

Virtue ethics for the prevention and fight against corruption in Cameroon

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**VIRTUE ETHICS FOR THE PREVENTION
AND FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION IN CAMEROON**

A Thesis

**Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the S.T.L. Degree
from the Boston College, School of Theology and Ministry**

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INTRODUCTION

Corruption is a worldwide phenomenon. Yet its grip on different communities, institutions and countries is not of the same intensity. While corruption is controlled in some countries, in others it has become a scourging plague. A corruption-free or corruption-curbed environment is a far better place in which to live; hence the need to fight corruption. The focus of this thesis is on how to prevent and fight corruption in Cameroon. In this thesis, I suggest that, notwithstanding the efforts already made by the government, the Church and people of good will, adopting a program emphasizing virtue ethics can effectively curb corruption in Cameroon. Since the vice of corruption springs from individual human beings, helping people become virtuous and live virtuously can lead to a less corrupt society.

Corruption is a moral issue and moral theology aims at helping people become better and live better. A harmonious society is an ideal one in which to live. In the past, prophets spoke out against the ills of society, condemning corruption, immorality and injustices, and advocating justice and respect for human life and for the properties of others. They helped people live ethically. Today, many voices condemn whatever drags our society down to widespread poverty—both material and moral—by means of cheating and other immoral behavior. Beyond condemnation, a plan of action and change to contribute to the well-being of individual human beings and of society at large is needed. It is against this background that I attempt to analyze and fight the plague of corruption which has grievously wounded Cameroon society and diminished the human and natural flourishing of this beautiful, blessed country. My great desire to build a better Cameroon and rid my home country of the scourge of corruption is what inspires this thesis. As an ethicist-to-be and called to live and work in this particular society, my conscience demands I support a better way of life in Cameroon through an active move toward

the prevention and fight against corruption. In Cameroon, the experiences lived and reports gathered show that there is no structure which is corruption-free, or at least where corruption is insignificant. The magnitude of the problem is the starting point in suggesting a means of thwarting the plague. Recommending a turn toward virtue ethics is the antidote I propose in curbing corruption. An emphasis on virtue ethics would create and cultivate in people a veritable goldmine of human and moral qualities which would help them to live ethically.

My thesis will be developed in the following manner. The introduction briefly states the thesis statement as well as the reason for choosing the topic and will end with an outline of the work. My first chapter titled “The Experience of Corruption in Cameroon” exposes the practice of corruption in Cameroon. From defining the many expressions of corruption in general, to looking at the various layers affected by corruption and how it gains ground in individuals and in the society in Cameroon, this first chapter raises awareness on the gravity of the issue. The chapter ends by pointing out the efforts made in Cameroon to curb the vice of corruption by way of corrective and preventive measures, efforts which do not seem to produce the desired fruits.

In the second chapter, “Corruption, A Theological Issue for Christians”, I show, with the use of Sacred Scripture, the Church’s teachings and the reflection of ethicists, why theologically corruption is wrong. It is such a serious issue that its implications transcend the human level and has to do with the alteration of our relationship with God. Hence it is vital to curb and prevent it.

The third and last chapter suggests a more efficient means to deal with the vice of corruption: virtue ethics. This chapter sheds light on what virtue ethics is, why it gained so much consideration among ethicists and looks at how modern cardinal virtues suggested by James F. Keenan, S.J. –justice, fidelity, self-care and prudence- can be concretely applied to develop virtuous human beings capable of acting virtuously, and thus say no to the practice of corruption.

This is surely not an easy task because tension between justice and fidelity is very much present in Cameroonian society. Prudence and self-determination are necessary when facing this challenge of fighting corruption. The conclusion of the thesis underlines once more the importance of virtue ethics as it proves to be effective and fruitful in areas where it is being applied.

CHAPTER ONE
THE EXPERIENCE OF CORRUPTION IN CAMEROON

Introduction

This chapter looks beneath the surface of the Cameroon society to expose its relation to corruption. Even though corruption exists everywhere—within individuals, communities, societies, countries and the world at large—corruption injects itself within particular and specific contexts as it adapts to the pace and magnitude the specific society gives it. This adaptation is why, although experienced worldwide, the Cameroon type of corruption may differ in its practice from other countries’ practice of the phenomenon. The economic, socio-cultural, educational, traditional, moral and leadership situation in which the country is steeped, determines the ways corruption is practiced in Cameroon. An observer’s comment on the issue leaves much to be desired: “Not a day goes by in Cameroon without a newspaper article on fraud, embezzlement or other corrupt practices, while conversations with locals are peppered with anecdotes about civil servants and private-sector workers demanding bribes.”¹ The above quote gives a foretaste of the severity of the phenomenon of corruption in Cameroon.

Corruption is certainly not limited to Cameroon; its existence in Cameroon is inscribed within the larger framework of the phenomenon that is corruption. Before exploring the way corruption manifests itself and makes its way in the country known as

¹ George Fominyen, “Why Corruption is Cameroon’s Worst-Kept Secret,” *Thomson Reuters Foundation*, November 18, 2010; www.trust.org/item/?map=why-corruption-is-Cameroon's-worst-kept-secret.

“Africa in miniature,”² a general understanding of the concept of corruption would be appropriate at this point of the thesis.

Defining the Many Expressions of Corruption

Susan Rose-Ackerman defines corruption as “the misuse of public power for private gain.”³ No country is immune from corruption, and it seems to have infiltrated all societal systems: political, economic, education, health and even personal. In the introduction to a compilation of articles dealing with corruption, Rick Stapenhurst and Shahazad Sedigh elaborate further:

Corruption is, in its simplest terms, the abuse of power, most often for personal gain or for the benefit of a group to which one owes allegiance. It can be motivated by greed, by the desire to retain or increase one’s power, or, perversely enough, by the belief of a supposed greater good. And while the term “corruption” is most often applied to abuse of public power by politicians or civil servants, it describes a pattern of behavior that can be found in virtually every sphere of life.⁴

In addition to this general definition of corruption, we can distinguish it as economic, sociocultural, political, ethical, public administration and legal system corruption. Although practiced by individuals, corruption is a corporate and social affair as well since individuals make up the society. Fighting corruption at the social level becomes even harder than at the individual level, just as fighting social sin is more difficult than an individual sin. Although this work suggests a means of curbing and fighting corruption in general, a brief look at the kinds of

² Cameroon is called “Africa in miniature” because it is a sort of summary of Africa; it exhibits the major climates and vegetation of Africa: rainforest, desert, plain, mountains, coast, valleys, rivers, savannah, cold and hot climate. More than 280 local languages are spoken, which include Afro-Asiatic, Nilo-Saharan and Niger-Congo languages. It is a touristic country blessed with many natural and human resources.

³ Susan Rose-Ackerman, *Corruption and Government: Causes, Consequences, and Reform* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 91.

⁴ Rick Stapenhurst and Sahr Kpundeh, eds., *Curbing Corruption: Toward a Model for Building National Integrity*, EDI Development Studies (Washington, D.C: World Bank, 1999), 1.

corruption is nonetheless worth examining. Emmanuel Wabanhu, a Catholic priest of the Diocese of Geita/Tanzania with a Ph.D. from the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium, has written a comprehensive ethical analysis of corporate corruption—one of the most rapidly growing phenomenon in the field of business ethics. Wabanhu distinguishes eight corruption perspectives, that is, areas liable to nurture and portray corruption. They are: economic, socio-cultural, political, legal, administrative, entrepreneurial, public and ethical/moral, which I now discuss.⁵

Economic Corruption

Within the context of economic corruption, Robert Klitgaard beautifully and mathematically describes corruption as $M+D-A=C$, that is, monopoly plus discretionary power minus accountability equals corruption.⁶ Wabanhu, taking clues from a number of authors on the subject, expands on the definition of economic corruption as follows:

Pranab Bardhan defines economic corruption as the use of public office for private gain, where an official or the agent entrusted with carrying out a task by the public or the principal engages in some sort of malfeasance for private enrichment which is difficult to monitor for the principal. . . . Other economists have understood corruption as the private wealth-hunting behavior of public officials or politicians who are officially regarded as representatives of the state. They also consider it as collusion between actors in public and private sectors through which public assets and collective properties are illegitimately converted into private-regarding payoffs.⁷

Economic corruption thus represents a conscious effort to distort the flow, the trend and the aim of economic growth of a group of people or society to which accountability, transparency, justice and the spirit of common good is required. The aim of this vicious exercise

⁵ Emmanuel Wabanhu, *Resisting Corporate Corruption A Virtue Ethics Approach* (Saarbrücken: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, 2010), 2.

⁶ Robert E. Klitgaard, *Controlling Corruption* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 22–23.

⁷ Wabanhu, 2–3.

is personal enrichment, which is not bad in itself, but of which the means used are foul. At a wider scale, the market and the economy, then, are negatively affected.

For instance, businessmen do use corruption to influence extra-legally the policy formulation and its implementation for their own benefits. Business people use it as a tool with which to influence the behavior of a corrupt official, especially in obtaining or retaining lucrative government procurement and avoiding business costs. It follows that corruption provides a market price where a market is not allowed.⁸

Economic corruption distorts fairness in business but more serious is the fact that it comes from a distorted morality combined with a personality. Corruption is a network rooted not only in individual personalities but also has its grip on society as a socio-cultural issue; it can easily be handed down from generation to generation as a cultural value, which is seen as part and parcel of tradition, and thus becomes hard to fight.

Socio-cultural Corruption

The expression “socio-cultural corruption” is not a kind of corruption on its own. It is inscribed within the larger concept of corruption, which points to a reality that affects multiple areas or facets of life. Wabanhu clarifies this distinction: “Corruption may be perceived as a socio-cultural problem as it evidently affects the way society relates with business, and the way public officials interact with private individuals and corporate executives in a particular culture. Every corruption scandal has a social effect, and in virtually all societies, people perceive it as a social evil, therefore sociologically unsupportable.”⁹ Corruption, from the sociocultural perspective may be understood as involving such practices as nepotism, favoritism, tribalism, regionalism, racism and the like. In this sense, even though corruption may involve a monetary

⁸ *Ibid.*, 3–4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

bribe, the social background of those involved therein might strongly come into play. This background is not without serious implications as it “creates favoritism and opportunities for some and costs for others. It also restricts the scope for human rights, facilitating opaqueness in human actions, eluding political and legal controls and counterweights. It encourages divergence from a specific norm of socially and culturally accepted acts and behavior.”¹⁰ With its disintegrative and disruptive effects, corruption compromises social justice and tends to spread at a general level, even when practiced at a private level; corruption by low-level officials is the reflection of the grand corruption practiced by high-level officials.¹¹ And as corruption is present at the social level, so is it at the political level, for politics take place within the society and its day to day running.

Political Corruption

The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (PCJP) notes the severity of political corruption when it states that:

Among the deformities of the democratic system, political corruption is one of the most serious because it betrays at one and the same time both moral principles and the norms of social justice. It compromises the correct functioning of the State, having a negative influence on the relationship between those who govern and the governed. It causes a growing distrust with respect to public institutions, bringing about a progressive disaffection in the citizens with regard to politics and its representatives, with the resulting weakness of institutions.¹²

The PCJP thus raises awareness of the rotting effects of corruption. It is a dangerous practice that touches on the core of morality within individuals, relationships, and the economic and social

¹⁰ Ibid., 7.

¹¹ Ibid., 120.

¹² Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, (2004), § 411; http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_c ompendio-dott-soc_en.html#Need for more educational and cultural formation.

state. Corruption is so dangerous that those responsible for running societies become unable to respond to their true vocation since they are no longer, nor do they recognize, their true selves. Commenting on the moral implications of corruption, Wabanhu says, “the paradigm of the moralistic approach to corruption treats corruption mostly as a violator of trust and a betrayal of moral principles, the norms of social justice and solidarity.”¹³

When talking about political corruption, two levels may come to mind as it can happen both at the level of a campaign for voting and at the level of governance. Individual politicians or organizations can skew voting in order to attain a governing position. Buying of votes with financial influence or the buying of minds through false, attractive and deceptive ideologies—traffic of influence—are not uncommon and are a clear manifestation of political corruption. At the level of governance, political leaders may find themselves “obliged” to pay back those who voted for them by offering leading positions to incompetent persons; it can steer political leaders to bad governance by following ideologies that please their voters and not that which is for the general interest of the governed. In these cases, private interests take precedence over the common good and this situation is not without moral and political erosive effects; as Wabanhu writes:

The moral and political implication of political corruption is that public officials, civil servants and politicians will continue to have the opportunity to irresponsibly exploit their positions in plundering state resources, in extorting large bribes from citizens, national and transnational corporations and in stealing large sums of money from the public treasury depositing them into various foreign bank accounts. . . . [P]olitical opportunists, evil and dishonest public officials use this form of corruption as the tool for gaining or retaining positions of power and trust in those particular societies, which are still largely characterized by the lack of democratic rule, appropriate laws and good governance.¹⁴

¹³ Wabanhu, 14.

¹⁴ Ibid., 8.

Political corruption may curtail a politician's freedom to act morally. Consequently, it may result in a split personality and ineffectiveness in serving the common good of those they are supposed to serve. This state of affairs is unfortunately not absent from the legal system.

Legal Corruption

The legal system of a country has as its mission the enforcement of justice and equality and the just application of laws. Unfortunately, corruption often makes its way into the legal system in such a way that the less financially powerful and those who have no "human support," such as family, clan or regional members, are not rendered justice as it ought. In the context of criminal law, for instance, "corruption is perceived as impairment of integrity, virtue, or moral principle. It is a deviation from binding rules; it is the arbitrary exercise of discretionary powers and the illegitimate use of public resources for private gains."¹⁵ Corruption is illegality, a vicious or fraudulent intent to evade the prohibitions of law and end up either taking a bribe for what is supposed to be done free of charge or interpreting the law in a way that favoritism is the *leitmotiv* of the judiciary system. The practice of corruption equally makes its way in public administration.

Public Administration and Corruption

Also called bureaucratic corruption and inspired particularly by the Weberian ideal type of rational-impersonal bureaucracy,¹⁶ public administration specialists perceive corruption as the

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ From Karl Emil Maximilian (Max) Weber, a German sociologist and political economist whose ideas influenced social theory and research, as well as the entire discipline of sociology.

abuse of public resources and the (mis)use of public offices for private gain contrary to the prescribed norms. It is the type of corruption encountered daily by citizens in their various interactions with those in public administration and services like schools, hospitals, police, travelling organizations, taxation authorities, etc.¹⁷

The essence of corruption “lies in the perverted behavior of a person in a position of trust, which induces him to deviate from the formal rules of conduct governing the actions of someone in a position of public authority because of private-regarding motives such as wealth, power or status.”¹⁸ This perversion of behavior is also very much present in business people who, in many countries, practice corruption to maintain their controlling power in the economy of the country.

Corruption and Entrepreneurship

Corruption viewed from an entrepreneurship perspective is that which is practiced by business people and is an investment policy concern. This kind of corruption is practiced by entrepreneurs who pay bribes to public officials in order to gain preferential treatment of their businesses, especially for tax purposes, and to minimize the burden of government regulation on their enterprises. In this sense, corruption allows a few business people and corporations to capture and retain a monopoly position in the country’s economy, thus widening the gap between the rich and the poor.¹⁹ Here still, the idea of common good suffers a great deal since the struggle is for the preservation of one’s business and the self-advancement of the business persons and their families; moreover, corruption makes a negative impact on the companies’ true values and its public image, and its moral respectability is falsely presented to the public. When corruption

¹⁷ Wabanhu, 8.

¹⁸ Ibid., 11.

¹⁹ Ibid.

is practiced, it is difficult to predict the outcome of competition. This unpredictability is why, as a mechanism of fighting and preventing corruption for multinational businesses, the International Chambers of Commerce has made it clear that whereas governments have a major responsibility in controlling extortion and bribery, the international business community, at a global level, also has a responsibility to strengthen its efforts to fight extortion and bribery.²⁰

The public is familiar with corruption. It is present not only in organizations but in all structures of society. The common person has his or her view on it, lives with it, or practices it.

Corruption and the Public

Although there are differing views and understandings of what corruption is among the public, its essential expression as a wrong practice, usually taking place “under the table,” and for self-interest is shared by the public. Generally, the public knows that corruption is wrong even though little or nothing is done to curb it. Emmanuel Wabanhu reports that over the last twenty years research projects have developed scientific and empirical insights into the question of how the public feels about corruption, depending upon the development level of countries:

Whilst in the rich countries, most take corruption as incidental to public and private employees that must be watched over by appropriate laws, in the poor countries most people take it as structural. Corruption is almost an unalterable structure of sleaze, and with regard to it they have no choice but patience. In the African countries, for example, most people see corruption in a wider scope and in more practical terms. As E. Harsch²¹ asserts: “The African understanding of corruption seems to be wider in scope: outright theft of public resources; embezzlement of public funds; illegal appropriation of state property; nepotism, favoring relatives and friends in the distribution of public goods, employment in the public sector, etc.; abuse of one’s office in an effort to generate benefits for the office holder and his family; capricious and selective enforcement of government laws and regulations in an effort to benefit the office holder; differential treatment of private enterprises in the expectation of a bribe from the entrepreneur whose

²⁰ François Vincke and Fritz F Heimann, *Fighting Corruption: A Corporate Practice Manual* (Paris, France: ICC Pub., 2003), 24.

²¹ Ernest Harsch is an Adjunct Associate Professor at Columbia’s School of International and Public Affairs where he has taught courses on African development and political instability.

business is enjoying preferential or favorable treatment; and illegal taxation of economic activity, with benefits accruing to the bureaucrat. . . . From the public opinion perspective of corruption, it follows that corruption is a deliberate abuse of office or position of power, the result of which is the deprivation of the rights of others or the infliction of pain on a person and a human community as a whole.²²

Worth noting is the interesting wide scope of understanding corruption within the African context as examined by Harsch in the above quote. It is precisely within this elaborate and diversified understanding of corruption that Cameroon society is plagued by the phenomenon. This understanding lays the ground for examining and perceiving the way corruption makes its way and the various areas affected by it in Cameroon. Before looking at how corruption infiltrated and has taken a firm grip on Cameroonian society, I now discuss the eighth corruption perspective, which is the ethical aspect in understanding the plague. Corruption is an ethical issue in that, in its practice, it involves conscience and will, and has to do with both virtue ethics and actions.

