


# The 'brown envelope syndrome': Culture of bribery and ethics at the crossroads



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This article unravels the destructive practice of bribery, which is ingrained in South African culture. Through the scenarios in the public transport industry and literature review, the article reveals that indeed bribery is a reality to reckon with. It is observed in all tiers of society such as politics, businesses and religious circles. Bribery explained as a 'brown envelope syndrome' is rife in the South African socio-political landscape. The objective of this article is to enlighten the readers that bribery from socio-theological perspectives is ethically unacceptable. It promotes corrupt political accountability, economic inequality, social disrespect and religious hypocrisy. The article starts with personal scenarios and then delves into the definition of bribery as payment in a form of money, favours or gifts, to influence a decision, to receive favours in turn, facilitate fast delivery of goods, gain an unfair advantage, avoid legal prosecution or to supply substandard products or services. The second part of the article discusses how bribery clashes with Christian ethics as pointed by Jesus in Mark 7:21–22, as bribery lies buried in human hearts and manifests itself in different sins. There is a clear biblical condemnation of bribery as detestable, and that by all means possible, it should be proscribed. Bribery in political circles is known as 'brown envelope', which means the currency exchanges between the corrupt and the corrupted. Solutions suggested is that citizens in their national democracies should break out of the shell and become vocal against bribery. The church should emerge behind the trees and come up with prophetic discernment, wisdom and be vocal against bribery. Personally, those exposed to bribery situations must maintain wisdom and learn how to refuse offers without endangering themselves. This research unravels bribery and its devastating effects of promoting corrupt political accountability, economic inequality, social disrespect and religious hypocrisy.

**Contribution:** This article calls for communities and churches to be vocal against bribery and encourages personal accountability when confronted with bribery offers.

**Keywords:** bribery; brown envelope; corruption; ethics; culture; prophet; society.

## Introduction

This article looks at corruption from a Christian-ethical point of view. Corruption in a form of bribery is engrained within the fabric of daily life in many African nations. The malpractice is known and accepted by residents and citizens of most African countries. It is generally practised overtly or secretly depending on the context, the individuals involved and the control system in place. Persistent corruption damages the economic well-being of society and affects the nation's long-term development at the expense of personal gain. Richardson (in Kretzschmar, Bentley & Van Niekerk 2009:55) is correct when saying that 'Every episode of corruption and crime has the effect of undermining the fabric of society'. The risk for investors and businesses is often significant because of mistrust and deception. Corruption through bribery is not only in the economic fabric of the society but also in the judiciary and social interaction. The manipulation of the legal system, such as the biblical case of Naboth (1 Ki 21), which is not just the royal greed but the means of murder pictures corruption that people go extra mile for victory against human and social justice (Wright 2004:171). Corruption is enhanced through bribery and in political circles through the monetary transaction referred to in this article as 'Brown Envelope Syndrome' (BES).

## Lessons from some scenarios

One of the sectors most vulnerable to bribery is the transportation industry. For decades, most stakeholders of this industry (vehicle owners, passengers, public and private authorities, etc.) have engaged in different forms of corrupt practices. In addition to the stress and challenges of

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regular travel, residents in certain African countries are expected to adapt to and engage in some form of bribery that will facilitate their commute. Bribery is deeply ingrained into cultural practices that even minibus taxi passengers become part and parcel of it.

