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**CORRUPTION IN PUBLIC LIFE  
A THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE**

**Indian Theological Association (ITA)  
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**Introduction**

1. "Corruption in Public Life: A Theological Response" was the theme for the 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting cum Seminar of the Indian Theological Association (ITA) held from October 19 to 23, 2012. We, the members, assembled at the Bishop's House, Jalandhar, Punjab, to reflect on this theme—a concern that has caused great anger and agitation nationwide, leading to protests from every sector of Indian society. The theme was selected since the issue of corruption is being widely discussed, and movements against corruption have received tremendous support from civil society. The desire to free Indian society from the bane of corruption has fired the imagination of people of all walks of life. Amidst the darkness of massive corruption, it is very likely that people feel helpless and hopeless. However, the movements against corruption evoke great hope in the possibility of preventing the poisonous spread of this social malaise. We affirm that both the perpetrators of corruption as well as its victims are dehumanized as they compromise gravely with the quality of their human life, the nobility of their call, and the dignity of their nation when they indulge in corrupt practices or let themselves be victims of corruption for whatever reasons.

2. Well researched inputs and experienced panels contributed to the dynamics of the seminar. Our reflection on the issue of corruption was not only as observers but also as participants. As citizens of India and members of the Church, we surveyed the national scene and were deeply affected by the spread and enormity of this malaise afflicting our society. We were shocked by the realization that the evil of corruption has penetrated the very fabric of our society, affecting practically all its sectors: the economic, social, political, cultural, even the religious and moral sinews of the body politic. The worst affected by the evil of corruption are the poor of this country, threatening as it does the very existence of the poorest of the poor in their struggle for survival. And, sad to confess, the evil virus has also vitiated many institutions of the Church in spite of its being the sacrament of the

Reign of God. Being painfully aware that our Church too is not free of corruption, we feel the need to name and denounce corruption in the Church, first, then in society, at large. The deep-seated desire for authenticity and integrity both in private and public life needs extrapolation. The experience of truth is always liberative; for it eventually enhances the quality of self-governance.

### **Part I. Nature, Range and Spread of Corruption: The National Scenario**

3. *What is Corruption?* Corruption is a complex phenomenon and cannot be easily defined. Certainly it is seen as a degradation of, and departure from the accepted ethical-moral standards in human conduct. It throws to the wind ethical principles of rectitude in behaviour, circumvents justice, and bypasses transparency and accountability, the very bulwark of normal human transactions. As a human act, done by a morally responsible agent, corrupt practice carries with it moral guilt, because it goes contrary to established moral standards accepted by society for code of conduct and transmitted from generation to generation. It badly affects the body politic. It can be understood as immoral transaction and reflects decadence in our moral values, standards and orientations. Because of its social effects, corruption hits at the very foundation of the human social order. It taints our economic, social, political, cultural and religious activities and relationships. Unless it is checked, corruption as a social disease can lead to disintegration of human conduct and consequent breakdown of personal and communitarian life and systems. Many a civilization disappeared from the pages of history due to such breakdown of human mores.

4. *Expressions of Corruption:* It is quite disturbing to notice the fall of our common behaviour from the moral heights India reached during the days of the freedom struggle. Once known and recognized for its deep religiosity and spirituality, India is now a place where the culture of corruption is thriving. Corruption expresses itself in various types and forms, and affects many sectors: political, societal, corporate, legal, commercial, intellectual, and police. For example, power is exercised for common good. But its use for private benefit or advantage is a corrupt political practice. The exercise of leadership and authority ceases to be a service to citizens when it seeks to promote the selfish interests of an exclusive few, and dispenses with the common good. It employs manipulation, blackmailing, physical elimination of political opponents and commercial competitors silencing the voices of the weaker sections of society by means of hidden deeds and transactions, unpaid or underpaid employees, etc. The everydayness of corruption persuades one to think that it is unavoidable in any society. The current Indian scenario of large scale corruptions seems to show that the dynamics of corruption has become the grammar of nation building. Different categories of corruption are considered by analysts: like 'petty corruption' which involves small pecuniary remuneration for frequent transactions;

'administrative corruption' when bribes are offered to procure services, or to escape tax, to win small contracts; we have 'systemic corruption' when corruption is pervasive through all levels of society; and 'grand or mega corruption' when ministers, senior bureaucrats, corporate, industrial magnates or middlemen are parties to shady mega deals like arms purchase or coal/minerals allocation, etc., and in return huge sums of 'black money' change hands.

