THE SALVATION ARMY
INTERNATIONAL MORAL AND
SOCIAL ISSUES COUNCIL

SYMPOSIUM

SEPTEMBER, 2021
On Earth as it is in Heaven:

Exploring Moral and Social Issues through a Kingdom Lens

CORRUPTION

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Introduction:

General William Booth, the founder of The Salvation Army, (Green, 2005), sought after a church and partnerships that aligned with his Mission and agenda. Booth required a people who valued order with a sense of acceptance that would be part of the great Army. The mission of The Salvation Army from onset, is established on a coherent, substantial, and integrated foundation through its founder. The call to Salvation, holiness, and Booths postmillennial vision for saving the world, raising up saints in holiness by loving thy neighbor is a reminder towards discernment and social intelligence for one another. This calling for purity and sacrifice as demonstrated beyond Booth, but by the love of Christ on the cross, is a reflection and image of the high-level expectation for fellowship of believers with God’s standards, on earth as it is in heaven. Social justice issues within the community of believers are evident. The core of injustices and moral societal issues such as corruption, are existing and permeating the lives of believers, creating darkness in a world that mirrors a perfect home for God’s people.

Corruption is a global problem that interferes with all areas of social life, including the private sphere. It is a retrogressive aspect globally, and it depends on society norms, personal values and moral vies. Like the same way human beings suffer illness and diseases in their bodies, the individuals, groups, and economy worldwide suffer through this epidemic because of corrupt behaviors by people in positions of power, those entrusted with public and private resources, and a deeper lack of contentment stimulated by temptations towards greed, sin and darkness in the world and lack of sound judgement.

A general outlook to Corruption as discussed by Transparency international is that this is a giving, obtaining, or denying advantage through means which are illegitimate, immoral, and inconsistent with one's responsibility towards other people. The degree in corruption levels differs in different countries hence becoming a global challenge, impacting in various degrees, and in multiple ways. Corruption is a complex social, political and economic phenomenon that affects all countries and hinders the rule of law. It undermines democratic institutions, erodes economies, and contributes to political instability. While there is no internationally agreed definition of corruption, many actions are recognized as forms of corruption.
The international nature of corruption reflects how hazardous this phenomenon is. Majority of international organizations and institutions are aware of the severity of consequences resulting from cross-border corruption. Those organizations and institutions intensify their efforts for the adoption of effective instruments allowing for concerted actions in the elimination of corruption and adverse effects thereof on economic and social relations on both the national level and international community level.

Corruption is futile to any effective redistribution scheme a government is undertaking. It also goes without saying that corruption frustrates people and leave them disproving of their institutions. Both things mean that a society with corruption cannot possibly enjoy leaps and bounds of sustainable economic growth and development. Corruption is now recognized to be one of the world’s greatest challenges. It is a major hindrance to sustainable development, with a disproportionate impact on poor communities and is corrosive on the very fabric of society, faith-based organizations notwithstanding.

Corruption in the church promotes deep levels of unhealthy relationships, it harbors unrealistic conflicts, suspicions, and jeopardizes by misdirecting established strategies, programs, and resources both physical, spiritual, and leaving the mission and goals unrealized or incomplete. The subtle nature of corruption within the church breaks relationships by creating layers of expectation and favor without hard work. The birth of extraneous social vices emerging within the midst of the chaos stimulated by corruption, such as lies, lateness, arrogance, manipulation, demeaned leadership, trust issues and loss of faith in the leadership.

An essential role, this process is played by international conventions and recommendations adopted by the United Nations Organization, the Council of Europe, the European Union, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. By developing international policies, adopting international documents, and implementing anti-corruption reforms, supranational organizations aim to ensure the development of the uniform anti-corruption framework to prevent the spread of this negative social phenomenon in the international environment.

As much as the church is affected by this behavior, According to U.S News' 2021 Best countries rankings, a characterization of 78 countries based on a survey of more than 17,000 global citizens,
Iraq is perceived to be the most corrupt country in the world. In the survey, respondents answered how closely they related each of the countries term "not corrupt," the exact meaning of which was left to their interpretation. The attribute is factored into the Best Countries rankings for transparency and the best countries to invest in and headquarter a corporation. Iraq finished last among survey respondents. Other most corrupt countries include Colombia, Mexico, Brazil, Russia, Guatemala, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Azerbaijan.

The United States is ranked as No. 24 for being seen as not corrupt, dropping two positions from 2020. Conversely, Denmark, Canada, and Germany are seen as the most transparent countries in the 2021 Best Countries rankings. On earth as it is in heaven, the statistics above are a glimpse of the nature of the world we are living in and a challenge for Christians to turn the wheels.