I was once in a taxi from Mafikeng to Rustenburg and the traffic officer appeared behind the bush to stop it, as it was very clear that the sound from the taxi engine indicated some road unworthiness. One older lady in the middle seat asked a young guy on the front seat to go and pass water by the fence behind the bush, as she is running late for the funeral. The lady handed a R20.00 note to this young man who consequently complied with the officer's instructions. Stopped by the traffic officer from behind the bush, and he found fault with either your vehicle or over speeding or driving license faults, he thereafter pointed to the tree or the fence and asked the young guy to *tsamaya o ye go rotela fale* (go and pass water there), which implies he goes behind the bush; pretend he is passing water while he dropped the currency note on the ground, left it there for the officer to collect later. In this entire interaction, one could clearly see that passengers are very familiar with the language as the young man complied confidently and the body language of other passengers communicating affirmatively. The driver was let go upon the return of the young man, and after hitting the road the driver reimbursed the old lady. In another incident, it was Sunday morning and the traffic cop stopping the taxi was of Indian origin. As the driver was instructed by the officer to park along the road, one lady from the back seat shouted to the driver: *Ke lekula o tlile go batlela mosadi le bana rice* (He's an Indian man coming to seek some rice for his family). Both the driver and the officer went behind the minibus taxi and currency exchanges were made. The trip proceeded as normal. It is a public knowledge in South Africa as in Nigeria that the law enforcement agents use their respective offices to take money from motorists. To force money out of the motorists, the police, with their guns in hand, harass and threaten them (Ademiluka 2021:6).

Bribery has become a norm, and it uses the 'coded language' that those involved can understand it. Behaviour of officers and passengers, including Ademiluka's citation above is pointed out by Carson (2008:140) that 'The police whose task is to serve and protect can become corrupt and exercise their power for personal gain, or simply because the exercise of power becomes intoxicating behaviour'. And at the national borders' entries and exits, one hears from the immigration or customs officers telling you that 'there is a missing page in your passport' or 'what can you offer your brother after this wonderful service?' At most checkpoints and points of entry, passengers are expected to pay arbitrary fees to immigration and customs officers and border control representatives. These fees are generally non-standardised and may not be reported to government treasury; hence no official receipt bearing official corporate image is issued. The practice has become culturally ingrained as operative patronage in all hierarchies of societies, now accompanied and associated with materialistic elitism (Richardson in Kretzschmar,

Bentley & Van Niekerk 2009:55). In 2010, I was accompanied by my colleague in one particular West African country, and at every police roadblock, we were shown two fingers with words 'deux milles' (2000) in a local currency. In that country, police roadblocks are found almost every 20 km – 30 km, and some are unofficial and illegitimate. This 'deux milles' is the equivalent of US\$20.00, which in the local currency is a very steep amount.

The fees are intended to be used for the upkeep of personnel stationed at their assigned locations. Considering the delay in salary disbursement and the minimum allocation for stationaries and other working tools, the security and immigration personnel are expected to use non-conventional means to maintain their workstations. The amount charged may differ depending on whether the individual is a citizen of the country, a resident of a neighbouring country or an international guest (foreigner).

## Definition of bribery

The Setswana language has two beautiful terms for bribery called *pipa-molomo* (literarily, mouth shutter) or *bonweenwee* (slyness). Van der Walt (2001) gives a clear definition of bribery:

Bribery can be defined as payment, which may be money, favours or gifts, to influence a decision. Bribery takes place, inter alia, to receive favours in turn; facilitate fast delivery of goods; gain an unfair advantage; avoid legal prosecution or to supply substandard products or services. (p. 692)

Wikipedia informs us:

In some Spanish-speaking countries, bribes are referred to as 'mordida' (literally, 'bite'). In Arab countries, bribes may be called *baksheesh* (a tip, gift, or gratuity) or 'shay' (literally, 'tea'). French-speaking countries often use the expressions 'dessous-de-table' ('under-the-table' commissions), 'pot-de-vin' (literally, 'wine-pot'), or 'commission occulte' ('secret commission' or 'kickback'). While the last two expressions contain inherently a negative connotation, the expression 'dessous-de-table' can be often understood as a commonly accepted business practice. In German, the common term is *Schmiergeld* ('smoothing money').<sup>1</sup>

It has become a norm in South Africa to inculcate the culture of bribery for one to receive the services one deserves as a citizen. There are different references to bribery that one comes across even beyond our national borders into the continent. In South Africa, one often hears from the official over-the-counter statements like '*imali ye cooldrink*' (cool drink money); *ke kopa borothonyana daar* (bread please!) or *ya borotho e kae?* (where is the money for bread?). Haffajee (2022:258) points out that 'Bribing a senior politician or government official is called "looking after" them. Bribes are disguised as facilitation fees, success fees, consultancies in company account'. The bottom line remains that bribery is the criminal act of giving someone, especially an official or any leader (civic, religious, corporate), a token of value like money, presents, position, property, preferment, privilege or anything that official considers valuable. 'Some of these "gifts" were bribes in anticipation of a reciprocal favour'

1. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bribery>.