Ethical Perspectives of Corruption

The whole issue of corruption is a moral issue that needs close and serious attention. It is perceived as “a deep and widespread evil, thus a grave moral problem with an ethical dimension.”²³

Corruption is a harmful phenomenon to individuals and to society with devastating effects such as the distortion of right reason, the modification of moral reasoning capacities, the influence of moral imagination and behavioral conduct; there is a feeling of guilt or a state of guilty consciousness in whoever is involved. Besides moral distortion of human characters by

²² Wabanhu, 13.

²³ Ibid.

corruption, there is also a grave harm done to the virtue of justice. Wabanhu stresses this fact when he writes:

Furthermore, corruption has caused much injustice and unfairness to employers, be they in state's institutions or private organizations. A corrupt employee who acts against his official duties due to illegal and morally questionable self-interested incomes is acting unfairly and unjustly to his employer. In other words, corruption creates a conflict of interest that violates the moral duty that the employee's work contract establishes. . . . It creates classes among people and business firms. It spreads, infecting large groups of people, and even whole societies with widespread moral decay and fatalism, resulting in hopelessness and inaction. Finally, moralists and business ethicists totally hate and ethically condemn corruption as it basically breaches trust, fidelity and even more importantly betrays moral principles and norms of social justice.²⁴

Corruption is a cancer that exceeds the confines of the business world referred to above.

John Mary Walligo has carefully put together a number of qualifiers to describe corruption in its wider scope and its devastating moral effects. As Waliggo describes it:

Corruption breaks, destroys, disrupts; distorts life, the community, society and the environment. It stands in fundamental contradiction to normality, smooth growth, integrity, harmony, justice, virtue and values. Corruption is an evil with the potential to multiply itself so as to affect entire communities. Corruption is a cancer, which starts small and spreads to kill the entire body. It is a crime against humanity, which cries to heaven for redress. Corruption is outright robbery, however sophisticated it is made to look.²⁵

It can confidently be said that corruption actively fights the virtues. Inasmuch as there are virtues opposed to corruption, there are also vices that are associated with it. More serious is the fact that the vices that breed corruption and those that are enhanced by corruption, which are manifested in people's dealings with one another, come from within the agents involved in corruption. This source suggests that if corruption is to be curbed, condemning the effects of corruption is not enough; a particular interest in the human person is indispensable, since the

²⁴ Ibid., 13–14.

²⁵ John M. Waliggo, "Corruption and Bribery: An African Problem?" *Business Ethics in the African Context Today: Proceedings of the International Conference Held at Uganda Martyrs University, Nkozi, 9-12 September 1996*, ed. Michel Lejeune and Philipp Rosemann, UMU Studies in Contemporary Africa 1 (Nkozi [Kampala] : Kampala: Uganda Martyrs University Press ; Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 1996), 117.

person is considered as the potential grounds for nursing corruption. Among the virtues opposed to corruption, we can think of honesty, ingenuity, order, justice, diligence, uprightness, merit, and excellence, to name a few; and among the vices that go along with corruption can be mentioned fraud, immorality, abuses, injustice, duplicity, betrayal, robbery, extortion, cowardice, cheating, rotting, evil passions, and untruthfulness, to name a few. These vices lead to their perpetuation and subsequently to an enslavement that makes the exercise of virtues practically difficult.

After having looked generally at what corruption is and how it manifests itself in the various areas of life, I now turn to a precise manifestation of the plague within Cameroon society. Although corruption in Cameroon is experienced more or less in the same way as it is lived everywhere else in the world, there are peculiar ways in which it manifests in Cameroon, which shows how serious corruption is in that “national triangle” blessed with human and natural resources,²⁶ and how urgent it is to suggest a way to prevent and fight it.

Corruption in Cameroon

The Various Forms of Corruption Manifest in Cameroon and the Layers of Cameroonian Society Affected by Corruption

The practice of corruption in Cameroon has become a widespread phenomenon and is present in all spheres of life. Though punishable under Section 134 of the Penal Code of Cameroon, corruption, and its most frequent expression, bribery, has become a “normal” phenomenon practiced openly. It is manifested in various ways. Some areas are worthy of consideration.

²⁶ The “national triangle” is a phrase commonly used in Cameroon to describe the whole of Cameroon-based upon its triangular shape.

Corruption in General

“Backdoor,” “pushing files,” “oiling palms,” “soya” (roast meat), and “beer” are some of the expressions used by Cameroonians to describe the act of bribery in a system of corruption. For example, in some offices, to have one’s documents signed—which is supposed to be free of charge—one may be asked to “speak well” by giving something for “beer.” A report culminating a research project on corruption entitled “Corruption in Cameroon,” was presented by a group of Germans coordinated by Cameroonian Pierre Titi Nwell, University Lecturer and author who became a member of the Electoral Board of Cameroon in 2011. The report states that “Before an employee renders any service in the public or private administration, he must be given or will most probably expect to receive from the person requesting this service payment whose amount would depend on the issue at stake. . . . The most common bribe offered is money.”²⁷ No sector of social activity is left which is not touched by corruption in Cameroon. In the only Cameroon Catholic newspaper, we read:

[C]orruption literally touches every fabric of our society. Most uniform officers—be they police, gendarmes, custom officers or forest guards, are notoriously corrupt. Just drive along our roads and you will understand the depth of corruption these fellows are orchestrating. They receive bribes openly without shame. These fellows have no qualms of conscience which is supposed to be their guiding spirit. In most schools, principals and headmasters/mistresses take bribes with impunity to admit students while teachers have no iota of shame and professional ethics in dishing out sexually and “beerly” transmitted marks [that is, notes or grades]. Others sell marks at cut-throat prices like vendors on our streets.

At the political level, most parliamentarians and mayors who came with mouth-wetting promises during campaigns, claiming to be saints and solution providers, have turned out to be articulate liars and skillful rogues. They have spent their whole tenure in office protruding their stomachs rather than striving for the welfare of the people who voted them into office.

²⁷ Richard M. Diom, trans. *Corruption in Cameroon* (Yaounde: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, June 1999), 31. <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/kamerun/07797.pdf>.

When a presidential decree appoints ministers or directors, it is for the common good and with good intentions. Unfortunately, they disappoint and betray the chief executive's trust and confidence. This category of Cameroonians appears to be the most corrupt this nation has ever known. They do not care whether the nation progresses, retrogresses or disappears. All they desire is to satisfy their stomachs.

Another area that is ruthlessly corrupt is the taxation sector. Most of our unscrupulous tax inspectors help companies to evade paying taxes and ask for a lesser amount to fill their pockets. The judiciary is not left out of this bad culture. Our magistrates, judges and State counsels are notoriously corrupt and shamelessly sell judgments to the highest bidders.²⁸

The above article by Eugene Song presents in a nutshell the enormity and extent of the vice of corruption in Cameroon. Those who are supposed to watch over the security of people and goods have their own way of practicing corruption.

Corruption and the Police

“Uniform officers,” as they are commonly called in Cameroon, stop drivers, not primarily for security reasons, but in the hope of getting some money from them. It seems to be a well-structured phenomenon because at the end of the day, those officers who spent time by the road side are supposed to “render an account” to their boss by giving him a share of the money they collected from drivers. It is often heard that there is a precise share for the boss which the uniform officers who spent the day along the roads are supposed to give. They are expected therefore to do everything possible to find some people guilty of something—the absence of a personal identification document or one which is expired, a missing or expired vehicle document—so as to make them give a bribe when threatened by the police to be reported and locked in jail. If a driver is found with car documents missing or at fault of any kind, he can go free only if he gives a bribe. I remember once travelling in a public transportation bus. The

²⁸ Eugene Song, “Corruption still spreading like cancer in Cameroon, Transparency International says,” *L’Effort Camerounais* (November 13, 2010), <http://www.leffortcamerounais.com/2010/11/corruption-still-spreading-like-cancer-in-cameroon-transparency-international-says.html>.

police officers stopped the driver who gave them both his personal and car documents, which happened to be complete. As he did not give some money along with the documents, one of the police officers said to the driver: “Do we eat papers?” That said it all; the driver was expected to give money once he was stopped by police officers. In public offices, the scenario is not that different.

Corruption and Public Administration

In offices, if service is slow, there is but one recourse: those who are supposed to “serve” have not been “motivated.” To hasten service, money must be given. Often at pre-employment interviews, if the candidate does not understand that she is supposed to give a bribe, she is reminded by the following words: “speak well!” which means she is supposed to “give an envelope.” In fact, many competent young people fail in competitive examinations because they are poor and cannot bribe the examiner or the employer before the exam. On the other hand, it is common to see children of the rich being admitted to the post of responsibility sought. A close friend of mine went to an interview after being successful in the written exam for magistrate and the first question he was asked was: “Where does your father work?” Since his father was not in a high position in society so as to give a “good bribe,” this friend of mine failed. Politics is not free from corruption either.

Corruption and Politics

In Cameroon, with the current regime, rarely—if at all—does the country’s Head go out to the people for an open pre-elections campaign. This is not to say that the political party in power does not campaign prior to elections; representatives from various ministries leave the capital city—where the ministries are found—for their various villages to campaign. In fact they

have the obligation to do so. Very striking is the fact that the campaign consists more in sharing money with the heads of villages in order for them to “compel” their subjects to vote for the party in power than in presenting a well-structured and convincing political policy. In many villages, cows are killed to feed the population and alcoholic beverages are offered to people to make them think that they are thought of and catered to. Unfortunately, villagers forget that after the one-day good food and drink, they must return to their day-to-day struggles and miseries with less or no change brought by the government to better their lives and the country as a whole. This way of campaigning can be seen as a form of political corruption. In 2007, for example, prior to the general elections in Cameroon, the head of the National Assembly made a statement which was frowned upon by the bishops of Cameroon. He promised a sum of 100,000 CFA Francs (\$200) to every polling station that would give 100% to the governing party.²⁹ For hungry people, the temptation to accept bribery is overwhelming. Many sell their right to think and to foresee a brighter future at the cost of immediate and short-lasting material gain. On many occasions, elections have been contested in Cameroon. It is reported that through political corruption many victories which would have been otherwise lost have been won.

The justice system is not exempt of the “precious sesame” which corruption offers.³⁰

Corruption and the Justice System

Many Cameroonians are in prison, some held unjustly without trial. The judicial system is not free from corruption either. Magistrates, attorneys and judges have a “side” business—the business of extracting bribes from wealthy culpable people or rich relatives of suspects awaiting

²⁹ Léger Ntiga, «Bataille Autour du Prochain Premier Ministre », *Bonaberi. Com* (8/15/2007), <http://www.bonaberi.com/article.php?aid=3206>.

³⁰ A phrase commonly used in Cameroon describing something people long for, such as sesame seeds.

trial. Hence, it is not uncommon to see guilty people released simply because they have the financial means to bribe those who are supposed to oversee fair trials. Even where we may think that people should be the most humane and would not ask for a bribe—like health centers and hospitals—corruption has found a home.

Corruption and the Health System

Sadly enough, hospitals are not safe from the practice of corruption. In order to be attended to quickly, especially in the large cities of Cameroon, people have come to understand that a bribe must be given to nurses and doctors. In July 2007, I witnessed bribery practiced by a priest who was convinced that unless he offered a bribe, he would spend hours in the hospital waiting to be attended to. Because of their training and the fact that they are dealing with sick people who most often have little or no money, one would expect that professionals in the medical field would not be involved with bribery and corruption. But that is not the case. Further, what can be said about bribery practiced by religious, however willingly or unwillingly, who are supposed to preach not only by words but also by example? Their complicity is a clear indication that the vice is deeply rooted in individuals and in the society and so needs to be fought accordingly.

At this point, the question arises as to how corruption has become so deeply imbedded that it is the norm for all. Could there be a link between corruption and a historical narrative within the Cameroon society?

The Narrative History as Background to the Grip of Corruption in Cameroon

Although the practice of corruption may be as old as the world, the shape it took and the severity with which it affects Cameroon might have some historical roots. The facts of this

history are not to justify corruption but to try to understand why corruption is so rampant in Cameroon and what events might have contributed to its prevalence. The presence and spread of corruption in Cameroon cannot be separated from history. As Pierre Titi states:

The corrupt practices in Cameroon today did not start from nothing; they are partly a consequence of our past socio-political history. Olivier de Sardan also considers that what he calls the “logic of predatory authority” has its origins in history. According to the philosophy behind this “logic” any person wielding power considers it his right to exact dues from his subordinates or from the people he is supposed to serve, or help himself to the funds he is called upon to manage on behalf of society. “Is it not possible that this generalization of extortion is merely the extension of some pre-colonial political attitudes (raids, tributes, wars which formed part of social life in those days)?” This may be the case, but the socio-political environment today is so different (the modern African State, in spite of all that is being said has little to do with the chiefdoms, kingdoms and emirates of old) that one would rather have to look for causes in the colonial period proper, starting from the military rulers after the conquest or from the all “powerful Commandants” to the white administrative heads appointed by the colonial authorities to the “indigenous” auxiliaries who all had excessive arbitrary powers.³¹

Thus, some elements of corruption could perhaps be traced in the history of Cameroon administration. These elements are also inscribed within the framework of oral and practical tradition (transmitted through regular practice) in the sense that later generations think they cannot do otherwise to fit into the system, especially if people are concerned about their survival, career and success. But still, care should be taken in considering the origin or the progress of corruption in the early colonial administration. Although some corrupt practices have been sustained following foul administrative methods like bribes and extortion, would corruption be less if early administrators of the country shunned corrupt practices? The reality right now is that corruption is solidly rooted in Cameroon and has been so throughout its history. It has become a network difficult to do away with but not impossible to curb. The fact that the existence of corruption could owe to generations past does not mean it has to continue, especially since it is

³¹ Pierre Titi Nwel, ed., *De La Corruption Au Cameroun: Étude*, (Yaoundé: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 1999) 61-63. English version, *Corruption in Cameroon*, trans. by M. Diom Richard. <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/kamerun/07797.pdf>.

widely recognized as an evil. Reasoning that contemporaries can modify the existing social environment, if the tree of corruption is fed by the *humus* of the present time, then we might be able to uproot it; but if its roots are buried in time forever gone and beyond our reach, “what can we do?” would be an attitude of passivism symptomatic of the evil of corruption. Facing, explaining and dealing with corruption from an historical perspective is a kind of fatalism: as were our ancestors, so are we and so shall we be.³² The present reality of the severity of corruption in Cameroon is to be faced together with its causes. A survey reveals some causes of corruption. Of the ten Regions of Cameroon, a team of researchers surveyed eight regions, revealing the following as causes of corruption in Cameroon: low salaries, impunity, desire to get rich at all cost, and ignorance of rights.³³

In 2012, 48% of the Cameroon population (estimated at about 22 million) is said to live in poverty. The minimum monthly wage today in Cameroon is 28.216 CFA Francs (\$60). For someone to live on this amount for a month (taking into account a family of 6 to 10 children), is surely not enough. This low wage seems to lead people to indulge in corruption, but is it a better solution? Using foul means to solve the problem of low salaries is an immoral, short-sighted and evil solution.

Impunity may have encouraged many to fearlessly embezzle public funds. Since 2004, a vast campaign of tracking and jailing money embezzlers has been going on but the campaign has not prevented corruption from subtly continuing its way. Moreover, the unfair application of the campaign has not deterred the practice of corruption. As to the desire to get rich at all cost, many

³² Ibid., 64.

³³ Ibid.

have made it their “hobby-horse.”³⁴ Some think that all means can be used to get rich, provided one is not caught. On the other hand, because of the low level or absence of education, some are ignorant of the law and cannot argue when they are asked to give a bribe; the bribe takers in these cases use intimidating arguments to catch their naïve prey into giving a bribe. These practices show how corruption is not only a compound problem but has extensive impact at various levels in a country like Cameroon.

In addition to the social situations that may lead to its practice, the magnitude of the problem of corruption resides, in its roots, in the people who practice corruption. Just as a vice is a habitual voluntary disposition towards some kind of misbehavior, so is the vice called corruption which solidifies when habitually practiced.

Corruption’s Continuing Impact and the Magnitude of the Problem

Aquinas says that “[a] habit is a quality that is difficult to change.”³⁵ Both a virtue and a vice are acquired through habits which are formed through practice and then become dispositions. And since both good and bad habits are hard to eliminate, the individual eventually acquires a second nature which affects his or her behavior. Thus, corruption, being a habitual practice in Cameroon, can “corrupt” those involved in the practice to the point of their considering it a normal thing to do. Personalities are contaminated by corruption which, according to Aquinas, instills a disorder in their lives, the thirst for earthly things and the loss of

³⁴ A phrase used in Cameroon to indicate something that is part and parcel of a person’s routine.

³⁵ *Disputed Questions*, “On the Virtues in General”, 1 § 10.

the sense of the spiritual.³⁶ Practicing corruption is a sin and, according to Aquinas, because of their disordered ends, sinners do not have in them the virtue of prudence.

Children are strongly influenced by corruption because growing up with the idea that no service is rendered without bribery or that one can easily come out of an unpleasant or criminal situation simply by offering a bribe, can lead to the vice's becoming part and parcel of their personalities, thus perpetuating the cycle of corruption. Also, bribery and corruption can contribute to an excessive love of money. The Apostle Paul warns against this effect when he writes: "But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows" (1 Tim 6:9-10). As the Germans say: "Der Appetit kommt beim Essen" (appetite comes along with eating); practicing corruption may sharpen the appetite of those who indulge in the practice in such a way that it becomes an insatiable need to be quenched by any means.

Corruption has to do with decision making, with the individual's conscience. The practice of corruption, then, can easily lead to having an erroneous conscience that is less or not sensitive to what is wrong. It is a damaging phenomenon "only for the simple reason that it distorts choice."³⁷ Corrupted decision making can be as harmful as a lie or a false judgment on a given reality. And these harms do not happen without consequences to the economy of the society. As

³⁶ *Summa Theologica*, IIa IIae, q. 46, a. 3.

³⁷ Rick Stapenhurst and Sahr J. Kpundeh, ed., "Introduction: An Overview of the Costs of Corruption and Strategies to Deal with It," *Curbing Corruption: Toward a Model for Building National Integrity* (Washington, DC: EDI Development Studies, 1999), 3-4.