**Forms of corruption**

Corruption comes in different forms, which includes, nepotism, clientelism, stealing and misuse of Church funds, practices such as frauds, faking of receipts, embezzlement, bribery for higher positions or better appointments, money laundering, kickbacks. Kickbacks are a silent disease that fuels corruption within the church, a poison that is slowly destroying the church from within by escalating the existing gaps in quality programming and human capacity development. Other forms of Corruption include scheming of projects that are non-existent, overquoting budgets for relief or emergency programs.

The states in which our churches reside exhibits diverse forms of corruption. Government officials and politicians use powers delegated to them to further their economic interests and for the sake of the common goal. This practice maliciously interferes with the justice system or hiding the financial gains of corruption. Abuse of entrusted power and embezzlement of resources where a bribe is a significant factor in exchange for preferential treatment.

**Basic factors of corruption**

Corruption has become one of the most significant threat globally as it affects all spheres of society and penetrates all sectors including religions organizations.
It affects states characterized by economic and market stability with a long-term developed democracy and conditions that are only in achieving such status, irrespective of the existing state system. Within the church, corruption in all its forms, breaks and dilutes the ultimate gospel of truth, purity, and holiness.

Expressions of specific forms of corruption and possibilities of occurrence thereof are influenced by social changes, formal rules involving legislative and institutional support to fighting corruption, quality of the general governance, control mechanisms and accountability structures, as well as level in informal rules. It can be concluded that corruptive behavior, in its specific forms, results from the process of interaction of relevant social factors.

Corruption in various forms occurs across the whole society, and it affects the existing political, Spiritual, and normal representation in the public. The factors include freedom in decision-making monopoly of power, low level of transparency which leads to irrelevant policies and goals. Another factor is ineffective operations and programs, lack of integrity in the calling for Mission and persisting deficiencies in all corners of the organization that require balanced control systems. Key factors attributing to corruption in the church also include, poverty, a lack of servant leadership (Ken Blanchard, Phil Hodges, 2005), ignorance to evident truths and the fruits of the holy spirit ( (NKJV). Other factors include lack of wisdom, and knowledge in Kingdom business in meeting the needs of the world “ the science of humanity”, (Green, 2005) and departure from leading by the Spirit and gifting, to leading by flesh and its carnal desires.

In the world today, common factors exhibited by countries which are among the most corrupt is that all of them are developing countries or countries in transition with low-income opportunities, closed economy, less media freedom, and low level of education. Political and economic environment, professional ethics and legislation, and purely ethnological factors, such as customs, habits, and traditions have been identified as strategic factors that influence the development of corruption.

**Political and economic environment**

The political and economic environment strongly influences the phenomenon of corruption. The more the country's economic activity is regulated and limited, the higher the authority and power
of officials in decision-making. This leads to high chances and possibility of corruption since individuals are willing to pay or offer payment to avoid restrictions. It is clear great potential for corruption is present where the officials are under the regulation allowed to decide based on discretion.

**Professional ethics and legislation**

The sole lack of professional ethics is a particular issue, as the administration requires different amounts of time to develop or change its ethics and professional standards, which is well known in transition countries. It is precisely in the transition countries that the "softer" acts of corruption are often considered to be acceptable and justifiable. Therefore, due to the lack of professional ethics in some countries that otherwise manage crime well, there is widespread legal corruption. This issue also permeates within the church structures, where social behaviors overpower church governance as attuned to its mission and doctrines.

**Habits, customs, tradition, and demography “The complex Nature of Corruption”**

There exists different cultural settings and dynamics that interpret corruption differently. For example, gifts offered before, during, and after some business transactions are considered in some cultures as a bribe or undue influence for the service provider to decide in favor of the client. In other cultural settings, the same gifts may be acceptable and even expected as a way of living. Where systemic corruption exists, formal and informal rules are at odds with one another. In addition, in some environments, "thank you" in the form of a gift for a service for which this person has already been paid with a salary is an expression of courtesy, and elsewhere it is considered corruption.

It is possible that everything around corruption, could be a matter of ethics and morality; however, they can differ in different areas and countries. The primary core intent of giving, or nature of the environment between the giver and receiver should agree with the Spirit of God. Peace, joy, willingness, spiritual fulfilment, and acceptance/receivership that is humbled by the experience. The testing of the spirit as discussed in different scripture passages, *1 John 4:1-6, 1 Thessalonians 5:21*, (NKJV) as deeper application to this exchange of receiving and giving should act as an indicator during and after the exchanges.
Survey discussions and findings:

“A survey conducted between March and April 2021, including 16 male, 12 women with a mean age bracket of 36 – 45 years from Asia, Africa, Europe and Americas; - with 51% being Salvationists affirmed that corruption exists in the church. The key practices include bribery and envelopes (def. A reward in monetary value given to a Salvation Army Officer as gifts, or kickbacks or bribery, open for interpretation (n.a) source to confirm meaning). Another practice highlighted in the survey was misuse of power and position. Ranks, hierarchy, THQ staff or superiority a ‘standing statement’ of who has authority. Key factors contributing to corruption named were, greed, power, and financial management. The survey also sought the long-term effects of corruption which included loss of trust in governance systems and structures, lack of morale, conflict of interest, lack of development and congregational exhaust. Integrity of the church on the scales, and lawlessness and apostasy in Christianity. 79% of the respondents affirmed to have participated or been affected by corruption.

Responded 1: “I was denied opportunity for work simply because I did not have a godfather in the organization”
Responded 2: “I bribed a traffic police officer after being involved in a traffic offence”
Responded 3: “I was told if I won’t pay, I will not get a job”
Responded 4: “I was pressured to give kick-back for my community to receive a program funding, the kick-back requested was half of the money that was to cater for half of the program”

A few measures indicated in the survey to prevent corruption included civic education on corruption and its consequences, transparency in finance systems, improve decision making procedures, public discipline of offenders to set an example, teachings on Kingdom values”

General Effects of Corruption:

Corruption undermines good governance and the rule of law, it also leads to violation of human rights, distorts markets, and erodes the quality of life. It is a crucial element in economic underperformance and a major obstacle to poverty alleviation and development. Corruption hurts the poor disproportionately by diverting funds intended for development, discouraging investment and foreign aid for developing countries, undermining a government's ability to provide essential services.

Countries, organizations, and institutions including faith-based organizations, that are controlled by these factors, will have a certain percentage of belief that corruption is part of her society generally feeding inequality and injustice.
Corruption goes against the tenets of justice, human dignity, empathy to the needy, and the spirit of stewardship. It undermines people's confidence, trust, and moral character. It disadvantages those who have no resources to pay for favors. Corruption destroys the integrity of all involved, tarnishing the spiritual image of an individual, while leaving unguarded spiritual doors for spiritual attacks.

The church as the body of Christ, flourishes within a holy and pure state. The call for holiness, Kingdom expressions that are rooted in the word of God, and the vibrant movement towards saving souls and saints for Christ is irrelevant if wisdom for justice and integrity are corrupted because of our fleshly desires. The effects of corruption within the body of Christ circles beyond leadership, race, religion and any public or private sector. It is a sin that separates the spiritual cycle and completion of “on earth as it is in heaven”. The true life of a believer as founded in the theology and doctrine of the Salvation Army, “the father, the son and the Holy Spirit”, living without insecurities that produce self-protection.

*The Response of the Church: ‘On Earth as it is in Heaven’*

To tackle corruption, action is needed both individually and collectively. Managing corruption requires taking risky measures to minimize it’s spread as a part of an organizational integrity culture. In implementing anti-corruption measures, executive managers have a high degree of responsibility for ensuring an effective internal control system, observing professional ethics and integrity principles, and strengthening the academic levels of staff while setting an example to its publics.

The Salvation Army and faith-based organizations with a mission for Kingdom expansion must promote and enforce transparency. This includes full disclosure of relevant administrative processes to increase the circles of accountability. There is a need to improve business conditions, enhance the integrity culture, strengthen legal awareness and individual involvement in preventative measures. Adequate provision and access to the knowledge, systems, and procedures to all stakeholders will be an effective tool in the fight against corruption. Free and the broadest possible access to information effectively eliminates potential corruption points and fundamentally increases the risk of disclosure. Some of the practical responses include:-
Mainstream anti-corruption policies and Strategies: Transparency, accountability, integrity, and multi-stakeholder participation need to be integrated into all programs, plans, and policies. This includes conducting corruption risk analyses as part of broader system within the church or organization. The conceptual aim of the preventive anti-corruption policy is to promote and protect the mission of the church. The space and opportunities that trigger corruption should be reduced and as a church the need to improve the quality of the working environment for church leaders, and lay staff would be significant.

Strictness on corruption behavior: An important measure to minimize corruption is the strict sanction of any form of corrupt conduct, including the withdrawal of assets from sin, as well as the exclusion of evil persons from the exercise of a profession, employment, or function. In this context, it is necessary to continually profile citizens' legal awareness and involvement in preventive anti-corruption activities and reporting corruption crimes. It is also possible to subsume the personnel policy to the given initiatives, in which the quality of public administration employees' selection is conditional for the observance of moral values, principles of integrity, and strengthening the transparency in the performance of public functions. Having said this, strictness in its application ought to aim at restoring the dignity of those in question, (Crawford W Loritts, 2009)

Multi-teams/layers in Audits: Special attention in team combinations for auditors/audits within diverse departments for accountability. Specific technological tools that enable real-time auditing must be rolled out and activated when necessary. It might also be worth setting aside sufficient resources for ex-post audits and communicating the decision to conduct these to deter potentially corrupt behavior.