(Van der Walt 2001:691). The intention of this offering is to receive back a favour or service in kind. It is always an illegal act of dishonesty, therefore unethical as it is intended to induce or influence the action, vying for support for personal ego or gain. The bottom line is that bribery is the 'act of taking or receiving something with the intention of influencing the recipient in some way favorable to the party providing the bribe' (Ben-Nun 2018:10). It affects human relationships, especially in the area of economic work that becomes tainted with corruption. Wright (2004) refers to this kind of corruption when he states that:

Work becomes a commodity to be bought and sold with little care or responsibility for the working human being. Work becomes a slave of greed, a tool of oppression, a means of replacing God with one's own ambition. (p. 151)

Bribery is prevalent by practices such as buying the position or promotion in a job situation, unemployed person paying someone to get a job, females buying favours through the sexual exchange, immigrants paying either monetarily, sexually or otherwise to possess legal papers to be in the country, paying secretive fees for clearance of the goods to pass through customs or immigration processes, paying fees for the awarding of contracts, tenders, among others. The list can go on. What is important is that any favour paid for and that does not go through legal documentation or is expedited for final authorisation is regarded as a bribe.

## The 'brown envelope'

The BES, though an international practice, became popular within the Nigerian journalism about five decades ago (Williams 2014). For the past three decades, South Africa is caught up with the 'BES', which means the currency exchanges happen between the corrupt and the corrupted. This happens mostly between political officials and the business proponents, sometimes known as tender winners, and in some cases, the ecclesial leaders (prophets, pastors, priests) can be entangled into the web of bribery. The 8th century prophet bemoaned the socio-economic conditions of Judah. He presented 'how socio-economic and religious circumstances of unfaithfulness have apparently provided the ground for corruption in society at different levels' (Boloje 2021:1). In his oracle, Micah (Mic 7) he spoke to this:

The faithful have been swept from the land; not one upright person remains. Everyone lies in wait to shed blood; they hunt each other with nets. Both hands are skilled in doing evil; the ruler demands gifts, the judge accepts bribes, the powerful dictate what they desire – they all conspire together. (vv. 2–3)

Bribery is a syndrome, and as a 'brown envelope', it comes in devious and diverse ways, with coded language as seen in taxi examples cited above. The exchange can go both ways among the politicians, pastors, businesspeople and ordinary citizens, depending on the deals struck. The three spheres of society that is, politics, corporate world, and the church set the pace for the populace, as confirmed by Wright (2004:171) that 'Not surprisingly, ordinary people follow the examples of their political masters'. Haffajee (2022:60) refers to the

unholy trinity of corruption in South Africa as a triangle of the tender system, politicians and politically connected businesspeople and the funding of the African National Congress (ruling party) through that system. The church permeates all the three as ecclesial leaders are found in all members of this unholy trinity. However, the vast literature scope associate 'BES' with journalism. In this journalistic context, 'brown envelope' is the monetary inducement offered to journalists for positive press coverage. The objective is to write a positive story or kill the negative story. The 'brown envelope' containing currency notes is offered to the journalists during press conferences or briefings for this purpose. Universally, 'brown envelope' is a euphemism for a bribe. It is criminally associated with corruption.

