

**NMB church Leaders for “Good Values, Ethics and Clean Living” – 2020  
“They worship in our churches”**

## **An opportunity for the church to intervene in order to diminish corruption in South Africa?**

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*Ephesians 5:8 -10: Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.*

### **Church leaders and moral regeneration**

Some time back I attended a meeting arranged by a former premier of the Free State. It was called by the premier (who opted out at the last minute!) to elicit the co-operation of the churches in the moral regeneration of the nation.

Representatives of diverse Christian denominations and groupings were present along with those of other religions.

The almost unanimous feeling was that for moral regeneration to work it must begin with the ANC, at the national, provincial and municipal levels.

Interestingly enough those from the AIC (African Independent Churches) and Muslim community were the most forthright in expressing this idea. The ensuing discussion ended by a bishop (I think from the Ethiopic church) saying, “What are we doing wrong, because they (government officials) worship in our churches?”

I am making this comment the headline for this series of articles.

### **Focusing on corruption**

There are many areas of moral regeneration that were covered in the meeting’s discussion that this question applies to. I am just going to concentrate on one ethical issue that is particularly relevant at the moment in the light of Nkandla saga.

This is corruption both in the governmental and business sectors.

Over the course of the next two years I discussed this “event” with Professor Benito Khotseng with particular reference to corruption.

He, unfortunately, is now deceased. The country sorely misses this well known, educationalist, and a father in the nation, who at one time was an assistant vice chancellor of UCT, and a committed Christian and the elder of a local Presbyterian congregation.

(My background is that of having worked as a systems analyst for several years after gaining a postgraduate diploma in business studies and then for the next forty years fulfilling my vocation as a minister in the Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa. Now I am enjoying doing post-doctoral research as a Research Fellow in the Theology Department, for the University of the Free State.)

In the course of our discussions Prof Khotseng suggested that we co-authored an article together, in order to try and answer the bishop's question, with the purpose of mobilizing the church to combat corruption by informing church members of the biblical principles concerning corruption, the harm it does and the role they can play in combating it.

In fact, he was more alarmed than I with the level of corruption because of his inside knowledge gained from conversations with his circle of colleagues at all levels of government and academia, from all over South Africa, and his experience taking 'business ethics' seminars in both the private and public sectors. This article was published in 2013, under both our names, in a peer reviewed theological journal, for which I give the URL at the close of this article. The current article you are reading is a modified version of the published version.

### **Do we need to do anything about corruption?**

Do we need to combat corruption? Is it wrong?

Amazingly enough some say that corruption is not wrong!

They simply see it as another way of doing business; or of redistributing wealth in an unjust national and global economic system; or a way of "getting mine" in a dog eat dog world, where everybody does it; or providing for my family or culturally acceptable gift-giving. I will make my case for combatting corruption more forcefully later, but I think that what I have already shared may have already communicated some of my alarm with you, the reader.

Suffice it to say for now, that we should be worried about corruption - worried enough to read on to find out what we are doing wrong as church leaders so that we may combat it more effectively.

I have become more and more alarmed, myself, at the increasing levels of corruption through interaction with members of my congregation. They have been affected by corruption in the fields of civil engineering, the health services, education and municipal administration, both in the Free State and Eastern Cape.

Some are unwilling to become "whistle-blowers" because of the way whistle-blowers are often treated such as having to face dismissal, counter-accusations, the accompanying court-cases or threats thereof, and ruined careers.

So, they endure silently with their seared consciences, which become progressively more so when they read their bibles or attend worship. Others cannot stand an involuntary acquiescence to corruption and resign and/or take an early pension. This latter option usually depletes the institutions concerned, either private or public, of their best, most able, and conscientious staff, with a resultant decrease in efficiency.

Before we can decide whether we need to do anything about corruption we must first decide what it is.

### **Deciding what is a corrupt act**

Definitions of corruption differ, but nearly all revolve around the concept of corruption being undue gain by a public or private official or functionary which may unfairly benefit that individual, a political party, social grouping or business. The simplest definition, that it is, "The abuse of public power for private benefit."

This is rather narrow, and excludes corruption in private business. A broader definition is that it is, "the wilful (or attempted) subversion of a due decision-making process with regard to the allocation of any benefit."

In South Africa, the Prevention of Corruption Act of 2004 defines corruption. It is described as any act that involves:

*Any person who – directly or indirectly- accepts or agrees or offers to accept any gratification from any other person, whether for the benefit of himself or herself or for the benefit of another person; or gives or agrees or offers to give to any other person any gratification for the benefit of another person so as to act in any way that amounts to be illegal, dishonest, unauthorized, incomplete or biased, or the abuse of a position of authority, a breach of trust; or the violation of a legal duty or a set of rules or designed to achieve and unjustified result or improper inducement to do or not to do anything.*

I quite understand if this seems to a mind-boggling verbose mouthful, but such definitions are necessary from a legal perspective, to prevent people escaping through loopholes. It is much more understandable when unpacked. So then what are described as corrupt acts by South African law?

1. Bribery, which is the offering of some benefit, such as money or other favour, that influences the decisions of a public servant in your favour (for example in awarding a contract).
2. The asking by a public servant for some benefit so that he would make a decision in your favour (for example in getting a contract).
3. Fraud, which is any action by a public servant that fools others into providing a benefit to which he is not legally entitled by his job description, such as overcharging a client, without that clients being aware of the extra cost, for the provision of a document or service (for example in issuing an Identity Document, passport, travel visa or birth certificate etc.). Another case would be the claiming of fictitious or over-inflated travelling or accommodation expenses from an employer or for a service rendered to a government body, such as in the course of your work, attending a conference or acting as a consultant.
4. Favouritism and/or nepotism, which is the award of services or resources or positions to those with whom the public servant has personal associations such

political, racial, tribal, family or friendship affiliation instead of those who are better qualified for the position, service or to handle the resource.

5. Embezzlement which is the theft of resources by persons entrusted with authority and control of such resources, such as the siphoning off by municipal officials into their private bank accounts of money awarded to a municipality by the government for service delivery.

These definitions are deficient in that they do not explicitly cover corruption in the private sector. This will be described in further articles.

### **Corruption: the enemy of development?**

We have seen what corruption is and considered very briefly how some people justify their corrupt acts.

The rationalizations with which people justify or excuse their corrupt acts will be dealt with in subsequent articles in this series, along with many other ethical questions and the biblical perspective concerning corruption and how the church can mobilize to combat it.

But before we can get onto these issues, we need to be alerted to the harm that economists have discovered that corruption causes to people's lives and opportunities for fulfilment especially in a developing nation like South Africa. See the next article.

### **Something to think about for the next article:**

Quote: Corruption is the enemy of development, and of good governance. It must be got rid of. Pratibha Patil at

<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/p/pratibhapa506695.html#qYZ2QgbYzyRMdvQk.99>

### **Tucker/Khotseng article link:**

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