5. Corruption has permeated our national ethos and poisoned political processes and establishments, civil society, public and private sectors of industry, business and commerce, and the educational system. Even religious establishments are affected by its deadly spell. It has vitiated the whole economic machinery of society by taking the form of 'black money'. It has affected our moral preferences and is vitiating the social fabric of the nation. Although corruption has been a constant cancer-cell in our history, with the onset and growth of the processes of liberalization, privatization and globalization during the past two decades or so, it has grown exponentially. Globalization has resulted in corruption becoming all-pervasive. Some affected sectors need to be highlighted:

6. A most powerful force that weakens our democratic system of governance and subsequently leads to the unhealthy reign of corruption in the country is *discrimination based on caste*. This is so because caste—primarily on account of its discriminatory categories of purity and pollution—debases our very human nature itself. Labelling a fellow human being as so-called 'outcaste' and 'polluting' is already moral debasement. This perception is stuck to the socio-political structure of our country. Since the social structure is affected by the evil of caste, politicians as well as bureaucrats make sure that the presence of the subaltern classes/castes, as well as their participation in the political processes of the country, is kept to the minimum, so that their corrupt ways to satisfy the greed at the expense of the bare needs of the poor are uninterrupted. Besides, there is a conscious effort in the country today to exclusively highlight corruption charges against the subalterns so as to publicize the prejudiced impression that the subalterns by nature are corrupt and, therefore, not worthy of political leadership. We hold that, unless we address the question of caste from a structural, as well as socio-political viewpoint, no effective measure can be taken against corruption in India.

7. Though *gender equality* at all levels is accepted universally 'in theory', gender discrimination 'in practice' against females in our country is still a persistent and perturbing problem. The inability of parliamentarians to accept 33% reservation for women is a symbol of the unequal distribution of powers in all other sectors of Indian society. The dehumanizing discrimination, oppression and exclusion of women from decision-making bodies in civil society as well as in the Church, continues in our society

despite constitutional guarantees towards gender equality. This is the result of patriarchy that is deeply embedded in the Indian ethos. Due to its all-pervasive sway, even legislation on behalf of protection of women's dignity and rights cannot become effective as is evident from the proliferation of crimes against women like female foeticide, child marriage, rape, dowry, wife-beating, dowry deaths and the like. In recent times the nation has been witnessing a phenomenal increase in violence against women in the form of rapes, dowry deaths, elimination of the girl child, human trafficking and flesh trade. The nation recently witnessed massive upsurge of awakened citizens, especially of women's movements against the monstrosity of rape.

8. Although national integration has been a major concern of the founding fathers and of the more recent National Integration Council, yet, non-recognition of the rights and the inadequate representation of the *indigenous people* of India in various sectors of governance is another manifestation of corrupt anthropological thinking in racial matters. Furthermore, recent economic policies have been making destructive inroads into their natural habitat, rendering them uprooted and migrants in their own ancestral land. The unhealthy use of money by the grand alliance of national and international corporate companies, political leaders, industrialists, bureaucrats and contractors to succeed in their objective of securing the mineral resources has adversely affected the unity and identity of the tribals. Put bluntly, tribals are 'expendable' in the eyes of economic predators! Worse still, they are now caught between the crossfire of the government's security forces and the Maoists. Indeed, countless tribal families have been experiencing the negative fall-out of manifold corrupt practices in every sector of public life.

9. Though the *rich-poor divide* has always been an ugly black mark on the fabric of Indian society, globalization, privatization and corporatization, as well as Special Economic Zones (SEZ), and New Economic Policy (NEP) have thrown up further spaces and possibilities for mega corrupt practices. The beneficiaries are inevitably those who are already rich, while the poor are always and everywhere the losers. The nation was shocked by the recent exposures of mega scams in the public and private arenas. This has resulted in a major disintegration in the culture of business transactions and decline in values.

10. Ever since Independence, self-governance has been through *constitutional democracy*—the bulwark of the Indian nation. Its exercise has been through party system of governance. However, of late, the peoples of India have been shocked to discover that some sections or individuals in the three wings of our democracy, namely, the legislative, the executive, and the judiciary, and the fourth estate, the media, were subject to unhealthy practices that affect adversely the integrity of these democratic institutions. The news of cash/goods for votes, paid questions, transfer of money for

cross voting, etc., have sullied the image of our elected representatives and cast aspersions on the integrity of democratic institutions. The 2-G spectrum case, episodes like 'coalgate', 'hawala' deals, etc., are indicators of massive erosion of values affecting central and state administration. Fathomless, indeed, appears the rot as revelations and disclosures keep flooding the media. The distribution of freebies like cycles, food, liquor, saris/shawls/bed-sheets, etc., by political parties in exchange for votes before election, as well as bribes given by legislatures to maintain majority status by political parties, are corrupt electoral practices of party politics that weaken the integrity and credibility of the democratic process. Besides, power in itself, and the centralization of power, is prone to corruption, since it leads to deviancies like favouritism, nepotism, etc. Corrosion of values takes place, eventually leading to the degeneration and failure of democratic systems.

11. The constitutional measures introduced to control and regulate native *industrial development* had led to the birth, growth and spread of the culture of red-tapism and license *raj*, a den of corrupt practices, affecting the integrity of bureaucracy. Though de-control has been introduced, the culture of rot has continued unmitigated and has assumed new forms. Besides, the indifference and disregard for accountability on the part of the bureaucracy affect the effectiveness of many welfare schemes such as MGNREGA, pension schemes for the elderly, and public distribution system.