'Brown envelope' practices in South Africa are associated with political criminality. One needs to read Myburgh's *Gangster State* (2019), Basson's *Blessed by Bosasa* (2019), Chikane's *The Things that Could Not be Said* (2013), especially Chapter 11 titled 'The Scourge of Corruption'. The scariest read on bribery from South African political soil is Hartley's *The Big Fix* (2016) on how South Africa stole the 2010 Football World Cup. This issue positioned South African national politics on the negative light. It surfaced that millions of dollars were siphoned from South African government under the guise of the Third World football development. The exposure of the bribery activities cost some top officials of FIFA (International Federation of Association Football) their jobs. Furthermore, the so-called 'Nine Wasted Years' of Zuma's presidency is closely associated with the zenith of state capture, which cannot be undertaken without systemic bribes. Haffajee (2022:136) unravels bribes and 'brown envelopes' through powerful linkages: Duduzane Zuma (President Zuma's son) with Essop Pahad became the 'Guptas' (Chief architects and designers of South African state capture) link to political society. Malusi Gigaba (in his capacity as the Minister of both State Enterprises and Finances, respectively) became the 'Guptas' key executive contact in government, while their relationship with President Zuma was their political cover. It is very clear that bribery or a 'brown envelope syndrome' is a systemic component of South African political culture. Through the Zondo Commission on state capture hearings, one hears of politicians receiving or been given sport bags stashed with thousands of cash notes. In one case, we heard of the two brown and maroon suitcases carried by Chinese men at the 'Guptas' compound. Some bodyguards were taken aback to discover cash notes in these bags in their bosses' car boots.

Government services are privatised through corrupt tender systems that are manipulated to be offered to those who can give back to either politicians or a governing party. State procurement developed into a path to wealth rather than offering services to the people. Individuals were placed in strategic positions in order to facilitate bribery stratagem of accessing the state coffers. National treasury became a personal wallet of the political and business elites. All bribery dealings mentioned in the state capture hearings (South African Airways, Gupta's dealings, Bosasa, Eskom,



tenderpreneurships, e.g., asbestos case in the Free State province) were purposed for the benefit of certain high-flying politicians and/or African National Congress. Bribery became a vehicle for corruption entrenchment in the state mechanisms. This sad picture is painted by Jan-Erik Lane (2022):

People play democratic games with expectations of moderate rewards. Those who succeed are paid salaries and pensions. Various democracies have different rules for the public and the private to minimize corrupt practices. Some have introduced state financing of political parties. We have here a gray zone where illegal influence is difficult to police. Yet, politicians who want the *Big Bucks* should operate in dictatorships. (p. 506)

Civil service is tainted by greed as civil servants expect a hand under the table in a 'brown envelope.' Business dealings, including tender processes are manipulated by *go ja ka lesika* (nepotism) accompanied by bribes of all complexities. Tenders are awarded to those who reward political seniors or the ruling party. This clearly shows that whenever innocent gift-giving bleeds over into efforts to extract obligations and favours, bribery is involved (Atkinson et al. 1995:202). Constitutional freedom is abused as foreign elements break the borders of state sovereignty and situate themselves in some illegal economic activities such as drugs paddling, human trafficking and money launderings. One does not go too far to validate this by current sagas involving ecclesiastical characters such as Shepherd Bushiri, Timothy Omotoso and other South African citizens wearing clerical collars colliding with the law of the land. It is disheartening that since the Zuma's presidency (the so-called 'Nine Wasted Years'), constitutional delinquency has become a political norm in South Africa. This has paved the way and created a platform of ethical contention where bribery and ethics are the contenders. South African ethical conceptions ascended to the pinnacle through multifarious acts of extortions. By extortion in this case, it is meant 'a business feeling compelled to make a substantial "gift" in order to have its product receive proper consideration' (Atkinson et al. 1995:202). All the then South African government's dealings with the Gupta fit perfectly into this definition.

## Bribery and ethics at the crossroads

From socio-theological perspectives, bribery is ethically unacceptable. It promotes corrupt political accountability, economic inequality, social disrespect and religious hypocrisy. Van der Walt (2001) makes it clear why bribery is unacceptable:

Bribery can be regarded as wrong because it creates an unjust advantage, distorts justice, creates expectations and binds the receiver to the giver's agenda. Furthermore, it prevents normal authority structures, it maintains the perverted structure of extortion, and provides only a short-term solution for a personal need. Bribery also benefits the rich and disadvantages the vulnerable and poor and provides no motivation for a person to do what he should do anyway. (p. 693)