Rick Stapenhurst and Sahrzad Sedigh put it:

Corruption also damages the economic life of a society. . . . [T]here is little doubt that corruption increases the cost of goods and services, promotes unproductive investment in projects that are not economically viable or sustainable, contributes to a decline in standards (for example, in construction and transportation), and can even increase a country's indebtedness and impoverishment. Although the economic costs of corruption are difficult to measure, some studies suggest that they include:

- A 3 to 10 percent increase in the price of a given transaction to speed up the delivery of a government service
- Inflated prices for goods as much as 15 to 20 percent higher as a result of government imposed monopolies
- A loss of as much as 50 percent of government tax revenues because of graft and corruption
- Excessive charges to government for goods and services because of overbilling on procurement contracts or the purchase of expensive and unnecessary items, with governments paying 20 to 100 percent more than necessary.³⁸

The above estimates may be higher in percentage in some countries where corruption is fast becoming a societal ulcer, and deeply destabilizing their economies. As corruption can produce inefficiency and unfairness, Paolo Mauro remarks, "recent empirical evidence suggests that corruption lowers economic growth [as] it may also bring about loss of tax revenue [and] have adverse budgetary consequences."³⁹ A logical consequence may then be that a set of people, namely those receiving bribes, are likely to be well off and wealthy, while the poor get poorer.

Worse still, the personalities and characters of both those who receive and give bribes are themselves corrupt and may influence other areas of their lives such as interpersonal relationships, their religious beliefs and their personal integrity.

³⁸ Ibid., 4.

³⁹ Paolo Mauro, "The Effects of Corruption on Growth, Investment and Government Expenditure: A Cross-Country Analysis" in *Corruption and the Global Economy*, ed. Ann Elliot Limberly (Washington, DC: Institute for International Economics, 1997), 87.

In sum, corruption has both objective and subjective consequences. The objective consequences may be the effect corruption has on the common good, on the smooth running of the economy and on the society, especially when an allocated good is directed for the betterment of a particular situation but is embezzled or redirected to another purpose. The subjective consequences affect the individual persons in their thoughts, principles, common sense and conscience. Colin Leys brings out this distinction in a number of questions he asks:

Under [objective consequences] will come such questions as, What resources are directed from what applications to what other applications? What are the real as opposed to the theoretical opportunity costs of the alleged corruption? What are the effects for income distribution? And what consequential effects are there on the pattern of loyalties, the scope of party activities, the incentives to economic activities? Etc. etc. Under [subjective consequences] will come such questions as e.g., What effect does behaving in this way have on the work of civil servants who regard themselves as behaving corruptly? And, what effect does observing such behavior have on the attitudes and/or behavior of others? Etc. etc.⁴⁰

These are thought-provoking questions which indicate that corruption affects not only the structure in which it is practiced but also and, primarily, the individual person who so indulges: corrupt individuals definitely lead to a corrupt society and a corrupt society, in turn, cultivates corrupt individuals.

The situation of Cameroon in relation to corruption thus presented is alarming. But it is not as if nothing is done to curb it; in fact much is being done. The question may reside in inefficiency of efforts and on why corruption is still rampant today in Cameroon.

What is Being Done to Curb Corruption in Cameroon

⁴⁰ Colin Leys, "What is the Problem About Corruption, in *Explaining Corruption*, ed. Robert Williams, (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, Inc., 2000), 36.

Aware of the damage corruption causes to Cameroonian society, preventive and corrective actions are being taken, especially in the last decade. These efforts are made at the levels of both the civil society and the Church.

Corrective Measures

Corruption is condemned by the Cameroon Penal Code. Under Article 134 of Law Number 77/23 of December 6, 1977, any person involved in the act of corruption will be punished through five to ten years' imprisonment and a fine of 200,000 F CFA to 2,000,000 F CFA (\$400 to \$4,000). Unfortunately, the law has not been strictly applied. Rather, in Cameroon, the practice of corruption has been “compulsory” for a long time; one could hardly access an office to request a service—even the least—without “leaving an envelope” first. Not only was nothing concrete done to fight the phenomenon, but, worse, leading politicians of the country publicly did not admit its existence. Many interpreted that failure as both a sign of weakness on the side of the government and an encouragement to indulge in it.⁴¹ Cameroon started her fight against corruption towards the end of the year 1990 when the Non-Governmental Organization “Transparency International Cameroon” reported to the whole world with regard to the issue of corruption and classified Cameroon—for two consecutive years—among the most corrupt countries of the world.⁴² This eye-opener prompted Cameroon's efforts to fight corruption in order to improve her world image and to benefit from external aid that was threatened should nothing be done to fight the socially entrenched vice. Since then the government has started to prosecute money embezzlers. This action intensified through “Opération Epervier” (Operation Sparrow Hawk) launched by the government in 2004. It consists of pursuing all money embezzlers and incarcerating them. To date, more than a dozen former ministers and directors of state agencies have been imprisoned for embezzling large sums of state money. Unfortunately,

⁴¹ Claude Assira, « Procès et Procédures: Etat de non Droit Permanent », in *L'Opération Epervier au Cameroun : Un Devoir d'Injustice ?* ed. Charly Gabriel Mbock (Montreal : Kiyikaat Editions, 2011), 49.

⁴² Ibid.

the embezzled money has not been refunded to the public coffers. True enough, the very people who stole government money have been stopped from embezzlement, since they have up to twenty or more years to spend behind bars, but they are not compelled to refund what had been taken. Even if the embezzled money is no longer available, restitution could be made through other material possessions.

In March 2006, the Anti-Corruption National Committee was set up to sensitize Cameroonians on the evils of corruption. It is a national organization which has as its mission the evaluation of the implementation of the government's measures to fight corruption. It is supposed to be an independent structure spearheaded by the Head of State and open to receive any report on corruption coming from any citizen. Although it does not have the powers to prosecute, the committee can make reports "To Whom It May Concern," who can take appropriate measures and sanctions on those responsible. Efforts are also made to prevent corruption.

Preventive Measures

In some public offices, postings with words like "No Corruption" or "Corruption Free Area" are displayed. The hope is that people would read and try to apply them. The punitive measures undertaken by the government are also believed to serve as deterrence. By jailing eminent members of the government, it is hoped that others who may want to follow in their footsteps would be taught a lesson, which will deter them from embezzling.

The Catholic Church in Cameroon is also very concerned with the scourge of corruption. The Bishops of Cameroon have issued letters to all Christians and men and women of good will urging them to pray for leaders and for all Cameroonians, and to actively fight corruption. They believe that only God can effectively help us eliminate corruption in Cameroon. A "prayer

against bribery and corruption in Cameroon” is said weekly –every Sunday- or daily where possible, in all Catholic Churches of the country. It goes thus:

Heavenly Father,
You always provide for all your creatures,
So that all may live as you have willed.

You have blessed our country Cameroon
With rich human and natural resources,
To be used to your honour and glory,
And for the well-being of every Cameroonian.

We are deeply sorry for the wrong use
Of these gifts and blessings
Through acts of injustice,
Bribery and corruption,
As a result of which many of our people
Are hungry, sick,
Ignorant and defenceless.

Father,
You alone can heal us and our
Nation of this scourge.

We beg you, touch our lives
And the lives of our leaders and people,
So that we may all realise the evil of bribery and corruption,
And work hard to eliminate it.

Raise up for us God-fearing people
And leaders who care for us,
And who will lead us in the path
Of justice, peace and prosperity.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.⁴³

In 2000, the Bishops of Cameroon issued the sixth pastoral letter since 1977 on corruption. It reads in part: “Corruption is destroying our country. It is destroying our economy, it is destroying our social fabric, it is destroying above all our consciences. What was once done

⁴³ National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon, “Prayer Against Bribery and Corruption in Cameroon”, *L’Effort Camerounais*, (2006), http://www.leffortcamerounais.com/2006/04/prayer_against_.html.

secretly is now done openly. Corruption has become a way of life. Sometimes it seems as if it is officially tolerated, as if it has been institutionalized.”⁴⁴ The Church has been playing her role of educating society on the plague.

Much is being done to fight corruption in Cameroon. But a fundamental question is, how effective have the aforementioned measures been? It has been alleged that “Opération Epervier /Operation Sparrow Hawk” is being used not only to track money embezzlers, but also to stifle anybody who may have political ambition for elective office against the political party currently in power.⁴⁵ Why is it that, in spite of all that has been done, corruption still remains rampant? On one hand, Opération Epervier exposes wrongdoing, while on the other hand, it ignores the status quo. No one doubts, for instance, the power of prayer. “If the Lord does not build the house, in vain do its builders labor” (Ps 127: 1) and “Nothing is impossible to God” (Lk 1: 37) but we should not put God to the test by asking God to mechanically solve the problem of corruption for us. At the same time that we pray to God for help, we should do what is within our power to fight corruption. Why not turn towards virtue ethics?

Before discussing the application of virtue ethics to the plague of corruption, a theological look at why corruption is wrong for us as Christians would be useful and necessary. I turn to this consideration in my second chapter.

⁴⁴ Andre Wouking, Pastoral Letter of the Bishops of Cameroon on Corruption (Yaounde, 2000), <http://www.leffortcamerounais.com/2009/08/pastoral-letter-of-the-bishops-of-cameroon-on-corruption.html>.

⁴⁵ Enoh Meyomesse, “L’entrée en Injustice de la Justice Camerounaise” in *L’Opération Epervier au Cameroun: Un Devoir d’Injustice?* Ed. Charly Gabriel Mbock (Montreal : Kiyikaat Editions, 2011), 27.

CHAPTER TWO

CORRUPTION, A THEOLOGICAL ISSUE FOR CHRISTIANS

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to bring corruption under the scope of theological scrutiny. In the first chapter I reviewed the fact that corruption is acknowledged widely to be a wrongful practice; that is why it usually takes on various names to hide it from being noticed by the public, for instance: “palm-greasing,” “underhandedness,” “water,” and “beer.” In this chapter the wrongfulness of corruption is seen from the perspective of theological analysis; I explore, why for Christians, corruption is theologically wrong. I shall move from scriptures to the teaching of the Magisterium and theologians’ investigation of corruption.

Sacred Scripture and Corruption

The prominent moral theologian Bernard Häring, whom Protestant ethicist James Gustafson called the “pivotal figure in the history of moral theology in the 20th century both in the Catholic tradition and in an ecumenical perspective,” broke ranks with the Neo-Scholastic textbook tradition. He laid the foundation for new approaches to Catholic moral theology by integrating Scripture into a discipline that was once nearly devoid of biblical references let alone built upon biblical images and ideas.⁴⁶ Yet in order to integrate the scriptures into moral theology, the sacred texts should be used with interpretations that follow exegetical scholarship integrated into moral reflection and contemporary application. For William Spohn, “five different ways of using Scripture for moral guidance emerge from reading the wide range of

⁴⁶ Kathleen A. Cahalan, “Still Spiritually Alive: Remembering Bernard Häring,” *America*, Vol. 179, Issue 4, (August 15, 1998), 10.

theological positions: Scripture as the command of God, as moral reminder, as call to liberation, as call to discipleship, and as the basis of responding love.”⁴⁷ Thus it stands that Sacred Scripture is indispensable for Christian living; hence, we turn to the Bible for what it reveals about corruption.

The Old Testament on Corruption

Even confined to its narrowest meaning, there is no doubt that the concept of corruption is condemned by Sacred Scripture.⁴⁸ It stems from the fact that corruption is generally seen in the Bible as a breaking away, as an introduction of falsehood, greed, and immorality into a relationship of fidelity, truth and love willed by God.

Analyzing the etymology of the word, *corruption* comes from the Latin root *cor*, meaning “altogether,” and *rumpere* which means “to break.” Therefore corruption means a breaking altogether; and from what? The Jewish people in the Old Testament embraced the important notion of covenant, usually a covenant between two parties. This theme of the covenant was enfolded as God enters into history in a concrete relationship with this people. This covenant, as Xavier Léon-Dufour remarks, “is the point of departure of all their religious thinking and is the difference between their religion [of the Jews] and the surrounding religions oriented to worship of divinities of Nature.”⁴⁹ The relationship between God and the people was henceforth defined in terms of a covenant. On Mount Sinai, the Jews who were delivered from

⁴⁷ William C. Spohn, *What Are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 20.

⁴⁸ Paul Tan Chee Ing, “Corruption: from the Bible Point of View,” 1, a paper from *Oriental Heart and Mind Study Institute*, http://www.ohmsi.net/view_file.cfm?fileid=8.

⁴⁹ Xavier Léon-Dufour, *Vocabulaire de théologie biblique* (Paris: Les Ed. du Cerf, 1970), 30 [« ... il est au point de départ de toute la pensée religieuse et la différence de toutes les religions environnantes, orientées vers les divinités de la nature. »].

slavery in Egypt, entered into a covenant with Yahweh. In general practices, covenants concluded with a meal shared between the two parties and with a ritual of sealing with blood.⁵⁰ In the Book of Exodus, Moses is described as concluding the covenant with God with a meal and a liturgical ritual; that is, after offering the bullocks on the altar, “Moses took half of the blood and put it into large bowls; the other half he splashed on the altar. Taking the book of the covenant, he read it aloud to the people, who answered, ‘All that the Lord has said, we will heed and do.’ Then he took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, saying, ‘This is the blood of the Covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words of his’” (Exodus 24: 6-8). It must be noted that, prior to this ratification of the covenant, the Lord had given to the people of Israel their own part to play in the covenant; their part consists in the observance of the ten commandments (Ex. 20:1-17); divided in two parts, the first part concerns the people’s relationship with God, the second their relationship with others. The covenant also consists of some concrete rules like: keeping of the supremacy of God in the fear of the Lord (Ex. 20:18-26), laws regarding slaves which call for a more human way of treatment (Ex. 21: 1-11), those forbidding or regulating personal injury such as striking or killing (Ex. 21, 12-32), laws regulating the dealings with other people’s properties (Ex. 21: 33-37), and laws concerning trusts and loans, and social and religious laws (Ex. 22: 6-23, 19).

According to the terms of the covenant, therefore, the Israelites have a divine command to exercise love, patience, justice, truthfulness, respect of the other person’s property, etc. Unfortunately, shortly after this beautifully and happily sealed covenant, the people of Israel broke the covenant made with Yahweh by fashioning a golden calf, which they worshipped falsely as the God who brought them out of Egypt, thereby turning their backs to the true God

⁵⁰ Paul Tan Chee Ing, 2.

and by making a covenant with an object (Ex. 32: 1-29). But what has the breaking of the covenant to do with corruption? Everything. Corruption has to do with sin, with a debased conscience, with breaking away. As Bishop Paul Tan Chee Ing, S.J., explains:

Since the notion of covenant was central to the religious thinking and worship of the Jews of the Old Testament which has been passed down into the New Testament, corruption as “breaking [apart]” of the covenant becomes important. All sins—including bribery, fraud, injustice, underhandedness, dishonesty, lack of integrity, etc.—come from the basic infidelity to or the “breaking together” of the covenant. From the Old Testament, sin comes from breaking the commandments (the Torah) of God ending in breaking of the covenantal relationship between God and His chosen people.⁵¹

Theologically, corruption can be perceived as a way of acting independently from God, which implies a spirit of selfishness, avarice, and a preoccupation with one’s interests while closing up to others’. According to Ing, the word corruption, which the Latin renders as *corruptio*, can be understood within the context of the moral degradation caused by the original sin of Adam and Eve.⁵² Here we see in our first parents the spirit of wanting to grow at all cost in order to become like God without listening to God. They deviated from what God had planned for them, they were lured by Satan’s temptation (Gen. 3:5). Paradise, where Adam and Eve were placed, was an expression of happiness and harmony. But by turning away from God, the harmony of Paradise they knew gave way to chaos, to an insatiable desire to have more, even through deceptively immoral ways. In defining original sin, Matt Slick makes the link between corruption and the sin of the first parents as he states that “original sin is known in two senses: the Fall of Adam as the ‘original’ sin and the hereditary fallen nature and moral

⁵¹ Paul Tan Chee Ing, 3.

⁵² Ibid., 1.

corruption that is passed down from Adam to his descendants.”⁵³ This original moral corruption takes place when the first human beings decide freely to follow their selfish desire to be like or equal to God. This selfish tendency results in an effect on human beings to reach for possessions beyond their limits at any and all cost. Similarly, the Catechism of the Catholic Church refers to the aftermath of original sin as a universal corruption that follows the wake of sin.⁵⁴

The many prophets sent to Israel did not condone the corruption portrayed in its various forms. They vehemently, in the name of God, denounced the ramifications of corruption as injustice, the illegal appropriation of others’ goods, simony and fraudulent dealings with one another. All these practices flow from the rejection of God, who is love, just and caring, and who wants only faithfulness to the terms of the covenant made with humankind. A few verses against corruption from various angles in the Old Testament bring out the fact that corruption compromises justice, love of God and neighbor.

In the Book of Proverbs we read: “The wicked man accepts a concealed bribe to pervert the course of justice” (Proverbs 17:23). Thus, it stands out that bribery leaves no room for consideration—in justice—of the other person. Another passage reads: “When I would heal Israel, the corruption of Ephraim is revealed, and the wicked deeds of Samaria; for they deal falsely, the thief breaks in, and the bandits raid outside” (Hosea 7: 1). This passage from Hosea points to the fact that corruption is not a mere dealing with fellow human beings; it “affects” God, as well, who created them all; before God, nothing is concealed and a well-formed conscience cannot but be worried when involved in corruption. In the following quote,

⁵³ Matt Slick, “What is Original Sin?”, *Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry* (2012), <https://carm.org/questions/about-doctrine/what-original-sin>.

⁵⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City, 2003), 401. http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM.

corruption is condemned as a practice not willed by God, who Himself is impartial and just: “For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing” (Deuteronomy 10: 17). The Lord’s ordinance concerning bribery and corruption is unambiguous: “You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in their lawsuit. Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent or those in the right, for I will not acquit the guilty. You shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the officials, and subverts the cause of those who are in the right” (Exodus 23: 6-8). When faced with the temptation of corruption, the idea of the fear of the Lord should be remembered as we read in the Book of Chronicles: “Now let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take care what you do, for there is no perversion of justice with the Lord our God, or partiality, or taking of bribes” (2 Chronicles 19: 7). Finally, the Book of Proverbs warns of the consequences of practicing corruption in the following words: “Those who are greedy for unjust gain make trouble for their household, but those who hate bribes will live” (Proverbs 15: 27).

