

“They worship in our churches” -

## How serious is corruption in South Africa?

Ps 82:4,5 [NET])

Rescue the poor and needy! Deliver them from the power of the wicked!  
They (*the wicked*) neither know nor understand. They stumble around in the dark, while all the foundations of the earth crumble.

### A review of the first chapter

Earlier we asked the question, “Can the church intervene effectively in South African society to combat and diminish corruption?”

The idea was suggested that this was possible since many of the perpetrators worshipped in church congregations on a Sunday.

Hence the title of this series “They worship in our churches”.

We began the “campaign” to encourage church leaders to intervene to combat corruption by describing how the South African Prevention of Corruption Act of 2004 defines corruption.

Then we examined what is a corrupt action in business, government and daily life. We concluded by briefly looking at some of the excuses people use to justify their, or others, corrupt behaviour.

As we have seen some dismiss concern about corruption by saying that it is just another way of doing business and, any way South Africa is no more corrupt than many other countries and like “other” countries, it does not seem to be doing any harm.

So, then we need to ask, “How serious is corruption in South Africa?” and “Does it warrant intervention, when there so many other pressing issues?”

But before these can be answered we must ask, “Does serious corruption exist in South Africa?”

### Is corruption in South Africa a “myth” of the disaffected?

Some have, for a long time, dismissed the allegations of serious and damaging corruption in South Africa as a myth invented by those disaffected with the present regime.

This is no longer a credible argument. Corruption can no longer be dismissed as “unproven” or only “alleged”.

As early as 2007, then president Thabo Mbeki, in addressing the National council of Provinces, spoke of the “unseemly scramble (sic) by municipal authorities to be elected”, because “those who are elected can determine the outcomes of municipal tendering processes.”

A medical doctor, writing an article in the South African Medical Journal, in 2012, estimated that losses in South Africa's healthcare system resulting from wastage, fraud or corruption must amount to billions of rand.

This has never been more evident and blatant than the corruption that accompanied the procurement of Covid-19 related resources.

Now "fighting corruption" has even become a plank in the ANC's manifesto. This implies that is happening and is serious.

### **How serious is corruption in South Africa?**

I agree that South Africa is not the only country to suffer from corruption.

However, the country's ranking on Transparency International Global Corruption Index (TIGCI) has slipped from being the 54<sup>th</sup>-least country in 2008 to 70<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries.

This is a worrying trend for at least three reasons:

Firstly, on a global scale it is not an issue that cannot be ignored. The World Bank estimates that more than US\$1 trillion is paid each year in bribes globally, and that US\$2.6 trillion is lost to corruption.

Corruption causes suffering because it prevents the global economic pie from growing as fast as it could.

South Africa suffers from global corruption because the global economic pie that is to be shared by all countries is not as large as it could be.

Secondly, it needs to be recognized that in the South African context corruption has far more serious consequences for service delivery implementation, development, GDP growth and societal and personal fulfilment than in richer, developed countries where there is more wealth to go round in the first place.

Thus, the figures have serious consequences for everyone in South Africa.

Then lastly, and most seriously most people have the perception that corruption is increasing in South Africa.

If this perception is correct, we need to ask, "How far are we from the tipping point, where corruption becomes so endemic that the South Africa economy is permanently and irretrievably damaged?"

We are not just talking about Rands and cents here, or idolatrous consumerism, but people's living standards. The financial resources of a vibrant, growing economy is needed to fund these benefits and 'rights', guaranteed by our constitution such as fulfilment, health, education and well-being.

Corruption is indeed a serious issue in South Africa!

### **Why are the consequences of corruption so serious?**

Perhaps the most serious consequence of corruption is that it is hindering service delivery. Service delivery is the implementation of public services by the State, or by others on its

behalf, to improve the living conditions and enable our constitutional rights to become a feasible reality for all South Africans so that they may attain their full potential as human beings.

In today's world service delivery is commonly accepted as the obligation of all governments. In South Africa it involves providing and maintaining such services as roads, transport networks, health care, housing, electricity, sanitation, education and potable water.

These services are fundamental to the wellbeing of our population and thus have an impact on the nation's wellbeing, development and productivity. Unfortunately, because of the great amounts of money and many levels of participants involved in this the delivery of these services is highly vulnerable to corruption.

It is of especial importance in South Africa. The reason for this is that it has been promised since 1994, is expected and is seen as necessary, from the poorest to the wealthiest, for the redistribution of wealth, improvement of living standards and the development of the country as a whole. If corruption prevents effective service delivery, then the country is in trouble.

The siphoning off or misappropriation of money allocated for service delivery reduces the amount available to the national fiscus for the effective implementation of service delivery. This is more serious in than in wealthier, developed countries since less money is available in the first place than in those countries.