Jesus in Mark 7:21–22 lists the sins that according to Stott (1970:141) 'are within the soil of every man's heart and lie

buried the ugly seeds of every conceivable sin.' These sins of evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride and foolishness (NLT) can all be achieved or activated through bribery, all they all are *ek tēs kardia* (coming out of heart). All these sins listed here are the embodiment of Christian ethics violation. They are inclusive of any kind of sin, bearing in mind that 'No wrongdoing is an isolated act of the pure evil will of an individual; it is nourished by our sinful inclination and reinforced by a sinful culture' (Volf 2005:216). Bribery is a masterful methodology of overruling ethical principles, prominent in many cultures. Bribery is a powerful force with a high speed of charging towards the demolition of ethical principles. A token of cash or kind can be exchanged either because of these sins or in order to accomplish some if not all of them. It can be a very interesting elaboration of each of these sins and see how they violate ethics in social life of the population. For instance, evil thoughts can be any attempt or strategy to facilitate acts of criminality using bribery as a means. This evil strategy emanates out of wickedness, greed and envy. Sins of sexual immorality, adultery and lustful desires can be the acts of illicit sex or commercial sex, which are all forms of prostitution, sex abuse or pornography. Bribery is prevalent in these kinds of sins, as some form of exchange can happen, where sex can buy job, promotion, food, accommodation, pleasure or any favour. Theft and murder involves another party whereby bribery is used either to buy a murderer to undertake elimination of human life or using extortion to steal from individuals, businesses or any corporate formation such as banks, churches, community formations such as stokvels, burial societies, community cooperatives, among others. The underlying urge to use bribery flows out of greed (*dolos*) and envy, and slander can be used in judicial procedures where justice is distorted to deny the accused the human right of protection by the law. These three (greed, envy and slander) carry the idea of lure or snare with bait (Robertson 1930:325). Foolishness (*aphrosunē*), implying that lack of sense is the power behind all these unethical activities.

In studying Christian ethics, one has to deal with these ethical challenges embodied in this list of sins. It is clear that in the nature-fallen society, bribery is the powerful tool for undertaking these, proving that 'the dominant force in a person's life is his heredity, and that the ultimate origin of his evil thoughts and deeds is his evil heart, his nature which is twisted with self-centeredness' (Stott 1970:141).

The bottom line remains that theologically and traditionally, bribery is unacceptable. The Bible consistently condemns bribery. It labels it as detestable and that by all means possible, it should be proscribed. God does not receive bribes (Dt 10:17), believers must reject any bribery offer (Ex 23:8; Dt 16:19), accepting bribes and extortions are labelled as detestable in God's eyes (Ezk 22:2; 12). These practices are viewed as oxymorons with the decadent cultures steeped in corruption; however, Christians are expected to be both the salt and the light in the world. There is a need for new

religious trend that is ethics based and Christ-driven, because the new trends, according to Jenkins (2002:13) 'have the potential to reshape political assumptions in a way that has not been seen since the rise of modern nationalism'. The world views are clashing, but there is hope, something can be done.

## What can be done?

The time is now for the citizens of the world, especially those who are afforded the freedom of speech and expression in their national democracies to break out of the shell and become vocal against the practice. Let it be known that 'Empowered by God's Spirit, people can learn to serve the poor with compassion and without paternalism' (Maldonado in Lammers & Verhey 1998:1004). This truth is also enhanced by Du Plessis and Breed's (2013) assertion that:

The Spirit-filled Church will minister the manifold grace of God in a broken world even if the ultimate sacrifice is required, and it will so become true consolers of those in pain through servant leadership. (p. 2)

If there is an agreement in the society that bribery harms national economy and personal relationships, each member of society, religious or otherwise should examine themselves and see what public role one can play to curb this national menace. Ntlha (in Kretschmar, Bentley & Van Niekerk 2009) prompts intelligently that:

The Church needs to be present in the public attempts to imagine a future free of corruption, where human rights are refined and respected, and political checks and balances are established. (pp. 294-295)

One hardly hears sermon from the pulpit addressing or condemning corruption, bribery, illicit purchase or selling of goods (back-door), etc. Responsibility lies squarely on the church to become a prophetic voice that condemns sin, calls to repentance, shapes lives, comforts the broken hearted and heals the sick society. Indeed (Makhata & Masango 2021):