12. Though the armed forces have been known for their integrity and commitment to the defence of the nation, recent revelations unearthing shady deals in the purchase of arms implicating personnel of the higher echelons of the armed forces have disturbed the nation. The role of middlemen and ministers and practices like bribe for recruitment, are part of the same mess. The drive towards more and more sophisticated weaponry, necessitated by the constant fanning of hatred and hostility from across the border, and the phenomenon of terrorism in the sub-continent, can only lead to further divert the national resources badly needed for the very basic steps like poverty alleviation and other fundamental needs of the masses. The development certainly vitiates the very perception of humans, now seen as instruments only of vengeance, a grave error in rational thinking. The collapse of, or trivializing dismissal of, values is sign of the disintegration of culture.

13. The police force is part of the nation's enforcement agency for maintaining the rule of law and public order. However, corrupt practices of the police like non-registration of FIRs, non-appearance, or misrepresentation of facts in courts, suppression of evidence, fake encounter deaths, torture and custodial killings – all are common knowledge. It is by yielding to financial gratification, or pressure groups, or misguided political leadership that such corrupt practices are resorted to. Such corrupt practices

destroy the credibility of the agency which will further weaken the social system itself. Decline is seen as manifold.

14. The common citizens' trust in the integrity of members of the higher *judiciary* has been breached by the recent allegations of corruption by some judges and unhealthy nexus between politicians, or business magnates and members of the judiciary. Greater decadence will set in if such steps are not checked. Besides, the legal system has become accessible only to those who can afford to pay exorbitant legal fees; but, today, basic legal aid is unaffordable for ordinary people.

15. The media, both print and electronic, are accepted in all democracies as the fourth estate, and as watchdogs of the functioning of all the wings of the Constitution as well as promoter of public opinion on the mode of governance and responsibilities of civil society. It often happens that the partisan role of the media—both print and electronic—which comes out in the form of suppressing, under-reporting and exaggerated reporting of events is gross distortion of truth. Selective highlighting, or planned downplaying, and even concealment of facts misleads the public. This is another example of corruption in public life.

16. Religion is the realm that provides meaning to any culture or community. Rightly do people look up to religions as conscience-keepers of society. However, on the one hand, recent reports of some religious leaders implicated in acts of criminality, sexual immorality and fraudulent financial practices like capitation fees, massive swindling of funds allotted for relief or developmental works, and, their indifference to major national disasters, communal holocausts and caste-gender-based discriminations on the other, have blackened the image of religions in public perception. Corrupt practices in some religious institutions, like non-transparent financial transactions, appointment of personnel, shady deals, non-fulfillment of legal obligations towards poorer sections of society, etc., have further contributed to the decline of values in institutional culture. The politicization of religion for personal, or sectarian ends further add to the infamy religion.

17. Probably, the most gigantic mode of corrupt transactions takes place around the vast *mineral deposits* of iron ore, coal, petroleum, gas, aluminium and related mines of natural resources. The players at work are mega corporates, middlemen with political clout, political leaders with blurred conscience, bureaucrats, and their cohorts. Benefits that accrue to partners in the covert deals are colossal. But the truth that these transactions are tainted seems not to affect either the donors or beneficiaries in these transactions. Loss to the nation, to the owners of the land (in most cases tribals or farmers) and above all to the integrity of the value system is incalculable.

18. Slow indeed is the realization that corruption as an anti-human and anti-social trait is harmful to social cohesion. It works against inclusive and integral development of the nation. It leads to corrosion of values,

destruction of the moral fabric of society; and hence, to degeneration of the democratic system itself. Money or favours acquired through corrupt deals becomes a means to acquire political positions of power. Corrupt behaviour is taught and learned in the process of socialization. Corrupt practices gain acceptance as normal. More and more people become victims and agents of corruption. They also learn to justify corruption as necessary in public life. The risks involved in combating corruption discourage people who would like to fight it.

19. In sum, the preceding brief survey of the pervasive spread of corruption is quite disturbing. However, it should challenge us to respond. Humankind has rich heritages and powerful resources within itself that renders it capable of addressing these negative forces creatively and with a positive frame of mind. Before we unearth these resources, some probing into the root causes of corruption is in order.

## **Part II: Searching for Root Causes of Corruption and Decline in Values**

20. There are several root causes for corruption. These are traceable first to the economic, social, cultural and political levels. Further, there are ethical and moral spheres responsible for corruption. We enter into, and examine, each of these spheres.

21. Economic factors are keys to many forms of corruption. For example, low salary coupled with growing cost of living prepares the ground for public servants, low-paid workers, etc., to seek alternate sources of income like bribes, extortion-money, seeking illegal gratification and such nefarious indulgences. Again, corruption flourishes in states of high economic growth but where literacy, education and social consciousness is low; for, there can be less vigilance on the part of civil society for transparency in transactions. Furthermore, ambiguous laws and regulations can be the cause for corrupt practices. These may have loopholes, or inter-spaces through which selfish agents can enter and transact business bypassing stipulated conditions and ethical demands. Governments have power to impose regulations, levy taxes, and enforce the laws with the necessary sanctions. But, when enforcement is delayed, or neglected, spaces and opportunities for unethical transactions open up. Above all, the offer and availability of colossal sums of unaccounted for 'black money' can bewitch greedy minds enslaved in the clutches of consumerism.