This reduction in the financial resources available for service delivery is compounded by a reluctance of international and local investors to entrust their investments to a country with a reputation for corruption. They do not know what will happen to money invested, how wisely it will be used and what the rate of returns will be on that investment.

An uncertain climate always deters responsible investors, other than those looking for a "quick buck", with all the malfeasance or irresponsibility that may involve.

Furthermore, corruption reduces the financial resources available for service delivery because it results in what is available often not being spent in the most cost-effective way.

Arcane political decisions, lacking in transparency, based on favours owed and improving future election prospects do not necessarily, or usually, direct investment in projects that will benefit the worthiest or most needy or produce the maximum GDP growth.

At a lower level down the management chain the most efficient and skilled firms may not be given public service tenders. This will mean that because of inferior workmanship the end product is of poorer quality, will not, last as long and sometimes has to be paid for again to be redone.

A well-known example of this concerns such shoddy workmanship associated with RDP housing that many are having to be rebuilt. In addition, if people are not in a position to afford a bribe, they might be prevented from buying a home, or starting a much-needed SME.

It must be noted at this juncture, that it is not corruption in the public sector that is hampering service delivery, slowing GDP growth and creating discontent and anger, but also that in the private sector.

In fact, some allege that it is more widespread in the private sector, thus depleting the public fiscus even more. For instance, in 2010 Judge Heath alleged that R1.5 billion had been lost to the South African government fiscus by tax avoidance schemes. There is much evidence that bribery is becoming the norm in the private/public interface, either expected or demanded by public officials or supplied without previous solicitation.

Another example is the proven collusion between private companies.

This includes the practice called, “oligarchic price fixing”, such that engaged in by Tiger brands, Premier foods and Pioneer Food in the bread, wheat and maize industries.

At an international level global firms, such as BAe Systems (Britain’s largest arms manufacturer) have also been involved in bribery scandals in the Czech Republic, India, Qatar and South Africa. This involved providing prostitutes, sports cars, yachts, first-class plane tickets and other inducements. Again, corrupt practices lead to the public sector paying more for service delivery than it should and not selecting tenders on their merit which often ensues the purchase of inferior products.

### **Is corruption causing the foundations of our society to crumble?**

Ultimately, all are economically impoverished by corruption. This is highlighted by the fact that it is estimated that an improvement in the Corruption Perception Index of one percent would increase per capita income by almost 4% in most countries.

This clearly demonstrates the devastating impact of corruption on the livelihoods of many people and that rooting out corruption would solve many of South Africa’s economic and employment problems.

In these circumstances, not only, but especially the poor become incredibly frustrated and angry and do not witness the service delivery that the politicians have promised. Thus, anger is directed in the first place at government, because the public believes that most government officials are corrupt and are using taxpayer’s money that is available for service delivery to enrich themselves.

According to the results of research conducted by the Human Science Research Council in June 2012, Home Affairs, SAPS and the Public Services are regarded as those departments which are the most corrupt.

Some of their officials are making the situation worse by flaunting their wealth with life-styles that are the envy of the much less fortunate. It is precisely this latter sector, the poor and the vulnerable who constitute a demographic majority who are thus most dissatisfied and have the least to lose from outbursts of violence.

The long-term consequences of corruption and the resulting frustration at the resultant lack of service delivery expectations may be very serious for all. Some predict that within the next few years it has the potential to spread and develop into a fully-fledged revolt.

If the moral climate is not changed and the anger continues to grow some are predicting that South Africa is heading toward becoming an ungovernable failed state, as has been the case in other developing countries with high indices of corruption.

Are the foundations of our society beginning to crumble? Perhaps we are already seeing the first signs of this in the angry scenes that we witnessed in our parliament earlier on this year.

### **What can churches do about this?**

In conclusion we have looked at the serious consequences of corruption for the welfare of all in South Africa. No country can afford corruption least of all a developing country like South Africa. Even most of those who practice corruption suffer from it since the size of the economic pie that we all have to share will either decrease or not grow as rapidly as it could.

What then can we do about corruption? The problem is complex.

The first place the church must look to find an answer is in the bible. One advantage, among many, of going to the bible is that it deals with the roots and values (or lack thereof) surrounding the corruption issue as opposed to offering the superficial sticking plaster solutions often touted, as we shall see in the next chapter.

### **Quote from the Transparency International Global Corruption Index**

The need for greater accountability is clear, and leaders cannot look the other way. But recognising the problem is only the first step – governments need to turn pledges into actions. All citizens deserve bribe-free services, and leaders that are answerable to the public, not to powerful friends.

[www.transparency.org/cpi](http://www.transparency.org/cpi)

**Tucker/Khotseng article link:**

<http://www.hts.org.za/index.php/HTS/article/download/1933/3758>

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