The above extracts from the Old Testament show that corruption goes against social justice; it is a sin punishable by God and disrupts the peace and harmony brought about by justice, truth, and the spirit of consideration for one another. Besides the condemnation of corruption in dealings with one another, the same charges apply also to governing systems of societies and nations. Their leaders are targeted by the prophet Micah: “Hear this you rulers of the house of Jacob and chiefs of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert all equity, who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with wrong! Its rulers give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for a price, its prophets give oracles for money; yet they lean upon the Lord and say, ‘surely the Lord is with us! No harm shall come upon us.’ Therefore because of you Zion shall

be ploughed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooden height” (Micah 3: 9-12). Both interpersonal and corporate corruption are seen in the Old Testament as a breaking away from the covenant God made with the people. The same idea continues in the New Testament.

The New Testament and Corruption

The idea of the covenant is also strong in the New Testament. It is a covenant sealed this time not with the blood of animals but with the blood of Christ, the blood of the “new and everlasting covenant” based on the law of love. As Bishop Paul Tan Chee Ing explains:

Just as sin in the Old Testament is the breaking of the *Torah* leading to the breaking of the covenant between God and His chosen people, so sin in the New Testament is the breaking of the one and fundamental law of God: to love through service as God loves which is manifested in Jesus Christ, the Son of God become man. . . . Seen from the New Testament point of view, that is the teaching of Jesus Christ, all sins spring from our unfaithfulness to love as God loves. In the New Testament, Jesus revealed that “God is love” (1 Jn 4: 8,16), that is, His nature is love. And in 2 Peter 1:4, . . . we are “to share in the divine nature, after escaping from the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire.” Since we are made to God’s image, we are made to love. Thus, St. John can say, “. . . he who lives in love, God lives in him” (1 John 4:16). If we love as Jesus loves, that is, to serve others, then we fulfil the covenant between God and us. Hence Saint Paul can rightly say: “Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilment of the law” (Romans 13:10). And because it is the fulfilment of all laws, Paul can add: “Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Colossians 3:14).⁵⁵

Thus, corruption in its practice causes not only moral hurt in the one who asks or receives a bribe, but also makes no room for consideration of a neighbor who, instead, is mercilessly swindled. In most cases, those who are compelled to offer a bribe are numbered among the poor and the ignorant. Their low status in society serves as a fertile ground to despoil them even from the little they have. This kind of dealing with fellow human beings clearly points to the lack of

⁵⁵ Ing., 3.

love, justice, mercy and compassion; those are components of the terms of the covenant which are virtues required of Christians.

New Testament passages that address the practice of corruption are worth considering:

Thus he [Christ] has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4).

After the priests had assembled with the elders, they devised a plan to give a large sum of money to the soldiers, telling them, you must say, “his disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.” If this comes to the governor’s ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble. So they took the money and did as they were directed (Matthew 28:12-15).

In the Acts of the Apostles crass incidents of corruption and its condemnation take place as reported:

Some days later when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul, and heard him speak concerning faith in Christ Jesus. And as he discussed justice, self-control, and the coming judgment, Felix became frightened and said, “Go away for the present; when I have an opportunity I will send for you.” At the same time he hoped that money would be given to him by Paul, and for that reason he used to send for him very often and converse with him. . . . Simon the soothsayer tried to buy the power of the Holy Spirit with money. Peter condemned him saying: “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain God’s gift with money!”(Acts 24:24-26; 8:18-20).

The incidence of the cleansing of the Temple together with Jesus’ incredible anger in John 2:13-17 point to the unacceptable distortion of what a Temple is supposed to be: a holy place set apart for religious purposes. Yet the Jews let the corrupting influence of commerce creep in. Robert Barron situates the cleansing action of Jesus within the larger framework of Christian fidelity when he writes:⁵⁶

Given that the Bible calls humanity over and over again to relinquish its attachment to false gods and embrace the worship of the one true God, we might take that emphasis as

⁵⁶ Father Robert Barron is a priest in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago. He is an acclaimed preacher, author and theologian, the founder of the global ministry, Word on Fire, and is the Rector/President of Mundelein Seminary near Chicago. He is the creator of the documentary series, “Catholicism,” airing on PBS stations and EWTN.

means to interpret Christ's actions in regards to the moneychangers in the Jerusalem Temple, actions that are traditionally referred to as the "cleansing of the Temple." The dramatic scene portrays Christ entering the sacred center of Israel's culture and worship at the height of the Jewish year—the feast of Passover. Christ then raises a ruckus, for he finds the Temple to be not a house of prayer, but a "marketplace." He turns over the tables of the moneychangers, disrupts the trade in animals for sacrifice, and cleans the place out. This scene is often interpreted as testimony against materialism in religious practice. Religion is to remain radically pure in regard to the corruptions of commerce. An idealism emerges from this interpretation that engenders a hair trigger with respect to any and all associations of religion with economics or money. According to this conceit, the only way forward for religion is to maintain its purity by eschewing the corrupting influence of commerce.⁵⁷

While sharing the aversion of using religion as a means to gain material wealth, a more fruitful way of understanding Christ's action of cleansing the temple can be discerned in relation to Israel's aversion to the worship of false gods—thus, a diversion from what is right—and the necessity of cleansing our own temple—that is, our lives—of these fallen deities. In

1 Corinthians 6:19, Saint Paul asserts that each Christian is "the temple of the Holy Spirit." By this temple, he means a place where the one true God is worshipped in truth. "The apostle is providing us with an image of the Christian life as one in which a person finds happiness and integration in the measure that she becomes, personally, a place where God is first."⁵⁸ "Place where God is" is obviously a place where justice, truth, honesty, charity, compassion and love are found. In other words, Jesus desires to cleanse our hearts from the various vices that make us act against the spirit of justice. And since the spiritual and the human should not be dissociated, the cultivation of virtue is the grounds or the nature on which grace builds. As Barron reflects:

Think, then, that Christ has come not only to "cleanse the Temple of Jerusalem," but the temple of your own body, your own life. The Lord Jesus comes into your life expecting to find a place ordered to the worship of the one true God, but what he finds is "a marketplace." What does this mean? It means that Christ finds a place where things other

⁵⁷ Robert Barron, "The Cleansing of the Temple", *Catholic News Agency* (2012), <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/column.php?n=2073>.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

than God have become primary. To bring such idolatry closer to our cultural experience, how much of your life is given over to materialism, commercialism or the accumulation of things? What rivals to the one true God have you allowed to invade the sacred space of your soul? I have referenced earlier wealth, pleasure, power and honor. How are these things enshrined in the sanctuary of your own heart?⁵⁹

Linking the incidence of the cleansing of the Temple to corruption, corruption is the result of appropriating the vices—greed, materialism, desire for wealth and for more power and honor—over the virtues. Alternatively, the mind, conscience and heart are supposed to be sacred places of transparency, justice, contentment with one's possessions and respect of each person's dignity. Jesus' anger during the cleansing of the Temple would suggest today acute intolerance towards corruption.

The above New Testament quotes once more highlight the theological implications of corruption which affect human beings in their relationships with God and one another. In fact, the corruption that is bribery violates a divine paradigm. If the Christian is to imitate God, then the practice of corruption makes no room for this spiritual exercise because God is a giver, not an unjust snatcher. And as we have learned from Gustavo Gutierrez and other liberation theologians, God has a special relationship with the poor. For John Chathanatt, "This relationship takes the form of 'preferential love' toward the poor and the oppressed. Such a theological understanding has serious anthropological implications. God's preferential love will not leave a committed Christian with any other option than the radical 'preferential option for the poor.'"⁶⁰ Corruption, on the other hand, which preoccupies itself with selfish interests, has nothing to do with and could not be farther from placing the needs of the poor above other needs first.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ John Chathanatt, *Gandhi and Gutiérrez: Two Paradigms of Liberative Transformation* (New Delhi: Decent Books: Distributed by D.K. Printworld, 2004), 115.

John Noonan explores the theological meaning of corruption as an incompatible practice for anyone who believes in God and in His word and who wishes to live according to this word:

The imitation of God lies at the root of the bribery prohibition. God “does not take *shohadh*,”⁶¹ the Book of Deuteronomy proclaims. The God of Israel is not turned from the widow and the orphan by the wealth of their opponent. The God of Israel judges impartially. No human gift can blind God’s eyes or blind his judgment. Nothing, as the Book of Job teaches, can compel the Creator to reciprocate. . . . Fixed in the Christian tradition which has been recurrently invoked to reform our civilization are the image of what cannot be bought, the paradigm of the Donor who identifies with the donees, and the teaching that what is freely received must be freely given. . . . [F]or those who believe in God and who believing in him believe that He is the source of morality, the argument works. “Be holy because I the Lord your God am holy” is the law of Israel (Lev 19:2). “Be you therefore perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect” is the law given by Jesus (Mt 5:48). Jews and Christians are called to this imitation of God. It is a moral call, based on religious command; for one of the great human needs is for divine example; As the God of Job and Jesus does not take or give bribes, so cannot those who imitate Him.⁶²

From a theological point of view and based on Sacred Scripture, corruption is unequivocally condemned in the Bible. Seen in the context of the Covenant between God and human beings, corruption threatens and breaks the relation between God and the people and the relationship between human beings themselves. This brokenness results in the destruction of the person’s internal harmony, as well as the harmony between God and other human beings in society. And as Noonan puts it, “Personal and social needs are frustrated by the act of bribery, which violates the basic need to honor by actions not mere words values other than wealth, the basic need to trust one’s government, the basic need to be like one’s heavenly Father. The nature of bribery is contrary to the nature of the human person in its full development.”⁶³ This conclusion implies that human and Christian virtues will find no room for growth where

⁶¹ The Hebrew term that expresses a disapproved payment.

⁶² John Thomas Noonan, *Bribes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 705.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 706.

corruption settles with its destructive vices. A life desirous of being effectively spiritual, that is, a life of faith based on living the gospel message, is incompatible with the practice of bribery and corruption.

Taking a cue from Sacred Scripture, from social daily reality and moral issues, the Church, through her Catholic Social Teaching, the writings and homilies of Popes and the Magisterium's teachings, has addressed the issue of corruption from the perspective of love of God and neighbor, and of social justice. These teachings constitute the next point of discussion that will support moral reflection on why corruption is theologically wrong.

Corruption as Seen by the Magisterium

In *Gaudium et Spes*, we read: "The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well."⁶⁴ The Church in her motherly care and concerned about responding to the mandate she received from Christ to take care of the sheepfold, has a keen interest in the social, moral and economic situation of the world. Through her writings that address concrete situations, she has ever been teaching in an effort to enlighten and guide both her children and the world to the way of salvation. Catholic social teaching is one of these media.

The Church's Social Teaching

The compendium of the Church's Social Teaching states that inequalities are stoked "by various forms of exploitation, oppression and corruption that have a negative influence on the

⁶⁴ Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes* [Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World] (Rome, 1965), § 1, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

internal and international life of many States” and that “Corruption radically distorts the role of representative institution.”⁶⁵ In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, Holy Father John Paul II frowns upon the practice of corruption in Cameroon, qualifying it as pure theft, which becomes more serious when government leaders participate in making of it a well-structured network. For John Paul II, “Africa's economic problems are compounded by the dishonesty of corrupt government leaders who, in connivance with domestic or foreign private interests, divert national resources for their own profit and transfer public funds to private accounts in foreign banks. This is plain theft, whatever the legal camouflage may be.”⁶⁶ The Church’s social teaching follows in this direction to denounce all forms of injustices that allow a category of people to be well-off at the expense of others.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops explains further:

The Church's social teaching is a rich treasure of wisdom about building a just society and living lives of holiness amidst the challenges of modern society. It offers moral principles and coherent values that are badly needed in our time. In this time of widespread violence and diminished respect for human life and dignity in our country and around the world, the Gospel of life and the biblical call to justice need to be proclaimed and shared with new clarity, urgency, and energy. Modern Catholic social teaching has been articulated through a tradition of papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents that explore and express the social demands of our faith.⁶⁷

The major themes with which Catholic social teaching is concerned are: human dignity, community and the common good, rights and responsibilities, option for the poor and vulnerable,

⁶⁵ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Rome, April 2, 2004), §§ 192, 411, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html.

⁶⁶ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa* [Post Apostolic Exhortation] (1995), § 113, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_14091995_ecclesia-in-africa.html.

⁶⁷ Dennis M. Schnurr, “Sharing Catholic Church’s Teachings: Challenges and Directions,” *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops* (2015), <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/sharing-catholic-social-teaching-challenges-and-directions.cfm>.

participation, dignity of work and rights of workers, stewardship of creation, solidarity, role of government and promotion of peace.⁶⁸ The aim is to instill in everyone the spirit of consideration for another, of justice and of charity. Any struggle for survival or for amassing personal wealth is not to be done regardless of the needs, the rights and the dignity of other persons. In this spirit, no one is to amass excessive wealth through extortion or while others lack basic necessities; such initiatives definitely go against the spirit of corruption.

The concept of social justice, which the Church emphasizes and preaches, is not a new teaching. In one way or another, the concept is lived and felt from ancient days to now at all levels of life. Thomas Massaro writes:

Depending upon who is consulted, the simple question What is social justice? might prompt answers that are abstract and theoretical, on one hand, or vividly concrete, on the other hand. Economists and philosophers might emphasize formulas or logical syllogisms for ensuring that each member of the society receives the due amount of rewards and burdens. An average person in the street might be more inclined to list a bundle of indignities and hardships that nobody would have to undergo in a world that was more just. But whether the focus falls upon statistical measures or distributive shares or on simple acts of fairness and generosity between friends or even strangers, all common notions of social justice boil down to the goal of achieving a right ordering of society. A just social order is one that ensures that all people have fair and equitable opportunities to live decent lives free of inordinate burdens and deprivations.⁶⁹

Yet, corruption as it were, breeds social injustices that fight the right ordering of society. It would be hard to have a harmonious society where corruption has made its home. Pope Paul VI said: “If you want peace, work for justice.” Today, the Church continues to sharpen the consciences of people on the necessity of living out the virtues of justice and peace. In 1967, Pope Paul VI established the pontifical “Justice and Peace” Commission as recommended by

⁶⁸United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching” (2015), <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching.cfm>.

⁶⁹ Thomas Massaro, *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action*, 2nd classroom ed. (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 3.

Gaudium et Spes. “Taking into account the immensity of the hardships which still afflict a large section of humanity, and with a view to fostering everywhere the justice and love of Christ for the poor, the Council suggests that it would be most opportune to create some organization of the universal Church whose task it would be to arouse the Catholic community to promote the progress of areas which are in want and foster social justice between nations.”⁷⁰ Before the work for justice and peace reaches the global level, it should start with strong-willed individuals ready to selflessly work for justice by spreading it around, in communities and then in the society. The Church is conscious of her mission of actively working for justice and peace, so dear for the world. This mission is not obvious to everyone; that is why the Church plays the role of awakener of conscience by encouraging the setting up of Justice and Peace committees in all dioceses and parishes in order to spread the spirit of living out the virtues. In so doing, greater awareness of the destructive effects of corruption might be raised and efforts to avoid it be made accordingly.

At a local level, the bishops of Cameroon continuously raise awareness on corruption. In a declaration written to all Cameroonians, they energetically condemned the plague and urged all people of good will to continue fighting:

In 2000, we wrote a pastoral letter on corruption aimed at sensitizing and moralizing all the people of God and men and women of good will to the fight against corruption and the embezzlement of public funds in country. . . . [W]e encourage everyone to commit themselves with conviction to this fight against corruption and the embezzlement of public funds at their own level to ensure the birth of a just and fair society. The fight against corruption and the embezzlement of public funds in Cameroon is, undoubtedly, a difficult but noble and exalting task. For a long time now, practices of corruption and the embezzlement of public funds have developed, becoming an almost accepted or tolerated part of life. Today, with God's help and with the help of national and international organizations, an increasing number of Cameroonians are condemning corruption and the embezzlement of public funds, considering them mere theft, a grievous evil that is

⁷⁰ GS, 90.

depriving them of their rights, harming their well-being and negatively affecting social cohesion and compromising the present and the future of their country.⁷¹

The bishops of Cameroon are realistic when they rightly note that the fight against corruption is a difficult yet noble task. This hard struggle can be understood in the sense that corruption takes place not only at an interpersonal level but has also become present at the corporate level, touching wherever a community of at least two people are involved in a situation that requires the rendering of service. Consequently, as the bishops of Southern Africa noticed, corruption destroys our trust and “when bribery becomes a way of life for civil servants, business people or church personnel, their real responsibilities are put aside in pursuit of making money for themselves.” Therefore, everyone ““must do something within their power to tackle corruption.”⁷²

Even if the Church’s social teaching is less known or unknown to many, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the summary of which is taught at catechesis classes, might also help understand how corruption can destroy both individuals and the society.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, corruption is discussed in Part Three, Section Two, Chapter Two (“You Shall Love Your Neighbor as Yourself”), Article 7: “The Seventh Commandment”—“You shall not steal.” In this section we read:

The seventh commandment forbids unjustly taking or keeping the goods of one's neighbor and wronging him in any way with respect to his goods. It commands justice

⁷¹ National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon, “Declaration of the Bishops of Cameroon on corruption and embezzlement of public funds,” *L’Effort Camerounais* (2006), <http://www.leffortcamerounais.com/2009/08/declaration-of-the-bishops-of-cameroon-on-corruption-and-embezzlement-of-public-funds.html>.

⁷² Bronwen Dachs, “Bishops in Southern Africa Take Fight Against Corruption into the Pews,” *Catholic News Service* (10/21/2013), <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1304423.html>.

and charity in the care of earthly goods and the fruits of men's labor. For the sake of the common good, it requires respect for the universal destination of goods and respect for the right to private property. Christian life strives to order this world's goods to God and to fraternal charity. Even if it does not contradict the provisions of civil law, any form of unjustly taking and keeping the property of others is against the seventh commandment: thus, deliberate retention of goods lent or of objects lost; business fraud; paying unjust wages; forcing up prices by taking advantage of the ignorance or hardship of another.

The following are also morally illicit: speculation in which one contrives to manipulate the price of goods artificially in order to gain an advantage to the detriment of others; corruption in which one influences the judgment of those who must make decisions according to law; appropriation and use for private purposes of the common goods of an enterprise; work poorly done; tax evasion; forgery of checks and invoices; excessive expenses and waste. Willfully damaging private or public property is contrary to the moral law and requires reparation.⁷³

This teaching boils down to love of neighbor—and love of God—justice, order, honesty, transparency, selflessness, hard work and charity. These are virtues recommended by the Church and based on Sacred Scripture. The Catechism teaches that fraud and corruption, which are related directly to the neighbor, go beyond the corruption of a single individual because corruption involves more than one person: a corruptor and a corrupted; no one can bribe himself or herself.⁷⁴ Moreover, no one, indeed, would enjoy giving from what they have, be it little or big, as a bribe. Enjoying taking a bribe is an extortion which also goes against the golden rule: “In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you” (Matthew 7:15), which is expressed in the Old Testament as: “. . . what you hate, do not do to anyone” (Tobit 4:15).