The Church cannot remain silent when faced with cases of injustice in society. Any case of silence by the Church can be understood to be consent or support for the oppressors. The Church is free to challenge anybody, organisation, institution or government authority when her people are treated unjustly. The church must stand on the side of the needy by providing a prophetic voice... (p. 2)

One whimsical behaviour of traffic law enforcers in South Africa is hiding behind the trees. Even some international tourists pick it up and find it hilarious. The church does the same by hiding behind trivialities where she becomes skewed, invisible and inaudible in public spaces. She fails her divine institutional calling and role to be prophetic in the seas of corruption and bribes. One of the reasons for this docility is that the church in South Africa is enmeshed in politics. The fact remains that once the church and politics become bedfellows, compromise becomes inevitable. A good lesson was learned from the missionaries who cooperated with the colonial masters, and how the church (Nederduitse

Gereformeerde Kerk) and nationalists collaborated to justify apartheid. From then on, the church in South Africa was condemned both externally and internally, to prove that whenever the church is in corrupt society, she is attacked from without, but when she is corrupt herself, she is attacked from within (Rutler 2020:8). The turn-around or departure from the sins of the ancient architects of ethical compromises is possible only if the church 'co-operate with *prophetic discernment* towards the finding of solutions for the broken society that we have as a result of the violence of corruption' (Du Plessis & Breed 2013:2). Furthermore, 'the church has to apply *sagely wisdom* to discover the root cause as to why corruption flourishes practically unchecked in our society' (2013:2). The church as a covenant community is 'raised to live as loyal members of this community of character ... It is in communities of character that responsible people are to be formed' (Smith 2007:217, 225). Christian communities are called upon to honestly seek living according to God's Word in order to generate cultures that will counter or confront the values of the dominant culture of corruption (Carson 2008:143). Hiding behind the trees is not a solution, but incarnational visibility in the public space can be a solution. Parsley (2007:37) is correct when saying that 'A key to restoration and wholeness for our culture lies in people of faith forming, proclaiming, and contending publicly for a biblical world-view'. Church voice is to be audible in public spaces. This is what public theology is all about. The wisdom of Parsley (2007) is to be considered again:

When the church retreats into her religious enclaves and allows the world to go on its wayward course undeterred, the culture is directed by those with a point of view antithetical to the Bible. These viewpoints cannot help but prevail if those who say they uphold morality abandon the field. (p. 103)

Corruption enhanced through bribery is entrenched in South African culture. This is visible in all tiers of the government – from national to local governments. This is visible as South Africans from all walks of life, if they are honest enough, witness the dilapidating infrastructures that were inherited from the apartheid regime. Roads are under-maintained, leaving potholes that are a danger to citizens transportation mechanisms. Buildings that were of high elegance are now ruined and left falling apart. In provinces such as Northwest and Free State, corruption is so deep that former government buildings are abandoned by government departments, and through bribery, government leases buildings from private owners, who are friends of politicians or are using profits to support the ruling party. These kickbacks happen as discovered with the likes of Bosasa and SAA, as one can see in Basson's *Blessed by Bosasa: Inside Gavin Watson's state capture cult*, (2019).

The question remains: Is there hope? As bribery is a path that leads to the entrenchment of corruption in the society, those of household of faith keep reiterating: *The foundations of law and order have collapsed. What can the righteous do?* (Ps 11:3 NLT). The 'brown envelope syndrome' undermines constitutional democracy. It opens the wide gate of stratifying the society into categories of the bourgeoisie and aristocrats,

'haves and have nots', 'capitalists and socialists', among others. Hope lies with resilience from the masses against corruption. Justice Zondo, in wrapping up the Commission's Report (Haffajee 2022) remarked:

I'm quite sure that corruption has no place in a constitutional democracy. It deprives people of services they are entitled to, and we have to find mechanisms and ways to stop it or bring it to the absolute minimum. (p. 292)