22. There are cultural factors too. Consumerism is linked with the need for abundance of wealth and the desire to publicly display it, which in turn feeds the greed for limitless acquisition of material goods—fodder for affluence. This cycle of greed creating needs, being fed by goods, which create even greater needs, sullies the integrity of human life. A weakened and sick culture can easily fall prey to the vulgar display of ill-gotten wealth and the superficiality of consumerism. Conscience and ethical imperatives are easily stifled. People easily become prone to corrupt practices.

23. Deep down at the psychic level is the blind and irrational egocentric drive to acquire and accumulate at any cost as much as possible. Unbridled greed, on the one hand, and non-performance of one's committed duty for healthy functioning of society, on the other, are the underlying factors for the all-pervasive corrupt practices.

24. Discrimination based on caste and gender in society, in general, and in the Church, in particular, feed many types of corruption. These militate against our faith in one God, and in the brotherhood and sisterhood of all humanity. Such discrimination violates the constitutional principle of equality and equal dignity of all citizens. Deviation from these values leads to the emergence of corrupt practices rampant in society.

25. The cherished values of the indigenous people like egalitarianism, sense of community, caring, closeness to nature, sharing, fellowship, non-competitiveness and simple living are also values of God's reign implanted in them by the Creator. But these are easily ignored and not brought to interact with the disorders raging in the country. One result is that individualism in its extreme form seems to flourish and has come to stay.

26. Secular India cherishes and values plurality of religions. It is the responsibility of the religions to strengthen and protect the ethical-moral fabric of our social living, which is now threatened by the malaise of corruption. But religions in India often seem to be content with merely performing rituals and celebrating festivals without sufficiently and effectively grappling with these larger responsibilities and duties towards society, at large.

27. Political leaders, bureaucrats, security forces as well as enforcers of the rule of law and public order, are expected to be stewards, not masters. The organization of society in view of common good and the welfare of all is an ethical-moral imperative that is the backbone of the human family's identity. Authority as service and not for domination is expected to be normative for those who govern according to these inherited insights of heritages of all humanity. However, a great disconnect seems to affect the relationship between the ideal and the practice. The right to recall non-functioning or corrupt political representatives has not yet been made operative. So, they still remain unaccountable. Bureaucrats face only departmental accountability if and when found guilty of grievous negligence. Hence, both these categories of public servants remain unaccountable to the larger society. Consequently, corruption thrives through these escape routes.

28. As guarantors of constitutional democracy, it is the sublime duty of the members of the judiciary to uphold, protect and ensure justice for every citizen of this country. The judiciary in India has till recently been credited with compliance with these expectations. But, undue influences like lucrative appointments on retirement, or deputation to reputed national



bodies, or appointments to national undertakings seem to be factors for occasional deviant behaviour on the part of some among them.

29. The media are expected to fulfill their role as the watchdog of democracy by flawless adhesion to objectivity without compromising the interests of the masses. Indeed it is to the credit of the media in India that they have been serving democratic cultures and institutions laudably. However, of late, the media seem, at least in some cases, vulnerable to the persuasive power of capitalist interests and forces. Moreover, the consumerist culture, which promotes corruption and holds sway over people, is being fed by the media.

30. Some of our cherished cultural values are truth, non-possessiveness, detachment, non-stealing and simple living. These have gained universal recognition. These values need to be reemphasized and placed at the centre of the life and governance of our nation. However, the all-pervasive corruption is impinging upon them to the extent of eclipsing them. 'Having' more things, possessing and consuming them—offshoot of the culture of superficiality—are seen as superseding the need for 'being'. This trend contributes to corrupt practices.

31. Corruption is created and perpetuated by a super alliance in which political structures with powers vested in a select few who are unaccountable, are major components. The bureaucratic system makes of administrators more 'rulers' of the people than their 'servants'. The legal system allows misinterpretation and easy denial of justice. It fails to punish the corrupt, especially if they are rich and influential. These provide structures that encourage illicit relationships among the rulers, bureaucrats and the rich, and reinforce a value-system that considers money as the source of power and the criterion for status. These manoeuvres are part and parcel of sinful structures that make corruption possible and perpetuate it.

32. Land and natural resources belong to the nation, indeed, to the people. The resources of the earth are God's precious gifts and are provided for the use and welfare of all living beings, especially human beings. Use of these resources ought to be governed by the needs of the community. The Gandhian ideal of trusteeship and Ambedkar's concept of economic equality were expected to be taken as complementing each other. However, misappropriation of natural resources through privatization has set in motion a race to acquire them at all costs. Corrupt practices are rampant in this sphere.

33. The evil of corruption finds its place within our democratic setup which is far from perfect. Besides its positive values, democracy has susceptibilities that are detrimental to its correct functioning: like submerging of the voiceless under the power of brutal majority, and, the permeation of corrupt transactions. The Indian context, which is characterized by the pervasiveness of corruption, helps us to understand the

logic of power at work. Corruption seems to have taken over the task of governance. Since politics is seen as the art of problem-solving, the helpless people seek the help of politicians who 'fix' their problems through corrupt channels. And there seems no easy solution to it in the electoral system.