Enforce checks and balances: a robust system of checks and balances is a critical systemic measure against corruption. Any emergency powers assumed by the executive should follow best practice and due process, be proportional, respect time limits, and fundamental human rights.

Empowerment on response to social injustices: reform, restore, Re-establish God’s Kingdom:

“Father God, we pray for your church to fall back on its knees, to repent and find solace in deep healing and reformation for restoration through your glory. To serve and break out from the patterns of corruption that have become norms, unpleasant before your throne, weakening your children, stripping away the confidence and self-worth of your servants who are filled with constant complaints and lamentations that are confined within their hearts; - being
prisoners within structures that have imposed fear. Transform our minds, renewing us by establishing your kingdom afresh, in us and for the Church. Your kingdom on earth and in heaven as one, led by one Body of Christ, the church, the instrument of your Glory and honor.

(Feuvre, 2014), highlights explicitly, the process Gisele Gowans undertook in discussion with her mother towards repentance, forgiveness, and acceptance of Jesus Christ. True Christianity and followership is restored within the framework of the family of God. Acceptance of Jesus Christ when we are saved means the realization that we let go what is not acceptable before Him. Christians in God’s Kingdom are equipped, empowered to do more than we can imagine because we are co-heirs with Christ, we discern the spirit of corruption before it takes hold of our souls, we ask for forgiveness just like Gisele Gowans.

The Salvation Army in specific, following the vision of the founder as indicated by (Green, 2005) ought to be steadfast, not wavered by corruption as a practice without extreme spiritualism but with an inclination towards genuine Christianity. Corruption of any form within The Salvation Army brings discredit to the social services, emergency and relief programs that are uniquely identified with the world. The honor of The Salvation Army must be protected at all costs hence an immediate response and implementation of recommendations towards eradication or reduction of corruption as a moral issue.

1 Corinthians 12:12-21), all parts of the body of Christ align together for the common good. The dependency complexity within the body of Christ is reflected in the needful response towards corruption. All stakeholders ought to be mandated to act within their powers, positions or ranks in the response towards Corruption in the church. It is strategic to Integrate processes that lead towards, behavior change, willingness let go attitudes, and confidence to speak into the issues of Corruption, and lastly focusing on kingdom business; - elevating our sense of awareness of heaven on earth.

Understanding the complexity of leadership in the Church.

In response to the issue of corruption, the church today must implore the context of the church vs the current times. Servant leadership as described by (Ken Blanchard, Phil Hodges, 2005) provides better leadership because it provides a sense of humility by the leaders hence overcoming incompetence while bringing out the best in those they serve. This notion offers a complexity in review of the church in the 21 Century. The challenge with this notion by Blanchard within the current church is the existence of the old story vs the new story leadership. According to (Secretan,
“old story leadership expect the world and consequently organizations to run down...at some point in the future p.31”. A paradigm that requires a shift in the organization.

If our intention is to transform our thinking around corruption as an issue in the church; - while the Churches’ mindset, within its leadership, or congregants relates to the ‘old story leadership, chaos are expected. Corruption will be present as a norm because leadership doesn’t trust in the process. The strategy is finding the ultimate balance within the church structures to exemplify newness within the pathways of servant leadership; - while; - synthesizing values and rich morals from the old story leadership that informs God’s calling for a corrupt free people.

Conclusive Prayer:

The realization of a moral issue, accepting and exploring solutions is the first step the church can take towards sustained change. Globally, regionally or at national levels, whether in governments, institutions or communities, corruption exists. As a church, an inner evaluation of the ripple effects of corruption, causes, and factors explored through systemic integrated processes will bring healing and restoration. This is the conclusive prayer

“Father we repent and confess that we as your church have sinned, we are corrupt in our thoughts, actions and in our work. We pray for victims of corruption and perpetrators of the same. To realize that you are our father, who gives great gifts to His children, and be content, strong willed and active to withstand temptations to be corrupt. We pray for confidence to speak boldly about corruption and reveal where it is hidden without fear, for your Kingdoms sake. We thank you for programs, policies that the church has implemented so far on this vice. Change is possible. We pray for the Hope in the redeeming grace, salvation, and faith to believe that sin has no power over us. We ask for the power and knowledge of your word to young people to shift and redirect the church on the path to glory”
References


NKJV. (n.d.). *The Holy Bible*.