In the history of the Church, the Popes did not spare any effort in speaking out against the practice of corruption and in showing how theologically it is wrong. While many of them more or less did so, I here focus on Pope Francis who, in this present time which is more and more wounded by corruption, vehemently unearths the rottenness and seriousness of the evil of

⁷³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §2401, 2409.

⁷⁴ Emmanuel Wabanhu, 15.

corruption. His views suggest a more relevant and more urgent need to examine corrupt practices.

Pope Francis on Corruption

Pope Francis' tone on corruption is a clear-cut and severe one. On many occasions, especially in his homilies, he hammers the necessity and moral obligation to actively fight corruption. Corruption, for Pope Francis, is a sin that irritates God and causes people to sin; it is a way of selling oneself, selling one's God-given dignity, to do evil. He also warns against the danger of falling into the practice of corruption, which spares no one and is closely linked to power. An extract of his homily to the Vatican staff at Casa Marta on June 16, 2014 is worth citing:

In the newspapers we read many times: “Ah, that politician who got rich by magic has been brought into court. That business owner, who got rich by magic—that is, by exploiting his workers—has been dragged into court. We hear too much talk of a prelate who has become rich too, and left his pastoral duty to care for his power. So, the corrupt politicians, the corrupt businessmen and the corrupt clergy, are to be found everywhere—and we have to tell the truth: corruption is precisely the sin that the person with authority—whether political, economic or ecclesiastical—over others has most readily to hand. We are all tempted to corruption. It is a “handy” sin, for, when one has authority, one feels powerful, one feels almost like God.⁷⁵

Further in this homily, Pope Francis argues that many people pay the price of corruption. In other words, the sin of corruption spreads at social levels as it affects indirectly those who are supposed to benefit from the services of those in power or in charge, whether material, political or spiritual.

If we talk of politically or economically corrupt people, who pays for [their corruption]? Pagano hospitals without medicine, the patients who did not receive care, the children without education. They are the modern Naboths, who pay the price for the corruption of

⁷⁵ Pope Francis, “Pope Francis at Monday Mass at Santa Marta,” *Homilies* (Rome, 16/6/2014), http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2014/06/16/pope_francis_at_monday_mass_in_santa_marta/1101813.

the haughty. And who pays the price for the corruption of a prelate? The children pay, who cannot make the sign of the cross, who do not know the catechism, who are not cared-for. The sick who are not visited, the imprisoned, who receive no spiritual attention. The poor pay. Corruption is paid by the poor: the materially poor and the spiritually poor.⁷⁶

Corruption, which the Pope sees as “pride and arrogance,” thus weighs and preys on the weak and the vulnerable. By making others suffer the effects of corruption practiced by some, Pope Francis’ reading of corruption sounds like the sin of scandal of which Jesus speaks and whose punishment is so terrible: “If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18: 6). And, in fact, in another homily, Pope Francis seems to regard the punishment reserved for those who commit a scandal to those who indulge in corruption, thus emphasizing the severity of the practice of corruption. His fury against corruption is portrayed in one of his impassioned sermons as he spoke about those who donated to the Church using stolen money from the state. Nick Squires reports on the Pope’s homily:

Pope Francis has delivered a fiery sermon against corruption, quoting a passage from the Bible in which Jesus said some sinners deserve to be tied to a rock and thrown into the sea. In one of his strongest-worded homilies since he was elected in March, the Argentinean pontiff said Christians who lead “a double life” by giving money to the Church while stealing from the state are sinners who deserve to be punished. Quoting from the Gospel of St. Luke in the New Testament, he said “Jesus says: It would be better for him if a millstone were put around his neck and he be thrown into the sea.” While he did not allude directly to corruption within the Catholic Church, his remarks come just days after a scandal erupted inside an ancient religious order linked to the Vatican, and as he forges ahead with a determined effort to root out cronyism within the Holy See and financial irregularities in the scandal-tainted Vatican bank. The Pope described people engaged in corruption as “whitewashed tombs,” explaining that “they appear beautiful

⁷⁶ Ibid.

from the outside, but inside they are full of dead bones and putrefaction.” A life based on corruption is “varnished putrefaction,” the Pope said.⁷⁷

This insight would imply that practicing corruption is living a double life, a life of hypocrisy, a split life whereby physically and before others all may be well, whereas the consciences and morality of those who practice corruption are rotted. From Pope Francis’ view of corruption, this practice appears to be one of the greatest evils of our time; if those who engage in corruption are seen as “whitewashed tombs,” then they appear spiritually dead and useless, incapable of a true relationship with God and with others. In this sense, their relationship is based upon deceit—away from love of God and of neighbor. A call to vigilance is heard from the Pope’s homily, for he noted that “we become corrupt along the way of our own safety.” From “well-being, money then power, vanity, pride. And from there to beyond: even killing.”⁷⁸ His comments suggest that an act of corruption can have other serious consequences since as vice, corruption may very well move from bad to worse, from killing one’s conscience to attempting to kill other people’s moral, spiritual, social or even physical life. The Pope calls those who innocently suffer the effects of corruption or those who pay the price of corruption, “martyrs of political corruption, economic corruption, and ecclesiastical corruption.”⁷⁹

A day later, on June 17, 2014, the Holy Father came back to the serious issue of corruption. He re-launched his complaint against corruption as he based his reflection on the day’s first reading, the martyrdom of Naboth narrated in the First Book of Kings. For the Pope,

⁷⁷ Nick Squires, “Pope Francis: corrupt should be tied to a rock and thrown into the sea” *The Telegraph* (Rome, November 11, 2013), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/italy/10441960/Pope-Francis-corrupt-should-be-tied-to-a-rock-and-thrown-into-the-sea.html>.

⁷⁸ Domenico Agasso, Jr., “Francis: ‘The Corruption of the Powerful is Paid by the Poor,’” *Vatican Insider* (Rome, 06/16/2014), <http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it/en/the-vatican/detail/articolo/santa-marta-34745/>.

⁷⁹ CNA, “‘Humble Charity overcomes Corruption,’ Pope Francis Preaches,” Catholic News Agency (Rome, 06/16/2014), <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/humble-charity-overcomes-corruption-pope-francis-preaches-76196/>.

the corrupt people will not go unpunished; and the only way out is repentance and charity. The prophet Elijah, noted the Pope, says that the corrupt Ahab “sold” himself. It’s as though “he is no longer person but a commodity,” “buy and sell”: “This is the definition: it is a commodity! . . . Yesterday we said that there were three types, three groups: the corrupt politician, corrupt businessman and the corrupt clergy. All three hurt the innocent, the poor, because it is the poor who pay for the festivities of the corrupt! The bill goes to them. Then what will the Lord do with the corrupt, whatever the type of corruption? The Lord clearly says what must be done, “I will bring disaster upon you and I will cut you off.”⁸⁰ “The corrupt—the Holy Father continues—irritate God and cause people to sin.” Jesus, he said, said it clearly: he who “causes scandal may just as well throw himself into the sea”; the corrupt person “scandalizes society, scandalizes the people of God.” The Lord promises, therefore, punishment for the corrupt “because they scandalize and exploit those who cannot defend themselves, they enslave them”: “The birds in the sky will devour you.” The corrupt person, continued Pope Francis, “sells himself to do evil, but he does not know this: he believes that he will sell himself for more money, more power.”⁸¹ However, as the Pope reiterated, actually he “sells himself to do evil, to kill.”

The corrupt are traitors, even more. The first definition of corrupt is one who steals, one who kills. The second thing: what is in store for the corrupt? This is the curse of God, because they exploited the innocent, those who cannot defend themselves and they did it with kid gloves, from a distance, without getting their hands dirty. The third thing: is there a way out, a door for the corrupt? Yes! “When Ahab heard these words he tore his clothes, put sackcloth over his body, and fasted. He slept on sackcloth, and walked with his head down. He began to do penance.”⁸²

⁸⁰ Domenico Agasso, Jr., “The Pope: ‘Even Some Prelates are Corrupt,’” *Vatican Insider*, (Rome, 06/17/2014), <http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it/en/the-vatican/detail/articolo/santa-marta-34767/>.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

Penance, the Pope said, "is the way out for the corrupt, for corrupt politicians, corrupt businessmen and corrupt clergy: to ask for forgiveness!" And, he added, "the Lord likes this." God "forgives, but forgives when the corrupt" do what Zacchaeus did: 'I have stolen, Lord! I will give back four times what I stole!'"⁸³

Worth recalling also is Pope Francis' preaching about corruption and justice during his visit to the Philippines as he addressed the government on the necessity to fight corruption. As in Cameroon, in the Philippines corruption is a veritable social issue. According to *Wall Street Journal* columnists Deborah Ball and Trefor Moss, corruption is one of Pope Francis' favorite themes. They report that the Philippines visit "offers the pope a platform to touch on some of his favorite themes, including social justice, concern for the poor and abuse of authority. He started his day by meeting with Philippine President Benigno Aquino III, where he warned the government against the temptation of corruption."⁸⁴ The Pope told the Philippine authorities that "It is now, more than ever, necessary that political leaders be outstanding for honesty, integrity and commitment to the common good."⁸⁵

Given the above analysis of corruption by Pope Francis, corruption appears to be an urgent moral issue to address in order to build more just and peaceful communities. For the Pope, corruption is to be fought proactively in order to preserve the hope that Jesus gives. In other words, corruption compromises the virtue of hope. In his homily of July 26, 2014, Pope Francis said *inter alia*:

⁸³ Ibid., "The Pope: 'Even Some Prelates are Corrupt'," *Vatican Insider* (Rome, 06/17/2014), <http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it/en/the-vatican/detail/articolo/santa-marta-34767/>.

⁸⁴ Debora Ball and Trefor Moss, "Pope Francis Preaches about Corruption, Social Justice in the Philippines", *The Wall Street Journal* (January 16, 2015), <http://www.wsj.com/articles/pope-francis-preaches-social-justice-agenda-in-the-philippines-1421380670>.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Today, when I arrived, one of you approached me and told me: Father, may you give us hope. But I cannot give you hope, I can tell you that where Jesus is, there is hope; where Jesus is there is love for brothers and sisters, there is the commitment to safeguarding their life and their health and to respecting the environment and nature. This is the hope that never disappoints, the hope which Jesus gives! This is particularly important in this beautiful land which needs to be protected and conserved, which requires the courage to say “no” to every form of corruption and unlawfulness—we all know what this kind of corruption and unlawfulness is called—it requires all of us to be servants of the truth and to assume an evangelical lifestyle, which is demonstrated in the giving of oneself and in attention to the poor and the outcast. Take care of the poor and the outcast!⁸⁶

The Pope reiterates the fundamental option for the poor as the landmark for the avoidance and fight against corruption. In our consumerist society, the tendency is to go for the latest brand of technology products, and sometimes at all cost; yet this tendency can pave the way to corruption which, for the Holy Father, should be counteracted by charity, simplicity of life and truthfulness. One “nail in the coffin” on corruption comes from the Pope’s qualification of corruption as a “greater evil than sin.” As if to say corruption kills one’s conscience, the Pope says:

Corruption is like bad breath. . . . It is hard for the one who has it to realize it; others realize it and have to tell him. . . . The corrupt person goes through life taking the shortcuts of opportunism, with an air of innocence, wearing the mask of an honest person, which he begins to believe. [The corrupt person] cannot accept criticism, discredits anyone who criticizes him, tries to belittle any moral authority who would question him, does not value others and insults anyone who thinks differently. If the balance of power permits, he persecutes anyone who contradicts him. . . . The corrupt person does not perceive his corruption. For this reason, it is difficult for the corrupt person to get out of his state through remorse of conscience. More than forgiven, this evil must be cured.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Francis, “Homily of Pope Francis” (Caserta, July 26, 2014), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140726_omelia-caserta.html.

⁸⁷ Pope Francis, in Thomas D. Williams, “Pope Francis: ‘Corruption is a Greater Evil than Sin,’” *Breitbart*, (10/23/2014) <http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2014/10/23/pope-francis-corruption-is-a-greater-evil-than-sin/>.

No doubt, Pope Francis looks at corruption as an addiction as strong as taking drugs: “we may start as a small bribe but it is like drug.”⁸⁸ Corruption is thus a grave sin which needs both forgiveness and healing; spiritual healing and healing of the individual infected with the vice of corruption. This way of understanding corruption presents a difficult task; the work of undoing corruption requires committed effort in order to let virtue take control over vice.

Moral theologians have not been silent on the issue of corruption. They equally expand on why the practice of corruption is wrong as well as suggest ways to counteract the evil.

Moral Theologians on Corruption

At the initiative of James F. Keenan, an international meeting of moral theologians/theological ethicists was held in 2006 at Padua, Italy. The meeting was a success as the ethicists from America, Europe, Africa and Asia gathered to personally meet each other and share their views on ethical issues. During this meeting—July 8-11, 2006—among many points discussed, the theological ethicists included the issue of corruption in their presentations; they hammered on it, pointing out the seriousness of the phenomenon as they gave a theological view of it. From an African perspective, Laurenti Magesa pointed out that both corruption and bad governance are attitudes that are individualistic and selfish; they lack social conscience because they point to the lack of concern for the general welfare of the population. He referenced a particularly heinous type of corruption in Africa when the poor have to pay bribes for essential services like access to hospitals or courts; since the poor don’t have the funds, they have to do without those services at the cost of untold suffering or even loss of life, and for those who have

⁸⁸ Pope Francis, in Nick Squires. See footnote 77.

little, the loss of the means of survival and sustenance.⁸⁹ This kind of mindless love for power is unrelated to service; it breeds not only corruption but also a tendency toward lack of dialogue, a recipe for dictatorial use of power and authority.⁹⁰ This use clearly goes against the meaning of authority as Christ defines and recommends it: “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves” (Luke 22: 25-26). Unless Jesus’ sense of authority is practiced, authority runs the danger of being imbued by the spirit of corruption.

The presentation made by Asian theological ethicists included looking at corruption. Using the words of St John Paul II in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, No 36, Thomas Hong Soon Han sees corruption as a consequence of the “structures of sin.” While moralists in India do not fold their hands in the fight against the evil of corruption, they raise awareness on the theological and social gravity of corruption. Referring to how corruption degrades the human person and his/her dignity, Han writes:

Corruption debases and debilitates the human person and society, thereby deteriorating the human ecology. Cause and effect of the corruption are structures of sin, which are characterized by an all-consuming desire for profit and the thirst for power. The profusion of fraudulence and chicanery is a millstone around the neck of political modernization. Corruption undermines also the moral foundation of market economy, which presupposes a basic level of honesty and trustworthiness. Apart from its negative moral aspect, recent empirical evidence attests that corruption lowers economic growth. Thus various forms of corruption contribute to poverty.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Laurenti Magessa, “Locating the Church Among the Wretched of the Earth” in *Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church: The Plenary Papers from the First Cross-Cultural Conference on Catholic Theological Ethics*, ed. James F. Keenan (New York: Continuum, 2007), 53.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Thomas Hong-Soon Han, “Moral Challenges and the Church in Asia Today, with a specific Consideration of Korea” in Keenan, *Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church*, 69.

Through the practice of corruption, then, the human person's dignity is not upheld, and one vice to another, from personal to societal, is bred.

The findings of this first international meeting of theological ethicists were taken home by Indians who, once again, addressed the issue of corruption at a national level. Fr. Thomas Srampickal, one of the senior moral theologians of India, "invited moral theologians to break from its traditional casuistry and legalism, and become a tool to liberate people and help them to have life in its fullness."⁹² Talking of hot issues like corruption and injustice, the report reads:

Fr. Charles Irudayam, besides expounding the concept of justice in the Catholic tradition and the Indian theologians' reflections on justice, presented the Hindu approach to justice. In spite of some differences in the approaches, according to him, both these traditions can be made use to bring about a just society. "Concern over Corruption: A Theological-Ethical Analysis" by Fr. John Chathanatt, SJ was a fitting response from an Indian moral theologian to the cancer of corruption, especially in the context of people's movement against corruption, following a number of corruption cases involving billions of rupees. Fr. Patrick Xavier pointed out the need of living the ideals of equality and community, solidarity and democracy in ecclesial communities as well as in democratic states.⁹³

The concern and the theological reflections of theologians in India on corruption are more or less the same all over the world. The basic principles of Christian love, justice, dignity and equity are imperiled as they are disregarded.

A reflection by Veronica J. Rop on "An African Woman's Perspective on the Role of the Moral Theologian in Church and Society" discusses a woman's perspective of the role of moral theology and theologians. While stating that moral theology is a science of revelation and faith, guided by investigation and which calls for discernment of truth made through the sense of faith,

⁹² George Shaji, "Moral Theology in India Today: National Workshop Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore," Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church (July 12-15, 2012). <http://www.catholicethics.com/conferences/bangalore/report>.

⁹³ Ibid.

Rop addresses the issue of corruption from this angle.⁹⁴ For Rop, “A Moral theologian is a voice of the many marginalized persons in society such as the unheard women and children. She/he is that prophet that speaks against cultural institutions, structures, and systems that are biased against others because of their gender or social status.”⁹⁵ That is why, faced with economic challenges that include corruption, a moral theologian is that hand that stretches out to offer the Church’s teaching about solidarity and the universal destination of goods; they are those feet that walk an extra mile to meet the people at the point of their ethical concerns so as to reflect with them on the moral implications of Christ’s invitation to discipleship.⁹⁶ More than having a role of denouncing, the moral theologian is a person of action who teaches by concrete example. The devastating effects of corruption call for action on the part of everyone in order to counteract it. The African cultural predisposition to solidarity—the sense of belonging to a family, especially a large family—and compassion are supposed to help understand and prevent or inhibit the way to the practice of corruption, but it is not always the case and corruption seems to take control of those fundamental values handed down from generation to generation. Given the seriousness of the phenomenon of corruption, a moral theologian, in this context therefore “is to assist the person (African) find a way to reconnect Christian faith and life as well as forge reconciliation, unity and peace among different communities in the Continent.”⁹⁷ This work is equally true for other peoples and continents, too. Although not mentioning corruption directly, the American

⁹⁴ Veronica J. Rop, “An African Woman’s Perspective on the Role of the Moral Theologian in Church and Society,” *Catholic Moral Theology* (July 29, 2013), <http://catholicmoraltheology.com/an-african-womans-perspective-on-the-role-of-the-moral-theologian-in-church-and-society/>. Veronica Rop is a member of the Assumption Sisters of Eldoret, a local congregation based in Kenya. She is a member of CTEWC African Regional Committee and a contributor for the CTEWC Newsletter African Forum.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

reflection on social justice concerns, to some extent, point to the virtues that can fight inequalities and injustices and reflect Catholic Ethics in a world Church.