34. Many wonder how, in spite of the many protests against corruption, scores of steps like anti-corruption bureaus, legislations and occasional penalizations of some corrupt dealers, people still continue to indulge in corrupt practices. We contend that corruption needs to be understood and addressed in structural terms. Ultimately, it seems a systemic evil created by the greed of those who wield power and the failure of the weak to counter it. It is promising to see that protest movements against corruption that began in the 1970s till today are wholeheartedly embraced by the general public in India. However, there is a temptation among anti-corruption crusaders today to personalize corruption by demonizing one or the other corrupt personality. Rather than merely declaring one or the other individual guilty, attention needs to be drawn to the systems and structures that are fed and maintained by short and long term benefits.

35. According to some of the Indian traditions, the roots of corruption do not consist only of past unjust acts; they remain as traits of the race, and as characteristic of our history. Corruption affects the entire world, which is primarily the community of humans who live by *dharma* or *adharma*. Indian sages had said that *karma* cannot be annihilated, "*na kshiyate karma.*" It remains, and always produces results. It has to be opposed, not merely endured or gone through in its results, but positively counteracted by overcoming it. And human life is the time for this counter-action. Overcoming the situation of sin is through *prāyaś-citta*—translated as atonement, expiation, penitence, indemnification—a religious act to atone for sin with true repentance or *anutāpa*.

### Part III: Basic Steps towards Addressing Corruption

36. In addressing the social evil of corruption affecting our nation, the first step has to be to reaffirm basic principles and values based on which intra- and inter-community relationships are built for the attaining of the common good. The human family has accepted them. Some of these basic principles and values are truth and honesty at all costs in every transaction. Equality of rights and observance of justice are non-negotiable. Love for others expressed as recognition of the other as equal to oneself are fundamental for any civilization worth the name. Mutuality in service needs to be accepted as a most humanising virtue essential for healthy living as a community. In other words to reaffirm the ethical and the moral foundations of human conduct is essential and non-negotiable.

37. Of equal importance are social values like sense of duty and responsibility. Service of society needs to be held aloft as a torch when self-serving greed is having its sway. These have been directly and indirectly

incorporated into both the Preamble of the Constitution, the Directive Principles of State Policy as well as the provisions of the Constitution itself. The many laws, including the rule of law are there to enable their enforcement.

38. It is also important to recall to mind at this moment that '*satyameva jayate*' is the motto of the nation. The value of truth as underpinning the functioning of a society needs to be reasserted at this critical time. Distinguished values like self-sacrifice, equality, fraternity, fellowship, freedom, wholehearted commitment to truth and its demands, which the architects of the nation cherished, could ensure the integrity, unity, prosperity and continuity of the nation. These values should be normative for all aspects of our national life. We are ever indebted to the vision of Gandhiji and Baba Saheb Ambedkar for highlighting these. But we find that these precious values are not practised. As inheritors of the foundational vision and values of the Founding Fathers/Mothers of our nation, we, theologians, have the duty to recall the attention of the nation and serve the nation at this critical junction

39. People's movements—starting from Jaya Prakash Narayan's movement for total revolution—and their networks have been drawing the attention of the whole nation to the erosion of human and constitutional values and to the need for total regeneration. The need to listen to these voices is undisputed and urgent so as to restore democratic values.

40. Recent commendable initiatives such as the Right to Information (RTI), Right to Education (RTE), the proposed institutions of *Lokpal* and *Lokayukta*, agencies like CAG and CVC are important safeguards in the struggle against corruption in governance. These need to be strengthened.

#### **Part IV: A Christian Response to the Evil of Corruption**

41. "Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth." (Gen 6:11-12). The biblical author suggests that divine perception of the problem was prelude to divine initiative to purify humankind.

42. Corrupt practices dishonor the holiness of God and are crimes against humanity "created in God's image and likeness" (Gen 1:26-27). Corruption is sin. It is not only personal crime and sin, but also structural sin. Our God-experience in Jesus Christ reveals to us that God enters into human history to transform it for the better with the cooperation of human beings. Jesus begins his mission not by starting a new history, but by entering the story of Adam and Abraham. His entry thus enables our one-and-only history to journey towards its final fulfillment as God intended it to be. Jesus' life and the message of the Reign of God that led to his cross reveals God's call to

the human race not merely to stop corruption but to “unmake” or redeem its history, with the assistance of the power of God’s Spirit.

43. The biblical tradition reveals the mystery of God’s intervention in history to liberate an oppressed people from the exercise of corrupt power through the leadership of Moses. The oppressive political systems in Egypt and Canaan created laws and policies to suppress the slaves and peasants and favoured the elite. Those systems ensured exploitation of the hard labour of the downtrodden people. They showed discrimination and favouritism. They resorted to harassment, intimidation and extortion. The simple people were cheated and exploited. All these were elements of a highly corrupt political system. The poor slaves from Egypt and the oppressed peasants from Canaan reacted strongly against such corrupt systems and established a ‘counter’ system which was the confederation of Israel.

