

Light, salt, and the world of politics: Why we must stand against corruption

For a person living below the poverty line life is not just desperate. In all likelihood, it is short. The causes of and for poverty are multifarious, but given the current context corruption is the key suspect in South Africa. The problem is exacerbated when considered in our local context, the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro.

Recently I have asked close acquaintances how they would define the term “corruption”. The responses were often varied but eventually came down to the same common denominator: “Ask our politicians!”

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary the definition offered reads, “...characterised by improper conduct (such as bribery or the selling of favours)”.

Implied in corrupt behaviour is morally unsound behaviour at best described as wicked or evil.

These are harsh and disturbing terms. As disturbing as these terms are, we have become somewhat immune to them because we receive litanies of these deeds so often.

There have been too many media headlines exposing scandals and financial schemes fingering government officials, businesses, and individuals. Our tendency is to say, “Ag, so what?”

And the reason for such a response is tainted by the reality that these deeds seem to go unpunished.

The Afrikaans idiom captures the essence of the matter, “Dieselfde sous. Net ‘n ander tamatie”.

The English translation would read: “The same sauce. Just a different tomato”.

Corruption is a complex phenomenon and is seen as a degradation of, and departure from the accepted ethical-moral standards in human conduct.

It abandons ethical principles of rectitude in behaviour, circumvents justice, and bypasses transparency and accountability which lies at the heart of all human relationships.

When we hear about corruption and scandals within the Church, we immediately want to go beyond the headlines to the names of the individuals involved.

Now I am never sure if this is for reasons of information only or whether it is to get the lowdown on dirt of the person or persons involved.

Even the impact of that state of affairs is sensational for a moment and then becomes yesterday’s news. Far too often we quickly look beyond the headlines for names we might recognise. Even then the effect on us tends to be minimal.

Corruption deviates important financial resources meant to meet the needs of the poor in our midst.

This has a devastating impact on the local economy with lasting consequences on the political system of our metro and country.

The money earmarked for personal protection equipment (PPE) is a case in point.

It became a predatory target for unscrupulous people via an incestuous network of cronyism, nepotism, and a host of other isms.

The ones who were entrusted with our vote wilfully and deliberately take money meant for life-saving projects seeking to alleviating suffering.

The real tragedy is that often such thieving is based on a "vat alles" (take everything) mindset because if I do not, someone else will. Even worse is the insidious nature of entitlement that has infiltrated the psyche of too many leaders in our country.

Unless it is checked, corruption as a social disease will lead to the disintegration of human conduct and consequent breakdown of personal and communitarian life and systems.

Misery has been a close companion to many for too long, despite the countless empty political utterances that pay lip service to its alleviation.

Despite efforts to narrow the gap between rich and poor, the problem and gap seem to grow an ever-widening chasm.

The church's evangelism strategy has mostly operated from the premise that "an empty stomach has no ears".

Exasperation is known to have overwhelmed the missionary endeavour in the face of human mortality. The consequences are characterised by raised fists toward heaven crying out for justice.

Corruption has pervaded our national ethos and poisoned political processes and institutions, our civil society, and the private sector.

The church is not immune to the ills of corruption either.

It has corrupted our economy by the wilful taking of money meant to alleviate suffering in our midst.

Furthermore, it has negatively impacted our moral preferences and is invalidating the new South Africa we yearned for far too long.

The unofficial motto of our beloved country is "*ubuntu*".

If our politicians truly believed that they are our keepers and if that spirit underpins our politics then virtues such as self-sacrifice, fellowship, freedom, wholehearted commitment to the truth and its demands, which people like Mr Nelson Mandela, Mr OR Tambo, Mrs Lilian Ngoyi, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Mrs Albertina Sisulu, Advocate George Bizos and the many loyal people of integrity of their ilk strived for, then our collective prosperity could become a reality.

Corrupt practices dishonour the holiness of God and are crimes against humanity for we were all "created in God's image and likeness" (Genesis 1:26-27).

Corruption is sin. It is not only personal crime and sin, but also structural sin.

Jesus Christ revealed to us that God entered human history to transform it for the better with the cooperation of human beings.

In the life of Jesus that ultimately led to the cross, revealed God's love for all of God's creation.

In fact, we are reminded in John 15:13, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

This led to a cross. Not to another Bentley or Ferrari.

May we be wise and discerning when it comes to electing representatives for our Metro in 2021.

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