To efficiently face corruption, Catholic social ethics must be deeply rooted in the traditions of Israel and of Jesus, while being open to interaction with persons from other traditions; the interaction should be a reasoned one. Following the insights of David Hollenbach, such an ethic can affirm both the distinctiveness of the prophets' call to justice for the poor and Jesus' calls to be peacemakers, while simultaneously supporting universal human rights for all peoples.⁹⁸

It is worth noting that bribe giving is quite different from gift giving, although both may at times look like the same thing. To avoid the confusion, it is important to emphasize the role of intention. In bribe giving, the intention is to influence the bribe taker to obtain a favor. It is buying the bribe taker's conscience to make the person act subjectively before a concrete situation or in order to prepare the ground for a future favor. Gift giving, on the other hand, is a disinterested grant of some good to a person without the intention of influencing the person to act according to the mind of the giver. In the case of a bribe, there is always a duplicity in intentions that takes place and is not without spiritual, moral and social negative consequences.

Theologians, following the Church's teaching and being concerned with the spiritual as well as moral, physical and social being of persons, help bring out the theological significance of indulging in corruption. It stands out clearly that more than doing harm to social justice, corruption touches on the core of Christian vocation. It is a breaking away of the covenant of love and faithfulness between God and his creatures; it goes against the love of neighbor which calls for justice and the respect of human persons in their dignity. Corruption is a drug for many

⁹⁸ David Hollenbach, "Catholic Ethics in a World Church," in Keenan, *Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church*, 145–146.

individuals and is able to create an addiction difficult to remove. Corruption is a sin, a grave sin in need not only of forgiveness but of healing. It is inscribed within the structures of sin since it works as a network that affects and unbalances social structures and harmony between persons and in social institutions. Thus, justice, charity, peace and equity are equally threatened. From the point of view of common sense, of Sacred Scripture and of the Church's teaching, corruption is a great obstacle to human spiritual, moral, material and social flourishing. It is the duty of everyone to fight corruption; this work is not an easy task, especially where corruption has taken hold of people to the point of killing their consciences and their believing that it is the way everyone should follow. And as such, it is the responsibility of theologians, especially moral theologians, not only to name corruption as sin, but also to suggest a way out. Ethicists therefore cannot remain passive, bearing in mind that if moral theology is essentially the systematic search for the will of God made manifest in Jesus Christ, a will for life in its fullness, its routine extinction or degradation through denial or the absence of basic needs like food, water and shelter pose a continuing question for the ethicist's conscience.⁹⁹ Therefore, as Miranda suggests:

It is never enough that Christian ethics “notices” those whom others would rather not, and “looks” preferentially at their concerns; its added task is to ensure that the poor—whatever dehumanized faces they may wear as women, children, migrants, indigenous, handicapped, elderly, enslaved, indebted, oppressed, and so on—be encountered less as objects of pity but more as subjects, invited in fact to participate as advocates or “associate judges” of their causes. Rather than some arcane dispute in the tradition between unrecognizable unknowns, it is the ongoing history of suffering under inequality and violence of living and dying human beings that cries to heaven for answers.¹⁰⁰

The aim of this chapter is to show why theologically corruption is wrong. As Miranda states, the most important step after realizing the gravity of the evil of corruption is to do

⁹⁹ Dionisio M. Miranda, “What Will You Have Me Do for You?,” in Keenan, *Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church*, 168.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 178.

something. Yet, as shown in the last part of the first chapter, much is being done to curb corruption. In Cameroon—which is the focus of this thesis—the Church prays, teaches and writes against corruption. The State tracks and jails money embezzlers as a way of punishing them and deterring others from getting involved in corruption. Unfortunately, these efforts have proved to do nothing or less as corruption, like bush fire, continues to make its way quietly and intensively. And so the core question is, where does the problem lie? What should be done that could help prevent and curb corruption? Notwithstanding what is being done so far to fight corruption—which is great—and proposals such as the improvement of minimum wages, perhaps some other deeper thing could be done. Prayers also do help but that does not make us forget that grace builds on nature; and so, realizing that the “healing” needed—to use Pope Francis’ idea—could be at the level of individuals, I suggest a turn to virtue ethics, that is, a turn to a sort of “*sanatio in radice*”—a healing at the root—in order to help people shape their personalities into virtuous ones for virtuous living, which may not be a magical answer to the problem of corruption but could be a more effective one. Virtue ethics will constitute the object of the third chapter of this thesis.

CHAPTER THREE

VIRTUE ETHICS AS A RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGE OF CORRUPTION

The first chapter looked at the phenomenon of corruption and its impact on individuals and societies. The second chapter addressed the theological implications and severity of corruption. The objective of this final chapter is to suggest a solution to the evil of corruption. While not challenging the efforts that have been made, this chapter concentrates on virtue ethics as a means of preventing and curbing corruption. The choice of virtue ethics is motivated by the fact that the best way to fight a problem is to tackle it at its roots versus dealing with its effects. This chapter will focus on what virtue ethics is, how it works, what virtues need to be cultivated and how, and which virtues are best suited to preventing and fighting corruption. First, a look at how virtue ethics was introduced and its place in the study of Ethics is discussed.

Introduction of Virtue Ethics into the Study of Ethics

Although it suffered a momentary eclipse in time in the field of ethics, virtue ethics has grown as a serious consideration and pivotal element in ethics and in human lives because human actions cannot be disassociated from the person engaged in the action. A brief historical overview of virtue ethics is worth reviewing.

A Brief Historical Survey of the Concept of Virtue Ethics

Arguing that virtue ethics is an ancient solution to a modern problem, that is, the problem of moral decadence and moral suffering today—through the great number of our poor moral

choices Peter D. O. Smith suggests that virtue ethics is not a new concept.¹⁰¹ Claiming that virtue ethics began in the time of Aristotle and was upheld throughout history right to our time, he writes:

Virtue ethics is an enduring idea with ancient roots. Aristotle, some 2,300 years ago, clearly articulated the ethical philosophy known today as virtue ethics. Cicero, close to the time of Christ, wrote of it as being one of the three main contending moral systems of the day. Catholicism, early on, incorporated it into its teachings where it continues to this day to be a major influence. The last 50 years have seen a marked revival of academic interest in virtue ethics, and Alasdair McIntyre's publication of *After Virtue* was a landmark in this revival.¹⁰²

In fact, from Aristotle to our present age, the consideration of a renewal in or a return to virtue ethics is not limited to Smith's view. Plato in ancient times and Elizabeth Anscombe and Philippa Foot in recent times, all wrote of virtue ethics. Although concern for virtue appears in several philosophical traditions, as Jose Pennaparambil remarks, in the West the roots of the tradition lie in the works of Plato and Aristotle. Even today the tradition's key concepts derive from ancient Greek philosophy. These concepts include *arête*, which is translated as excellence or virtue; *phronesis*, understood as practical or moral wisdom; and *eudaimonia*, meaning flourishing and happiness. In the West, virtue ethics was the prevailing approach to ethical thinking in both the ancient and medieval periods.¹⁰³ Already present in Plato, Dorothea Frede writes, "Plato maintains a virtue-based eudaemonistic conception of ethics. That is to say, human well-being (*eudaimonia*) is the highest aim of moral thought and conduct, and the virtues (*aretê*:

¹⁰¹ Peter D. O. Smith, "Virtue Ethics: an Ancient Solution to a Modern Problem," *Scientia Salon* (9/25/2014), <https://scientiasalon.wordpress.com/2014/09/25/virtue-ethics-an-ancient-solution-to-a-modern-problem/>

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Jose Pennaparambil, "Plato, Aristotle, and Virtue Ethics," *Moral Philosophy at DVK* (July 27, 2011), <http://moralphilosophyatdvk.blogspot.com/2011/07/plato-aristotle-and-virtue-ethics.html>.

‘excellence’) are the requisite skills and dispositions needed to attain it.”¹⁰⁴ With Aristotle, the concept of virtue ethics takes more shape. From his theory of the Four Causes (material, formal, efficient and final) and of the Unmoved Mover, which look at the idea of how things are caused and how they move toward their purpose, comes the theory of teleological ethics, from the Greek *telos*, which means purpose or goal.

Pennaparambil gives a concise definition of virtue ethics and the distinction between another teleological ethics, consequentialism and deontological ethics:

Virtue ethics is an approach to ethics that emphasizes the character of the moral agent, rather than rules or consequences, as the key element of ethical thinking. This contrasts with consequentialism, which holds that the consequences of a particular act form the basis for any valid moral judgment about that action, and deontology, which derives rightness or wrongness from the character of the act itself rather than the outcomes. The difference between these three approaches to morality tends to lie more in the way moral dilemmas are approached than in the moral conclusions reached. Virtue theory is not actually in conflict with deontology or teleology: those two viewpoints deal with which actions a person should take in any given scenario, whereas virtue theorists simply argue that developing morally desirable virtues for their own sake will help aid moral actions when such decisions need to be made.¹⁰⁵

Virtue ethics is an approach to ethics that emphasizes an individual's character as the key element of concern and ethical thinking, rather than rules about the acts themselves, to which both deontology and consequentialism point. Virtue ethics focuses on the inherent character of a person or a society rather than singularly on the nature or consequences of specific actions performed.¹⁰⁶ Thus understood, virtue ethics claims that a lifetime of practicing virtues leads to virtuous acting or living; this ethics stresses the important relationship between being and action. As the Latin states *agere sequitur esse* – action follows being, the way human beings act and

¹⁰⁴ Dorothea Frede, “Plato’s Ethics: An Overview,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (July 18, 2013), <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-ethics/>.

¹⁰⁵ Jose Pennaparambil, “Plato, Aristotle, and Virtue Ethics.”

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

relate is reflective of the way their characters were formed, that is, with their habitual state of being or character. That is why, as Keenan argues, “virtues do not perfect what we have or what we do; rather they perfect who we are in the mode of our being, which is as being in relationships.”¹⁰⁷ The cultivation of virtues, which is an exercise that requires prudence, calls for avoidance of vices.

Aristotle realized that human behavior rests on a scale made up of extremes: the vice of deficiency and the vice of excess. He came to the conclusion that the best course of action falls in between; that is, virtue lies in the mean between these extremes. For the purpose of suggesting virtue ethics for the prevention and fight against corruption in Cameroon, Aristotle’s 12 moral virtues with their corresponding vices, as set forth in the table below, deserve close attention:¹⁰⁸

Vice of deficiency	Virtue	Vice of excess
Cowardice	Courage	Rashness
Insensibility	Temperance	Intemperance
Illiberality	Liberality	Prodigality
Pettiness	Munificence	Vulgarity
Humble-mindedness	High-mindedness	Vaingloriousness
Want of ambition	Right ambition	Over-ambition
Spiritlessness	Good temper	Irascibility
Surliness	Friendliness/civility	Obsequiousness
Sarcasm	Sincerity	Boastfulness
Boorishness	Wittiness	Buffoonery
Shamelessness	Modesty	Bashfulness
Callousness	Just resentment	Spitefulness

Virtue ethics consists in cultivating the virtues which exclude both the vice of deficiency and the vice of excess that weaken character or makes it grow wild. A further distinction is made by Aristotle in that there are two types of virtues: intellectual virtues and moral virtues.

¹⁰⁷ James F. Keenan, “Proposing Cardinal Virtues,” *Theological Studies* 56 (1995), 723.

¹⁰⁸ Virtue Ethics Notes. A2 Religious Studies: Developments (paper 3), Ethics 3, <http://www.thestudentroom.co.uk/attachment.php?attachmentid=295624&d=1402753628>.

While intellectual virtues are learned through instruction, that is, they are taught, moral virtues are developed through habits. Acquiring intellectual virtues goes hand in hand with the acquisition of moral virtues. While, for lack of well-trained instructors in some areas, developing intellectual virtues may not be possible, cultivating the moral virtues is a possibility within every culture's reach. Human moral values or virtues have been embraced by peoples of various cultures even where and when formal education is absent.

Not being a believer in the after-life, Aristotle's point of being virtuous is not to achieve unity with God or win a place in heaven but to live a virtuous life because it is the right way to live. Interestingly, Aristotle and Augustine were basic sources from which St. Thomas Aquinas, a thirteenth century theologian, built the now familiar structure of the cardinal virtues—prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice. A well-known feature of Aristotle's ethics which deeply influenced Aquinas is the theory that each of the moral virtues is a mean between excess and defect; thus courage is a mean between cowardice and rashness, and liberality is a mean between stinginess and prodigality. A person is virtuous because his/her actions correspond to an objective norm, which for Aristotle was knowable by reason and for Aquinas by reason and faith.¹⁰⁹

Virtue ethics in this thesis is looked at both as a way of life that fosters harmony, personal and societal well-being and as a way of living rightly the relationship between us and our Creator, in form of love of God and love of neighbor; a harmony indispensable for the hereafter. Virtue ethics in ancient philosophy persisted as the dominant approach in Western moral

¹⁰⁹ John A. Hardon, "Meaning of Virtue in Thomas Aquinas," *Great Catholic Books Newsletter*, Volume II, Number 1 (1995), <https://www.ewtn.com/library/SPIRIT/MEANVIR.TXT>.

philosophy until at least the Enlightenment. It suffered a momentary eclipse during the nineteenth century but re-emerged in the late 1950's in Anglo-American philosophy.¹¹⁰

Because of its utmost importance, the concept of virtue ethics, of which Plato and Aristotle are the fathers, was studied in history by other ethicists. In modern times, Elizabeth Anscombe in a 1958 essay entitled “Modern Moral Philosophy” argued that deontological ethics had become outdated. She felt that ethics had moved away from a focus on a person’s character and had instead become obsessed with a host of rules and laws. That is why she argued that it was time to return to virtue ethics which is person-centered and thus of utmost importance.¹¹¹

Discussing Anscombe’s turn to virtue ethics, Rosalind Hursthouse states:

It [virtue ethics] was heralded by Anscombe's famous article “Modern Moral Philosophy” (Anscombe 1958) which crystallized an increasing dissatisfaction with the forms of deontology and utilitarianism then prevailing. Neither of them, at that time, paid attention to a number of topics that had always figured in the virtue ethics' tradition—the virtues themselves, motives and moral character, moral education, moral wisdom or discernment, friendship and family relationships, a deep concept of happiness, the role of the emotions in our moral life and the fundamentally important questions of what sort of person I should be and how we should live.¹¹²

This turn from deontological and utilitarian ethics to virtue ethics is stressed by Alasdair MacIntyre in his 1981 book *-After Virtue-*¹¹³ in which he argued that serious consideration be given to Aristotle’s theory of virtue ethics. In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre traced the history of virtue ethics and tried to establish a system of virtue ethics for the modern age. His basic criticism was

¹¹⁰ Rosalind Hursthouse, “Virtue Ethics,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2012), <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-virtue/>.

¹¹¹ Elizabeth G.M. Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy,” *Philosophy* 33, No. 124 (January, 1958), <http://www.philosophy.uncc.edu/mleldrid/cmt/mmp.htm.l>

¹¹² Hursthouse, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-virtue/>

¹¹³ Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

that modern ethics puts too much emphasis on reason rather than putting enough stress on people, their characters and the contexts of their lives.¹¹⁴ McIntyre also underscores the fact that the problem with ethics really began during the Enlightenment, the period from the 17th to the 18th century when Science became more important for the discovery of the truth than philosophy. He realized that while universities were trying to resolve the issue of morality through theories, society still needed virtuous people in day-to-day life. McIntyre contended that society depends upon people who exhibit the virtues for its very existence.¹¹⁵ Following Aristotle, he purports that one becomes virtuous through the practice of virtues, the three most important being justice, courage and honesty. Free will and personal decision-making are involved in the practice of the virtues. One is therefore not born and does not remain automatically virtuous as a physical feature of the body. Furthermore, anyone has the potential and possibility of becoming virtuous. Linking this idea to corruption, “McIntyre suggests that... justice, courage and honesty... are core virtues that help to prevent organizations and institutions from becoming morally corrupt. It is largely through institutions that traditions, cultures and morality spread: if these institutions are corrupt, then vices become widespread.”¹¹⁶

Phillipa Foot has also written a modern version of virtue ethics as she argued that the wise person directs his/her will to what is good and what is good exhibits itself both intrinsically and extrinsically.¹¹⁷ The virtues, for Foot, are ways of obtaining good and the wise and virtuous person is aware of those particular ways. She also argues that there is a difference between skills

¹¹⁴ Virtue Ethics Notes.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Philippa Ruth Foot was a British philosopher, very much known for her works in ethics. She was one of the founders of contemporary virtue ethics that was originally based on the ethics of Aristotle.

and virtues. We may make deliberate mistakes with a skill, but not damage our character or reputation. For example, a teacher may deliberately misspell a word to draw his students' attention to it. However, if you deliberately act in a non-virtuous way, your character and reputation will suffer. Human character needs virtues to straighten it just as wood which naturally warps and changes shape needs continuous straightening to make it straight. Virtues therefore straighten us so that eventually we can, through habit, become virtuous.¹¹⁸ Martha Nussbaum argued that virtue ethics is a compassionate and caring form of doing ethics because it takes the whole person into account.¹¹⁹ "Nussbaum argues that the Greeks used virtues precisely to judge moral conduct: virtues can provide the standards of morally right conduct. Virtues, not principles, are the source for understanding normative conduct. In fact, principles and rules are derived from virtues: they are directives that obtain their content from the virtuous activity which humanity enjoins."¹²⁰

The views of contemporary theological virtue ethicists such as James F. Keenan, Lucas Chan, Charles E. Curran, Lisa Fullam, Stephen J. Pope, Jean Porter and Joseph J. Kotva just to name a few should be added to this brief historical summary on the development of virtue ethics. Their views converge to look at virtue ethics as character-based ethics rather than simply action-based; hence the importance of the threefold question of virtues ethics.

¹¹⁸ Virtue Ethics Notes.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtues," 711, <http://cdn.theologicalstudies.net/56/56.4/56.4.5.pdf>.