44. The Israelite prophets were known for the ethical standards they insisted on, based on the covenant at Mount Sinai. They spoke of a God who was holy, merciful and compassionate, on the one hand, and just and fair, on the other. Holiness of God signifies both a promise of salvation and a threat of judgment (Isa 7:14; 8:8). The ‘holy’ has to be proclaimed and manifested in human behaviour (Isa 5:16). The numinous element produces social responsibility. The ‘holy’ permeates humanity and charges it with ethical responsibility. This God demanded uprightness of heart within and insisted on rectitude in social behaviour.

45. The prophetic tradition reveals that social justice and special care for the poor were distinctive features of God’s demands. The God of Israel rejects any religious practices that ignore social responsibilities, and affirms that all people are equal in God’s sight. Unethical social dynamics produces the great anomaly before the Creator, namely, the ‘*anawim*’. Thus, injustice, oppression, exploitation, that produces the phenomenon of *anawim* is ‘corrupt’ practice before Yahweh. The prophets in the First Testament are very clear about the effects of corruption. Corruption kills. It destroys life. They make an uncompromising demand for a just society and raise their voices against every form of corruption, exploitation and injustice prevalent in their society. They solidly stand up for the cause of the poor and the vulnerable. They are great anti-corruption crusaders because the God they encounter, represents and serves abhorred corruption, injustice and exploitation and sides with the poor and the exploited, the victims of such practices.

46. The sinfulness of corruption must be evident to the Christian as it contradicts Jesus’ central message of God’s reign. Corruption is personal, moral failure. Moreover, it is also structural sin that hinders the flowering of God’s reign and frustrates God’s designs. It is detrimental to justice, freedom and human dignity, which are all essential values of God’s reign.

Individuals, and society as a whole, uncritically internalize the anti-values embodied in the structures of sin, reproduce them and thus, perpetuate evil in society. In God's reign, humanity is one family; we are all God's children and so sisters and brothers of one another. We are called to live and share in our lives and relationships the love and compassion which our God has for all of us. This is the basis for the call to repentance and conversion, which is prelude to the reign of God.

47. Repentance in the Bible does not merely mean a decision not to sin again in the future, but it implies the will to undo the evil done in the past, as well. This is the implication of the concepts of expiation, atonement and sacrifice. Therefore, although we suffer the consequences of sin in loving obedience, we struggle—with the help of God—to challenge the root-factors that create such situations of corruption and its consequences. The biblical revelation affirms God's respect for human freedom and responsibility. God respects all our free decisions, whether positive or negative. God does not ignore any of them. These need not only be forgiven by God's initiative, but also need to be blotted out.

48. Jesus confronted the sinful, dehumanizing and corrupt situations of his time created by the then-prevalent political and religious systems and structures. Being Love, incarnate, Jesus could not accept the unjust situation of exploitation and dehumanization where authentic self-emptying love could not flourish. While mere love looks towards the future and not to the past, self-emptying and suffering love redeems, because it connects with the past. Hence, the cross is not just a lamentable accident in the mission of Jesus, but the mysterious power of redemption at the heart of the mission. "By his wounds we have been healed," said the great poet in the second Isaiah (Isa 53:5), referring to the suffering servant. The cross heals and leads to the resurrection.

49. The Reign of God proclaimed and lived by Jesus is characterized by freedom, equality, love, fellowship and justice. In a world that is steeped in corruption, the Church is called to bear witness to freedom that liberates a person from internal compulsions and external pressures. Christians are challenged to experience the unconditional love of God which alone can cure this malady. Jesus practised a radical concern for everyone in need in a spirit of fellowship. There is a consistent denial of justice in a situation of corruption. Genuine fellowship is not possible without ensuring justice for all—especially those made poor by the caprice of others.

50. The cross of Jesus discloses the divine condemnation of sin in all its forms and expressions. Corruption as a sin dehumanizes humans and perverts the goal of society called to be the harbinger of the Reign of God where justice, equality, love, peace, fellowship and reconciliation prevail. Therefore, corruption that destroys the wholeness of humans and their society needs to be prophetically challenged and denounced as Jesus did.

And, in its place, a new way of being human must be shown through the personal lives of Jesus' disciples and the community of the Church.

51. The Church is called to be a sign and instrument of the Reign of God. It is not the work of the Church to build up a worldly empire. The concern for the justice of God's reign must characterize the life and mission of the Church. We bear witness to fellowship and justice of the Reign of God only by raising our voices in protest against social, economic, political and religious structures that perpetuate and enhance the practice of corruption. This we learn from prophecy in the first Covenant.

52. With the coming of Jesus, the once-and-for-all mode of being and fulfillment of human life and the transformation of the world have entered our history. It is the Christian faith-experience that Jesus is the beginning and the end of this fulfillment. The Church is the community which announces and symbolizes the transformed world we await. But this does not rule out our active engagement with the present world. Corruption takes the world in the opposite direction, not towards the final fulfillment of humanity and the entire cosmos. It is a real hindrance to humanity's journey towards final fulfillment. It works against human solidarity, communion, sharing and fellowship. It prevents individuals to realize their full potential and become wholesome persons. As a community that keeps alive the hope of the final fulfillment, the Church has a special responsibility towards combating corruption in all its forms, eradicating it first and foremost from her own household in order to become credible witnesses.