The Three Person-centered Questions and Virtue Ethics

To develop and strive for a virtuous character, a fundamental threefold question evolving around the moral agent should be asked. James Keenan, drawing from MacIntyre, beautifully presents and expounds on the three person-centered questions as follows:

In order to understand virtue ethics as life-guides, we can turn to MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, where he proposed that the issue of morality is a three-fold question: Who am I? Who ought I to become? How ought I to get there? The answer to each question refers to the virtues. Applying the list of classical cardinal virtues, then, the first question is not simply "Who am I?" but "Am I just, temperate, brave and prudent?" The second question reflects on the first, and in asking, "Who do I need to become?" it presumably answers, "more just, temperate, brave, and prudent." The third question asks, "In which virtuous practices ought I to engage in order to attain that goal?" Paul Waddell sums up the answer to the threefold question in this way: "The project of the moral life is to become a certain kind of person." That person is a virtuous one.¹²¹

As the French proverb goes, "*Qui va loin ménage sa monture*,"¹²² a halt in life to recollect and reflect on one's life often is necessary for a sure and steady moral, spiritual or human life journey. If we come to realize that we are not born by chance, that we have a mission to accomplish here on earth, then we have to live accordingly, that is, live a purposeful and virtuous life. This fact seems to be less or not at all understood by most Cameroonians, especially on what concerns the serious issue of corruption. Knowing what virtue ethics is and being aware of the various virtues is not enough. How to concretely become virtuous so as to avoid and fight corruption in Cameroon is the fundamental question at stake.

¹²¹ Ibid., 711.

¹²² Literally means, if you want to travel far away, you better prepare your horse or donkey or car as the case may be.

Applying Virtue Ethics to the Challenge of Corruption in Cameroon

The three person-centered questions of virtue ethics offer a major step toward building a virtuous character. Yet acquiring the virtues is not a task that can be achieved autodidactically. From time immemorial, character formation has been a value communities cultivated and transmitted to their descendants. Human character is built from the influence of the environment and of the society in which humans grow. This influence implies the major role of education, teaching and formation. Notwithstanding its utmost importance in preparing and building strong and pleasant characters, education has been neglected in some parts of the world. Cameroonians still need to take education seriously.

The Key Role of Education in the Prevention and Fight against Corruption in Cameroon

Illiteracy plays a great role in the spread of corruption in Cameroon. It cannot be said with certainty that it is the principal cause of corruption in that beautiful country but education spares one from ignorance and usually forms human beings with good character. According to a 2014 report, the literacy rate of Cameroon—which has a population of 23,130,708—is 71.3% with a rank of 162 out of 194 countries in the world.¹²³ Some of the ten Regions of Cameroon have a more alarming literacy rate; the Extreme North Region, for instance, has a literacy rate of 26.1% and the North Region, 35.4%. This statistic is cause for concern. The literacy rate and other consequent facts that contribute to the spread of corruption prompt us to focus on education. In countries where education is given a place of choice and importance, as in

¹²³ “What is the Literacy Rate of Cameroon, a Country in the Continent of Africa?” *Find the Data*. <http://country-facts.findthedata.com/q/38/2395/What-is-the-literacy-rate-in-Cameroon-a-country-in-the-continent-of-Africa> and “Cameroon People 2015”, *Countries of the World*’ http://www.theodora.com/wfbcurrent/cameroon/cameroon_people.html.

the United States, even though corruption is not completely absent, it is nonetheless controlled and does not seem to decay all layers of society. Education, whether formal through a school or informal through cultural practices, proves to be a vehicle for driving the development or neglect of virtues.

The first step toward reducing corruption, therefore, must be an emphasis on education by creating schools in all villages and encouraging, or even requiring compulsory education through high school. At the level of primary, secondary and university education, applied virtue ethics can be incorporated into all subjects taught. Virtues taught at a young age will hopefully develop lifelong character and virtuous living. At the professional level, a “better late than never” approach needs to be taken. Workshops can be instituted on a regular basis on professional and virtue ethics in all ministerial departments.

In Cameroon today, globalization and its growing temptations may lead Cameroonians astray from moral values. A common belief is that to be at the level of today’s technological inventions and tendencies is what matters. I believe that without strong and well-formed characters, today’s technological discoveries may instead lead to unbalanced judgment and immoral acts. Liberation theologian Leonardo Boff notes the importance of moral and spiritual acquired values when he writes:

[W]e are increasingly aware that sciences, technologies, economies, finance and trade, however important these are, are not sufficient to confer a human face to the process of globalization. The process itself demands a spiritual, ethical, and esthetic dimension, which ascribes direction and meaning to the other dimensions of the process.¹²⁴

It thus appears that virtue ethics, coupled with spirituality, are the basic grounds from which the betterment of self and society can be attained. The Church, with her social teaching, has a major role in the education of moral virtues—the hope and goal of which is to produce in

¹²⁴ Leonardo Boff, *Virtues for Another Possible World* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), viii.

persons moral character towards justice, equality, human rights and the fundamental option for the poor.

We must develop the virtues within ourselves if we are to expect a more positive result in curbing corruption. Through education, intellectual virtues are developed; through a disciplined lifestyle and proper habits, moral virtues can be developed. Although there are a host of virtues we can grow such as honesty, truthfulness, and simplicity, if the cardinal or hinge virtues take root in our characters, the ground would be ripe for a moral life. Knowing about virtues is not enough; practicing them as one would exercise his or her muscles is also necessary. All people have the potential to use both their reason and will first to know, then to pass from knowledge to right action and to a rightly ordered and virtuous being.

Keenan remarks that virtue ethics “sees every moment as the possibility for acquiring and developing a virtue. To underline this point, Aquinas held that every human action is a moral action. That is, any action that we knowingly perform is a moral action because it affects us as moral persons. Whatever we do makes us become what we do.”¹²⁵ It is thus necessary to pay attention to whatever we do so as to determine whether it is for our good and the good of others or at our detriment and the detriment of others and act accordingly. In order to arrive at this determination, character building through the practice of virtues, that is virtue ethics, is necessary. To look closely at the virtues and how they can be applied to prevent and fight corruption in Cameroon, I turn to the cardinal virtues proposed by Keenan as they are modern and apply to contemporary society and also because, despite their attractiveness, the traditional cardinal virtues fail to serve contemporary needs for the following reasons: “First, it is deceptively simple and inadequate. Second, a different anthropology has more recently emerged

¹²⁵ James F. Keenan, “Virtue Ethics and Sexual Ethics,” in *Virtue*, Readings in Moral Theology, no. 16, eds., Charles E. Curran and Lisa Fullam (Mahwah, N.J: Paulist Press, 2011), 121.

that insists on the relationality of the human. Finally, as if to prove this anthropological claim, philosophers and theologians have proposed virtues that are premised on our relationality.”¹²⁶ To underline this important aspect of relationality, Keenan proposes the following cardinal virtues: justice, fidelity, self-care and prudence.

The Cardinal Virtues Face the Challenge of Corruption

To fight corruption, the Cameroon government encourages teaching against bribery and corruption in schools, which is supposed to raise awareness. I suggest that coupled with this effort there be teaching on virtues, how to practice them, and how then to avoid the evil of corruption. This education should be implemented at the family level, in schools and in professional life. Given that the cardinal virtues are “sufficient conditions” for describing an agent or action as virtuous,¹²⁷ corruption and the cardinal virtues could not co-exist. So important is the fact that Keenan situates the cardinal virtues of justice, fidelity, self-care and prudence within the framework of our being relational persons. And as noticed in the second chapter, no one corrupts himself or herself in the sense of giving or taking bribe. Corruption involves two or more people and spreads into a network sometimes well-structured, as is the case in Cameroon. Relating the cardinal virtues as they affect the relationship between persons, Keenan writes:

As persons, we are relational in three ways: generally, specifically, and uniquely. And each of these relational ways of being demands a cardinal virtue. As a relational being in general, we are called to justice. As a relational being specifically, we are called to fidelity. As a relational being uniquely, we are called to self-care. These three virtues are cardinal. Unlike Thomas’ structure, none is ethically prior to the other; they have equally urgent claims and they should be pursued as ends in themselves. Thus we are not called to be faithful and self-caring in order to be just, nor are we called to be self-caring and just in order to be faithful. None is auxiliary to the others. Each is a distinctive virtue,

¹²⁶ Keenan, “Proposing Cardinal Virtues,” 717-718.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 717.

none being a subset or subcategory of the others. They are cardinal. The fourth cardinal virtue is prudence, which determines what constitutes the just, faithful, and self-caring way of life for an individual.¹²⁸

Although the first three cardinal virtues, the moral virtues of justice, fidelity and self-care are not auxiliary to each other, worthy of note is the fact that prudence plays the role of a common denominator in the sense that it is needed whenever the moral virtues are exercised so that virtue may lie in the mean, without excess or deficiency.

Justice

While Aristotle and Aquinas uphold the absolute priority of prudence, Keenan draws our attention to the central role of justice and to the fact that though the virtues of temperance and fortitude order ourselves interiorly, justice is a virtue that orders all our operations or exterior actions. For this reason, justice provides the real mean to human action.¹²⁹ Our relationality as human beings generally is directed toward a well-ordered appreciation of the common good whereby we treat people as equals.¹³⁰ We belong to humanity and are expected to respond to all its members with impartiality and equality. Justice is not merely an external behavior; it is about ordering our interior dispositions so that the claim of justice should come from within, and this is the task of virtue ethics. Justice thus understood builds a character that is inclined towards the common good and capable of looking at the practice of corruption as self-destructive and unfair to society.

¹²⁸ Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtues," 724.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 718.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

The vice of corruption, besides its effects on the individual, instills a lack of sense for the common good. It portrays selfishness and greed. Corruption pertains to injustice, to taking possession of or retaining external things unjustly. The virtue opposed to corruption and necessary to possess is justice, of which Aquinas says “is directed to the common good”¹³¹ and which “is a habit whereby a man renders to each one his due by a constant and perpetual will.”¹³² This idea of looking at justice within the framework of relationality underlined by Keenan was earlier brought up by Aristotle who argued that corruption concretely makes its way among human beings in their dealings – as selling and buying- with one another. As Stephen Pope explains, Aquinas was writing to Dominican students who would be confronted in the pastoral field by “practical problems of people buying and selling in the marketplace, going to court, and struggling to support their families under difficult economic circumstances.”¹³³ This marketplace activity is not a far-fetched happening as this observation bears resemblance to what occurs today in Cameroon. Corruption is not present only in selling and buying in Cameroon but also in every situation that brings people together and which involves at least a minimum of service rendering.

The background to corruption in Africa, in general, and in Cameroon, in particular, is the high degree of poverty and the need to survive and preserve one’s family—although it is not the only reason. For many, corruption is the easier way and an opportunity to make extra money for their necessities, thus doing further injustice to others by depriving them of even the little they have. One, however, cannot satisfy one’s needs by illegal, immoral, and short-handed means.

¹³¹ *Summa Theologica*, IIa IIae, q. 47, a. 10.

¹³² *Summa Theologica*, IIa IIae, q. 58, a. 1.

¹³³ Stephen Pope, “Virtue Ethics in Thomas Aquinas,” in *Virtue: Readings in Moral Theology No. 16*, ed., Charles E. Curran and Lisa A. Fullam (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2011), 10.

Poverty and need cannot be excuses for the practice of corruption. A moral, just, legal and lasting means is a much better way to acquire goods and supports, hence the necessity of developing the virtue of justice in one's character. Unfortunately, in Cameroon, justice is seen and practiced not as objectively or as universally as possible but partially. This partiality is portrayed in tribalism, nepotism and regionalism which are strongly present in Africa in general and in Cameroon in particular. The partiality is promoted by the multicultural situation of Cameroon, a country made up of more than 280 different tribes, cultures and languages. Before rendering justice, many office holders take the pains of looking at the region where people come from. In many cases, the name of those seeking a service tells which tribe they are from. If he or she is "one of us" in terms of belonging to their clan or larger family, they probably will benefit from the services of the office holders. Justice cannot be based upon a narrow-minded cultural practice. Keenan stresses this point when he writes:

Admittedly the days are gone (did they ever exist?) when a member of one culture could articulate the actual content and the actual application of specific virtues universally. Even more problematic is a definitive transcultural depiction of the four cardinal virtues. These admissions made, is it not legitimate to propose a highly formal description of the virtuous person for the sake of discussing transculturally and transgenerationally your understanding of right human living? Could we not make the description of the cardinal virtues formal enough so that each culture could fill each virtue with its specific material content and apply it practically? If we cannot, that is, if we believe that something even this formal is untenable, then we will have to acknowledge that cultural boundaries are absolute. That would contradict one of the functions of virtue: to provide understanding, not only about the practices that specific cultures recommend, but also about the humanity we share.¹³⁴

Justice is one of those virtues directed toward others. Yet, the mentality of most cultures in Cameroon is that of exclusiveness. The partiality is also portrayed in looking at whether or not one is rich. Rich people usually will have justice done unto them. Yet, for justice to be what it is, it should cross the borders of language, tribe, family and social class. Martin Rhonheimer offers

¹³⁴ Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtues," 715.

worthwhile suggestions when he stresses the idea of breaking the circle of the selfish ego to realize that one is not an island but a social being, and to understand that the other person is one like himself, bearing in mind the Scripture's golden rule of doing to others what people would like done unto them as found in Matthew 7:12. He writes:

But as soon as the other is known and acknowledged as "one like me," the basic principle of "justice" arises that has found an expression to be met with in practically all cultures: the so-called golden rule. "Do not unto others, what you would not have them do unto you," or as positively formulated: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." This "principle of justice" is thus nothing other than the principle of the symmetry of legal rights on the basis of the acknowledgment of one's fellow man as "one like me," and thus an equal: the rights that I have are also the rights that the other has. And: what I can expect from another with regards to my own rights, so the other can expect from me with regards to his, even if he cannot articulate this expectation, as in the case of a seriously handicapped person or an unborn child or an infant, or someone unable to speak through illness or old age.¹³⁵

The principles of equality in dignity and justice as prompted by the consideration of the other person as the one who is like me can help sharpen the sense and practice of justice. Consider a person who has nothing with which to bribe in order to obtain a service which is supposed to be rendered free of charge—if I were that poor person rather than the person in charge, I would obviously not "accept" being treated unfairly. Even if there is money to bribe, it would be unjust and immoral to rob the other from what they have in order to satisfy a selfish desire. The formation of justice in one's character as well as society is thus necessary.

Justice is indispensable for the proper management of public goods since "Justice seems to be very much a public, impartial, and dispassionate thing."¹³⁶ Leaders of the country must be consistently trained through workshops on the value, integration, and practice of justice if a just society is to be built. The disharmony and living imbalance in Cameroon society and the

¹³⁵ Martin Rhonheimer, *The Perspective of Morality: Philosophical Foundations of Thomistic Virtue Ethics* (Washington DC: Catholic University Press, 2001), 284-285.

¹³⁶ Howard J. Curzer, *Aristotle and the Virtues* (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 8.

tendency to indulge in corruption result from the lack of justice in the management of common resources. The way justice can work in reducing corruption can be sorted out from Rhonheimer's argument as he writes:

Justice as the principle of “giving to each his due,” or what each has a right to, is specified all the way to the level of specific action-types or basic intentional actions such as “respect another’s possession” or “respect another person’s life” or “tell the truth,” or alternatively, not to steal, murder or lie. The question, whether there are “exceptions” here is really not meaningful. To steal—by the very word—is always bad and an offense against justice. If there were an exception, it would be saying that stealing is not stealing. Something unjust cannot by exception be something just.¹³⁷

From the view point of justice, the aim of a moral life is to become impartial and to recognize the universal claim of equality. This way of understanding justice is present not only in adults but also in children who frown at any unequal distributing of food, gifts or any other object. Yet this awareness of unfairness should go beyond external activities and let justice, as a virtue, order our interior disposition so that all acts of equality should come from within.¹³⁸ Corruption being an expression of a deep-seated vice of selfishness, partiality and injustice towards others and the society, justice as understood within the notion of relationality – dear to African people- is an effective way of making corruption lose ground in Cameroon.

In a less broad sense, the virtue of justice finds expression in the virtue of fidelity which should equally be a powerful arm against corruption.

Fidelity

For most of those who undertake a public or Church service, there is usually an oath of fidelity taken to faithfully serve the people entrusted to their care. Unfortunately, by indulging in corruption, this oath is broken which indicates a fundamental flaw in those practicing corruption

¹³⁷ Rhonheimer, *The Perspective of Morality*, 287.

¹³⁸ Keenan, “Proposing Cardinal virtues,” 724.

and needs to be replaced with the virtue of fidelity. This type of fidelity is in relation to one's duty, commitment, responsibility and vocation. By being faithful to what one is supposed to be - especially in a social order - one renders justice to the community or those who are served. The practice of corruption so widespread in Cameroon denotes infidelity to one's duty, responsibility, commitment and/or vocation.

Keenan takes up this virtue more specifically; if justice urges us to treat people equally, fidelity makes a different claim on us: it nurtures and sustains the bonds of those special relationships that we enjoy whether by blood, marriage, love or sacrament.¹³⁹ Here, there is a focus on special care. While justice advocates impartiality and universality, fidelity rests on partiality and particularity as it fosters covenant, friendship, love, loyalty and commitment.¹⁴⁰ The partiality here is a positive one, that which goes along with the commitment to those people who are our intimates – children, spouse, siblings, etc. Infidelity in this sense can be viewed as a disruption of the relationship which is supposed to enjoy a special and particular attention and care; it is a form of corruption since it is the breaking of the covenant of fidelity and commitment. Infidelity in the narrower sense may lead to infidelity in greater responsibilities. In either case, fidelity is a virtue that reminds us of the particular duty to be fulfilled with commitment and rightness and which would fight corruption, which is a gross infidelity with regard to one's responsibility toward those most dear to us who are to be served.

Out of the intimates' relationships, infidelity in Cameroon is manifested through coming late to work, especially if one is the boss, unjustified and concealed absence from work and a lack of commitment and inefficiency at work. The giving of a bribe to help conceal one's

¹³⁹ Ibid., 724-725.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 726.

inefficiency at the job site seems to be what many do in Cameroon. On a more intimate level, infidelity through adultery and lack of or insufficiency of affective and material care toward one's spouse or children is very much present in the day to day dealings of many Cameroonians. The idea of corruption being connected to this type of infidelity is in the sense that it involves lies, untruthfulness and deceit.