53. The Church cannot be true to this call, if it is seen to be indulging in corrupt practices in any form. Unfortunately, this is the case with the Church in many areas of its life. This is particularly disturbing since the Church and its institutions and personnel—like in the case of other religions—are expected to be moral beacons to humanity. The Church being a divine-human reality is in the processes of becoming the community of wholeness and fulfillment of humans and their world in its truest sense. It has not yet achieved its goal. Therefore, it is imperative that the Church as a human reality introspects about its own identity and integrity from time to time.

54. In a world swamped by corruption, the first and most forceful witness the Church can give is to subject itself to critical scrutiny. Are we free of the malaise of corruption? Are we not more inclined to be pulled along with the stream rather than swim against the currents? Often we succumb to pressures in the name of greater good or imagined effectiveness. Our church institutions sometimes do get permissions for various activities by exerting their institutional influence and power or even by paying a bribe. This is compromise. Therefore what is important is an ethical auditing for the Church's institutional practices. Further, the Church's belief in the concept of divine election to hierarchical offices leaves much room for secretiveness surrounding the structures of the Church which does not allow, or foster

transparency and accountability. This situation can pave the way to multiple forms of uncontrolled corruption in the Church.

55. There is an intrinsic connection between corruption and the craze for accumulating riches. Greed for money seems to lie underneath the various forms of corruption. Today's capitalistic value system corrupts the minds and hearts of people with its ideology of profit-driven production. Christians too, often internalize such value systems and become counter-witnesses. In the Gospels, Jesus repeatedly affirms that an attachment to riches can be an obstacle to follow him. The story of the Rich Young Man (Mk 10:17-22) shows just how great an obstacle riches can be. Riches are for Jesus an insurmountable obstacle to the Reign of God. Christians cannot bear witness to Jesus and his vision for a new society without being detached from wealth and power.

56. Further, it is necessary that the Church denounces corruption in the strongest way possible. But this alone is not sufficient. The Church is called to instill hope where there is despair. Our hope comes from the crucified and risen Jesus. He was put to death as a result of false accusations by the corrupt religious and political rulers of his time who had their own vested interests. By raising Jesus from the dead, God vindicated all that Jesus taught and stood for. This is the hope that we need to harbor and instill in others—especially those who suffer the most—that the present situation too will pass and God will bring about the new heaven and the new earth where “every tear will be wiped away” (Rev 21:3-5). Our hope in the face of evil and its manifold manifestations become more real when we remember those Christians and Christian communities like those of South Africa, Latin-America, Korea, etc., who worked towards establishing justice in their societies, and who spoke in defense of human rights against dictatorial governments.

57. The mission of the Church in every age is to proclaim ‘Good News’ to the poor, and liberation to those who are in captivity (Lk 4:16-20). The primary mission of the Church is to promote the growth of the Reign of God. Liberation from all forms of oppression, both individual and societal, is an integral part of the evangelizing mission of the Church. The Church in India cannot be a silent spectator of the devastating corruption that plagues our nation. The situation of injustice has to be resisted and fought against with all our strength. The present situation demands that the Church takes her prophetic role seriously. The mission of each individual Christian—leader, ordinary faithful, member of the clergy, or religious wo/men—is to work for a just and transparent society, which, in the present context, has to be corruption free.

#### **Part V: Possible Ways of Being and Acting against Corruption**

58. Rectitude of human behaviour is determined by recourse to sound ethical-moral and spiritual, or transcendental foundations, perceptions and

values. The evil of corruption is countered by promoting rectitude of behaviour. This presupposes a return to sound ethical-moral and spiritual resources that a culture, or a community possesses but has forgotten, or left behind. That heritage needs to be resuscitated, and made available to create and sustain a healthy social fabric. The following steps are deemed necessary to contribute to that end.

59. We need to fall back upon and focus on the pneumatic core of Christian integrity. Christian integrity is to be nurtured and fostered in a faith which makes us participate in the incarnational dynamic of the God in the Christian tradition. Incarnation is not merely a historical event which happened once-and-for-all ages ago. But it is the continuous divine economy of the Christian God till “God may be everything to everyone” (1 Cor 15:28). The mystery of the Incarnation is ensured through the Spirit of the Risen Christ. The crux of the Incarnation is God’s participation in the vulnerability of human beings, and redemption worked out from within the womb of existence—not as an outsider, but as an insider. In this regard, the cross is the supreme symbol whereupon the Divine became both host and hostage. Thus, the cross is the source of Christian integrity, as well as the path of Christian *jnana*, *bhakti*, and *karma marga*, all condensed in one.

60. We need to work for a *new humanism nurtured by an inclusive pluralism*: the bedrock of Jesus’ vision of the Reign of God. Jesus community promotes a pluralistic community in which Greeks, Jews, pagans and the poor are all members bound together by the principles of equity and fraternity and sisterhood. When religious identity becomes exclusive and ethnocentric, it engenders communalism and fundamentalism, which is also the breeding ground of corruption. And in the process religion becomes irreligious and an agency of war and terrorism. The new humanism unfolded in the Reign of God offers a credible platform to critique the cult of corruption.

61. We need to concentrate on constructing a *new community built on an ethics of common good* through the practice of *diakonia* (service), *koinonia* (community), *marturia* (witnessing), and Eucharistic hospitality which ought to be the antithesis of corruption and its philosophy of unabated consumption and hoarding.

62. There is the need for a *new religious vision of a bio-centric God* that will offer a new imagination and logic to build up a society free of corruption. Theocentric and anthropocentric religions, which construct their identity through their historical specificity, can easily drift into cultural or ethnic reductionism and conceptual absolutism. On the other hand, a *bio-centric God* is inclusive because God is Life and Life is God. Reverence for life and its manifold manifestations will be then the new code and core of new religiosity into which the whole creation is positively incorporated.

63. We need to promote regular theological intervention, public theology or peoples’ theology. A *new cultural praxis of religions* is to be figured out in



the secular space by drawing from the religions' resources in the present context of corruption. Religion must primarily construct its credibility and its relational integrity right in the civic space; religious truths should become public truths and all religions should manifest their public meaning so that all can participate in them and be inspired by them.

64. Certainly we need to rely on *ardent faith in the self-sacrifice of the Crucified and Risen Lord*; his empowering presence is the premise and path of Christian integrity. He is the *Eschatos* in whom *Eschaton* is accomplished as the first fruit of resurrection. His empowering and unbound presence in the whole of existence is the source, energy and promises to wage war against the menace of corruption which is the new avatar of Mammon in the present times.

65. We need to insist on exemplary standards of integrity from Church leaders, just as we insist on probity in public life on the part of political leadership. Public accountability is absolutely necessary—not only in financial matters but also in moral integrity. This is required to restore people's confidence in Church leadership at all levels.

66. Present Christian moral formation needs to go beyond its current focus on individual choices and actions and pay greater attention to the social and institutional dimensions of human choices and actions. Growing in moral maturity demands that we become aware of and take responsibility for social and structural sins. To this end, we need to organize Bible study classes at various levels to help Church communities to educate themselves and to have a clear understanding of Christian moral principles, appropriately interpreted and applied to our context and situation. Moreover, we have to engage in serious study of the social doctrines of the Church involving everyone in the Church.

67. Covenantal accountability and transparency grounded in justice and righteousness is the core of Christian integrity and unity. The two terms justice (*mispāt*) and righteousness (*z'ēdāqāh*) being employed in the Biblical literature, especially in the books of Prophets (Jer 7:5-6; 9:13; 22:3,13), entail the covenantal relationship. It connotes the order that God has established in human society and humans are bound to abide by it.

68. There is the urgent need to evolve mechanisms and structures within the Church to support one another in combating the evil of corruption so that individuals are not victimized in the process. The church at various levels need to institute awards and honour individuals, communities and institutions that have stood firmly against corruption in any situation at parish, diocese, State and national levels. We need to ensure flawless enforcement of transparency and accountability mechanisms in Church-run institutions. Policy-making and their implementation in our institutions need to be managed in a participative way. Recalling values like stewardship and trusteeship rather than ownership of resources can be

helpful to create a spirituality that will support and sustain these measures. There is also a need to create grievance cells to ensure fairness and truthfulness.

69. We need to ensure proportionate representations of women, Dalits and Tribals in Church bodies and organizations and promote a participative culture. There is need to encourage authentic prophetic voices in the Indian Church by standing firmly for the poor, for justice and for the rights of citizens, especially the vulnerable and the voiceless. Including the marginalized in Christian institutions and judiciously integrating these institutions with credible social movements can be mutually beneficial.

### **Looking Forward**

70. The nation is astir and in ferment. The collective conscience of the Indian peoples is at work in the stirrings. These are disturbed voices against all forms of untruth in human affairs. The soul of authentic India is thereby being true to its identity. The Spirit of God is alerting and animating God's people. As Indian Christians, we join forces with the mounting tide of righteousness to tidy up the mess. The first step in that direction is to ensure that the Spirit, 'the radiance of His which brightens the countenance of the Church' (LG 1), renders every member of the Church worthy and capable of the difficult yet unique work of societal renewal. In this we need to return to the Judeo-Christian sources as well as to the wellsprings of the heritages of humankind. We remind ourselves of the historic truth that it was the divine source as 'pillar of fire during the night and pillar of cloud during the day' that a liberated community, Israel, marched towards a new way of being and organizing their common life for achieving their common good (Ex 14). It was on pillars like '*satyam eva jayate*'—truth ever succeeds (Mund. Up 3:6)—that the edifice of this nation was sought to be constructed. Fully aware that universal corruption brings any nation to the brink of disintegration and ruin, we alert ourselves and others that concerted counter-cultural initiatives can avert the disaster and set ourselves once again on the path of regeneration and restoration. Such efforts at regeneration and restoration ought to be counted among efforts at New Evangelization. As the sages wished, let noble thoughts and renewed vision rekindle hope and enthusiasm in all of us.

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