In Africa in general and in Cameroon in particular, the virtue of solidarity expressed through the concept of *Ubuntu* could be a fertile ground for the practice of the cardinal virtue of fidelity because of the strong bond between intimates, families and clans.

Ubuntu is a Bantu term which roughly translates "human kindness." The idea comes from the Southern African region and which literally means "human-ness." It is a concrete expression of "humanity toward others," but is often used in a more philosophical sense to mean the belief in a universal bond of sharing and solidarity that connects all humanity. The main idea in *Ubuntu* is how to be truly human by living out virtues that express the idea that we are social beings and are supposed to live as such, that is, attentive to one another, ready to help thy neighbor even if they are not of the same ethnic group. This idea of solidarity, espoused by Saint Pope John Paul II, is underlined by Keenan when he discusses the virtues of justice and love of which he says, "Pope John Paul II prefers the concept of solidarity, the concept that, on the one hand seeks equality, but on the other hand expresses a loving bondedness among its members. Again we find at least implicitly the two virtues of love and justice shaping and defining one another."¹⁴¹ The notion of solidarity expressed in the concept of *Ubuntu* is very much supposed to shape African cultures and people and help them live accordingly.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 721.

The idea of Ubuntu stems from the value of life which, traditionally, is transmitted orally from generation to generation, and it begins from an early age. Masango sheds light on this when he writes:

The great wonderful gift God has given to people is the gift of life. We are therefore charged to manage and take care of our lives. In Africa, self-management is closely related to one's world. In other words, how one lives his or her life is part of management of this gift. In short, self-management is all about the living of highest quality of the human life, as well as being able to enjoy life in a positive Ubuntu style. In fact, one grows with the above concept from early childhood, especially in rural African villages. As people grow and relate to each other they are taught by the elderly to pass what they learn to another person. This is the beginning of caring for each other. The notion of caring manifests itself in the respectful and humble way elders and superiors are greeted and addressed by young ones.¹⁴²

Beyond respect for elders, the concept of *Ubuntu* calls for formation of good values and good character in a person.¹⁴³ It is a way of living that respects human beings as well as their belongings, life and the other villagers, that is, the community –thus, promoting clan/community fidelity. As Masango explains,

At this stage, one is able to live with other people in a respectable way. It is a common saying among Africans, that it takes the whole village to raise a child. The statement captures good values, ethics and spiritual development of a person—it is holistically taken. This type of process forces one to internalize African values as a way of life. In other words, in an African community a person is expected to be in relation with other people. That is why an adult is allowed to discipline a child who is out of step. It is part of shaping values, ethics and spiritual life of a child.¹⁴⁴

This type of African virtue ethics which existed long ago in African traditions and which in some places seems no longer to be taken seriously is worth giving further consideration. If the concept of Ubuntu calls for caring for one another, it would therefore be contradictory to overlook the

¹⁴² M J S Masango, "African Spirituality That Shapes the Concept of Ubuntu," A Paper (Pretoria, 2006), 930-931, <http://www.ve.org.za/index.php/VE/article/viewFile/195/149>.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 931.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 938.

dignity of the other person or to despoil them of what they have simply to satisfy one's egotistic and insatiable desire of having at all cost through the practice of corruption. In fact, in a community where *Ubuntu* has made its home, cases of marital infidelity, theft, cheating, bribery and corruption are less or not heard of. Partly because of modernism, consumerism and licentiousness, many today disregard those values of old which have been faithfully transmitted from our forefathers from generation to generation.

Worth noting is the tension between justice and fidelity which is pervasive in Cameroon and Africa in general. Keenan raises this tension as follows:

While justice is about treating people generally equally; fidelity is about treating particular relations preferentially. The tension of the moral life is to figure out (through prudence) when fidelity is greater than justice. Good (and not so good) stories treat this all the time, for suspense is created when a hero or heroine must decide between justice and fidelity and therein is great tension.¹⁴⁵

The tension between justice and fidelity, present in Greek culture, is also perceived in various cultures in the world today as stated and illustrated by Keenan in the following examples:

For instance, the drama of Antigone is caught as she stands between supporting a universal peace for her whole city and obeying Creon's law, or else tending to her brother who remains unburied outside the city walls. But Greek culture is not the only setting for conflicts between justice and fidelity. The American movie industry regularly depicts justice calling us away from our special relationships. A lawyer abandons her father's defense and becomes his accuser of crimes against humanity in *The Music Box*. A wife rejects her husband's commands and participates in a civil rights demonstration in *A Long Walk Home*, and a mother campaigns against apartheid while a teenage daughter feels neglected in *A World Apart*. Curiously ...these films depict women choosing the universal claims of justice over the particular claims of fidelity.¹⁴⁶

This tension is more apparent in Cameroon where the ethnic bonds are so strong that people easily identify themselves by them and act using these bonds as the measuring stick for rendering a service or not. It is common for Cameroonians to face the tension between favoring the

¹⁴⁵ James F. Keenan, *Virtues for Ordinary Christians* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1996), 55.

¹⁴⁶ Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtues," 726.

member of one's clan or family and crossing the barrier to serve another person in justice who is not from one's family or clan. For example, there can be a close family member to whom a social and well-paying position could be offered by a boss and at the same time there is a qualified person who is from a different tribe or region whose background is not known. Usually, the tendency in Cameroon is to offer the position to one's friend or relative – which I would call favoritism instead of fidelity- rather than to offer it to an “unknown” person. However, the tension is also present between justice and fidelity as in the case of a young man who is about to go rescue a child from a fire accident taking place in a neighbor's thatch house – an incident which happens time and again in Cameroon villages where there are no firefighters to rescue- while the parents forbid the young man to take the risk. Should he obey his parents out of love for them who want to protect him, or rescue someone he does not know from a fire accident which has just started? In Cameroon, being a multicultural country where tribalism still exists, most people tend to reason in terms of the closeness they have with those who need assistance than to act in justice. In many instances, genuine fidelity clashes with justice. Should we, out of love and closeness, tend to our relatives and friends or in justice, sacrifice those instances of fidelity for the benefit of those who are not close to us or the community at large? That is where the virtue of prudence is required to make a judgment in the case of tension.

“Just as we have general responsibilities to everyone (justice), and special ones to particular people (fidelity), so too we have a unique responsibility for ourselves.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ Keenan, *Virtues for Ordinary Christians* 56.

Self-care

Self-care, if not properly understood, may be misinterpreted. A foundational and important cardinal virtue, self-care is not a type of selfish self-love as opposed to sacrificial love. While some ethicists call it self-love or love of self, self-esteem or self-respect, the appropriate word as chosen by Keenan would be self-care. In fact, if I don't take care of myself, if I don't value and appreciate myself, how can I take care of others in the way justice and fidelity demand of me? Neither of the aforementioned virtues addresses the unique relationship that I as a moral agent have with myself.¹⁴⁸ Making reference to Aquinas, Keenan explains how one can go against self-care while doing harm to justice: "for instance, Aquinas argued against suicide because it offends both justice by depriving the common good of one's life and charity by doing harm to oneself."¹⁴⁹ As mentioned in the second chapter, corruption is a practice that goes against charity. If people are not charitable enough in taking care of themselves, how would they care for the dignity and well-being of others? Self-care is a sign of responsibility which goes along with a well-ordered personality capable of saying no to the chaos that the practice of corruption may cause. Showing that self-care is not to be confused with a lack of sacrifice for others, Keenan writes:

Some Christian activists may balk at self-care. Some could go so far as to note that if Jesus let self-care to be a cardinal virtue we would never have been redeemed by the blood of the cross. But we have every reason to believe that the historical Jesus did take care of himself; we need only think of how often he was contrasted with John the Baptizer or his frequent time away from the disciples and the crowds. Likewise we have no reason to suppose that Jesus suffered from lack of self-esteem. In fact, I think we can say that it was precisely because Jesus knew the virtues of justice, fidelity and self-care that the agony in the garden was so painful. He was a man who loved God, humanity, his

¹⁴⁸ Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal virtues", 726.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 727.

friends and himself: his conflict, like all true conflicts, was to determine which relationship made the greater claim on him at that moment in time.¹⁵⁰

Anti-corruption mentality and practice would enhance the breeding of virtues, contribute to the individual's well-being and thereby help growth in the virtue of self-care. As is the case with any other virtue, self-care is to be acquired through habitual practice beginning in childhood through education, both formal and informal. Justice, fidelity and self-care, like the traditional cardinal virtues need prudence to be integrated.

Prudence

As is the case with the traditional cardinal virtues, prudence has the task of integrating the other virtues into our lives. There is a necessity and role of prudence in right living for “prudence is always vigilant, looking to the future, not only trying to realize the claims of justice, fidelity and self-care in the here and now, but also calling us to anticipate occasions when each of these virtues can be more fully acquired.”¹⁵¹ The case of the tension between justice and fidelity mentioned above, for instance, will require the intervention of prudence so that any decision made from the tension should not be influenced by any kind of bias, feelings or favoritism but a well-thought decision which puts justice in its proper place. Thus prudence establishes a moral agenda in individuals growing these virtues. The prudent person considers the claims of the other virtues.¹⁵² As a concrete modern example, Anthony Egan names Nelson Mandela who could inspire other Africans, especially Cameroonians in their struggle against corruption. He writes:

Nelson Mandela is a model of Aristotelian-Thomist virtue ethics: the prudent application of justice, courage and moderation, knowing when to compromise and when to stand firm

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 727-728.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 728.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

on principles. He exemplifies someone who above all knows himself, warts and all, and is ready to change. He knew instinctively that without change there could be no growth. With such self-knowledge, he came to understand others (comrades and captors alike), and out of such inner strength was able to win over enemies and admonish friends. It made him empathize with (sometimes profoundly unlikeable) others, and to willingly enter their chaos, which is a succinct definition of mercy.¹⁵³

The necessity of prudence in one's life is such that without this virtue there would be no good choices for good lives. Aquinas proves this utmost necessity when he writes:

Prudence is a virtue most necessary for human life. For a good life consists in good deeds. Now in order to do good deeds, it matters not only what a [moral agent] does but also how [the agent] does it. To wit, that he does it from right choice and not merely from impulse or passion. And, since choice is about things in reference to the end, rectitude of choice requires two things namely, the due end, and something suitably ordained to that due end. Now man is suitably directed to his due end by a virtue which perfects the soul in the appetitive part, the object of which is the good and the end. And to that which is suitably ordained to the due end, man needs to be rightly disposed by a habit in his reason because council and choice, which are about things ordained to the end, are acts of the reason. Consequently an intellectual virtue is needed in the reason, to perfect the reason, and make it suitably affected towards things ordained to the end; and this virtue is prudence. Consequently prudence is a virtue to lead a good life.¹⁵⁴

Further, true prudence intends those goals that are meaningful in life, goals that are concerned with the common good of the human life.¹⁵⁵ However, prudence can also be counterfeited. Money embezzlers show a kind of prudence in their dealings, which helps them get successfully through such an evil act. Rhonheimer terms this "apparent prudence" as in "that skillful cheater on taxes; or one can be very 'clever' in robbing a bank or some other kind of crime. This 'prudence of the flesh' however, is no virtue, even if it is accompanied by a great deal of skillfulness. It is false prudence because it does not help one become a better human being; it is a counterfeit, bearing only the name of prudence. True prudence, nevertheless, is

¹⁵³ Anthony Egan, "A Poorer Life and Work Without Mandela," in *Corruption*, eds. Regina Ammicht-Quinn, Lisa Sowle Cahill, and Luiz Carlos Susin, (London: SCM Press, 2014), 123.

¹⁵⁴ *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, q. 57, a. 5.

¹⁵⁵ Rhonheimer, *The Perspective of Morality*, 224.

always the ‘skillfulness’ of reason for the good.”¹⁵⁶ Corruption is practiced neither for one’s true good nor for the common good; it is prompted by greed, one of the seven classical vices and “is the unordered desire for external goods, really a kind of unordered self-sufficiency.”¹⁵⁷

Therefore, true prudence has no part in corruption. Prudence as a habit can and should be practiced for an orderly character. “The habit of prudence is formed through directing the natural ‘skillfulness’ of the reason toward the good,”¹⁵⁸ and this skillfulness is the noble task of education, which should be the major concern of families and government. Acquiring prudence can be a painstaking time-consuming exercise. Neglecting this exercise can be disastrous, both for the individual and for the society. As Keenan notes,

For Aristotle and for Thomas prudence is not simply caution. Prudence is rather the virtue of a person whose feet are on the ground and who thinks both practically and realistically. Prudence belongs to the person who not only sets realistic ends, but sets out to attain them. The prudent person is precisely the person who knows how to grow. Being prudent is no easy task. From the medieval period until today, we believe that it is easier to get something wrong than to get it right. . . . Prudence is even more complicated when we try to figure out the appropriate ways of becoming more virtuous. It must be attentive to detail, anticipate difficulties, and measure rightly. Moreover, as anyone who has watched children knows, we are not born with prudence. Instead, we acquire it through a very long process.¹⁵⁹

Investing energy, talents and resources in virtue education is thus worth painstaking effort if we are to grow people, communities and a country that desire moral living and if we want an end to corruption. It is a veritable challenge.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 218.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 225.

¹⁵⁹ Keenan, “Virtue Ethics and Sexual Ethics,” in *Virtue: Readings in Moral Theology No 16*, ed. Charles E. Curran and Lisa A. Fullam (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2011), 120-121.

Being Transformed by the Virtues: the Challenge for an Effective Fight against Corruption

Suggesting virtue ethics for the prevention and fight against corruption in Cameroon is not a magical potion. Being virtuous can be a painstaking exercise as it involves will and determination especially since perseverance is required to keep on being virtuous. Mary Jo Iozzio notes the importance of self-determination in virtuous character building. She writes:

The contemporary understanding of self-determination recognizes that individuals (and communities if they so choose) can freely decide courses and goals of action. ...self-determination is more than the free choices of this or that immediate object to be gained; it is the determination of oneself and one's community based on the knowledge we have of our past and our present, and of our hope for the future. Thus, the basis and meaning of self-determination are found in free choice and in what the source and the exercise of this freedom may mean.¹⁶⁰

The temptation is great to fall into the easy way out or to do as others do. It is imperative to make virtues part and parcel of who we are through conscious efforts and self-determination. It is in this sense that Keenan said that "being virtuous is more than having a particular habit of acting, e.g. generosity. Rather, it means having a fundamental set of related virtues that enable a person and a community to live and act morally well."¹⁶¹

Aquiline Tarimo argues that "formation in civic virtues, as a process of infusing moral values in social action, offers an opportunity to cultivate responsible character and civic friendship. It is a perspective that enhances public life by advancing the capacity to reason in order to make right judgements."¹⁶² Thus, in the efforts of preventing and curbing corruption in Cameroon, several means must be incorporated in teaching virtue. Apart from formal education

¹⁶⁰ Mary Jo Iozzio, *Self-Determination and the Moral Act: A Study of the Contributions of Odon Lottin, O.S.B.*, Recherches de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale. Supplementa, vol. 4 (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 11.

¹⁶¹ Keenan. "Proposing Cardinal Virtues," 714.

¹⁶² Aquiline Tarimo, "African Natural Resources and Corruption," in Ammicht-Quinn, et als., *Corruption*, 55.

in schools where virtue ethics can be taught both theoretically and practically, the Church has a great role to play in the fight against corruption as she recognizes that the issue of corruption is primarily a moral one which is based on dysfunctional relationships, a whole series of relationships and complicity that involves the numbing of consciences.¹⁶³ The Church, represented by the various parishes, is a privileged place for this task. In all parishes in Cameroon, the diocese's youth apostolate caters to the youth groups. Such apostolates like those of women, children and many others are fertile grounds for instruction on virtues. Training sessions can be organized on an ongoing regular basis in the form of catechetical instruction on the value and moral obligation to grow, act and live virtuously as well as on the dangers of corruption. At the level of Cameroon villages, traditionally when there is important information to pass on to villagers, a gathering at the initiative of the head of the village is usually summoned and the message delivered. Such gatherings are conducted in the local language so all may understand and can be frequently organized to sensitize everyone on the cancer of corruption and to encourage denouncing the practice. Perpetrators could be called to order in a suitable and lesson giving way customary to the locality. In leading a relentless battle in a continuous, organized and sustained manner, the evil of corruption in Cameroon will be curbed, prevented, and eventually, a distance memory.

¹⁶³ John Tenamwenye, "Politics and Corruption in Africa: A Moral Challenge", *Corruption in Africa: A Threat to Justice and Sustainable Peace*, eds. Elizabeth Nduku and John Tenamewnye, (Geneva: Globethics.net, 2015), 432.

CONCLUSION

For such a sensitive and widespread phenomenon as corruption, this work did not aspire to bring an easy or ready-made solution to the challenge corruption poses. Its purpose however has been an attempt to propose that if more attention, care and focus are given to virtue ethics – through raising awareness and educating people to cultivate the virtues, especially justice, fidelity, self-care and prudence, so that they act virtuously- corruption, which is a devastating vice for the Cameroon society, can be drastically reduced and eventually eliminated.

This appeal to a more serious consideration of virtue ethics is neither a pious dream nor a mere intellectual exercise. There are instances in Cameroon where the practice of corruption is resisted and fought by people because they have been educated to cherish the virtues in their lives. A concrete example would be the members of the “Justice and Peace Commission” in the Archdiocese of Garoua in the Northern Region of Cameroon. These are parish members who come together regularly both at the parish and diocesan levels to reflect on such issues as various unjust practices, extortion, bribery and corruption. During the meetings, specific cases encountered in villages are shared, discussed and suggestions made on how to fight them. The members of the “Justice and Peace Commission” are then empowered, to go back and sensitize their Christian communities who together work on fighting the issues at stake. The empowerment and sensitization are on knowing and applying the virtues of justice, courage and truthfulness in the Christian spirit, in order to denounce and bar any form of exploitation, extortion, injustice, bribery and corruption. This effort has been bearing fruit as whenever the Christians stand united against unjust practices, these practices begin to lose intensity and eventually die out. Such formation in virtue is to be intensified and spread through formal education, catechetical instruction, sermons and any forum that brings people together.

A total eradication of corruption in Cameroon may be a utopia, but intensive efforts to live virtuously will greatly weaken and curb the practice of corruption so that Cameroonians may enjoy justice, peace, moral, spiritual and integral well-being and happiness. It is my hope that this thesis will help reduce the scourge of corruption in Cameroon.

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