South African corrupt culture demands something more profane and that is bribery. Christians are constantly taken to tasks and left within the horns of dilemma, where they are asked to 'sacrifice the truth of the gospel on the altar of political and cultural correctness' (Parsley 2007:213). This is the time for theological ethics to ascend the stage of speaking prophetically in a form of teaching and exposing the dangers of bribery, especially its consequences of enhancing poverty and minimising quality of life. Like the biblical prophets, the church should uncompromisingly adopt an advocacy stance in favour of the victims of corruption and bribery. The church with its missional mandate and prophetic calling should be vocal in denouncing corruption. Well informed and educated society on the ills such as bribery will always take a stance against any person, regardless of social status, when bribery is proposed or indicated. Confrontation of bribers should be the cultural practice so that the perpetrators can stop endeavours of practising it, knowing that as it is a social menace, it will never be accepted by those faced with it. The church is a confrontational prophet just like Nathan confronted David on behalf of Uriah, and Elijah confronted Ahab on behalf of Naboth (Wright 2004:268). The church is the mouthpiece for the victims of corruption.

Training on ethics should be part of the curriculum of training civil servants, community workers, pastors, among others. This should be thoroughly treated so that the interns may see the dangers of falling into the traps of bribery. Any human service in all social activities and interactions require certain standards of morals. Morals are shaped by ethics; therefore morals can be acquired through training and conscientisation. Morality is the means to develop human beings who can qualify to function properly within the society (Wurzbürger 1994:63). This needs thorough orientation, as 'morality is much more about duty, obligation and responsibility than about pleasure' (Cook 1990:33). Ethically educated person counts and takes it upon themselves to do the right thing responsibly, because there is a conviction that 'ethical compromise is a sin' (Pearson & Hahn 2009:14).

Any person, whether a professional, a consumer, a service provider or a tourist, can be led into awkwardness of being offered a bribe. Being offered a bribe comes usually when least expected. It should be within our human intelligence to firmly decline the offer. Of course where corruption is culturally ingrained, declining the offer may be difficult or impossible. A briber may exert some pressure on you. Apply intelligence, assess the situation and be particularly cautious with the person you are dealing with – who is bribing you, when and where you were approached and what is being

offered and what is at stake. Think and read even the small prints before attaching your signature. Make sure you do not verbalise any promise or willingness to comply. Remember, *kgomo e tshwarwa ka dinaka, motho o tshwarwa ka loleme* (You can catch or tame a cow by horns, but a person by his utterances). The main societal problem is that the bribed are angry to those demanding or offering a bribe. The problem is perpetuated by passivity. Wolterstorff (2013:174) reiterates that 'the public knows the facts and feels empathy for the victims and anger at their victimisers, but they wallow in anguished hand-wringing ... this culture of passivity is pervasive corruption'. Theology should rise and be visible and vocal.

## Conclusion

On closer scrutiny of corruption in South Africa, one realises that it involves all the mechanisms listed by Lane (2022:506): '(1) Bribery; (2) Embezzlement; (3) Patronage; (4) Favouritism; (5) Kickbacks; (6) Flawed tender; (7) Racketeering. They are all often subsumed under the label "corruption" one cannot discuss bribery without reference to corruption. Bribery is a method while corruption is the results, with ultimate goals of poverty, diminished sense of humanness, lowered quality of life, leaders with seared consciences whereby they amass wealth at the expense of the poor, economic devastations that leave the country in the hands of oligarchy. Furthermore, corruption and bribery threaten Christian mission, which is to worship God and multiply more image bearers who worship this very God (Beale & Kim 2021:26). It is a total onslaught on the 'being' of humanity, therefore mars God-human relationship in the deeper level. This scenario goes against the biblical assurance that *in him we live and move and have our being* (Ac 17:28).

The 'BES' is practised by those in power or any position of influence, and it is a social menace as discussed in this paper. It is a bribery entrenched in the culture, which is dominated by corruption. The corrupt state leads to poverty of the masses. Ethics of service with excellence disappear and the society is left with anomalies that disrespect human dignity. Bribery destroys the ethics of service, selfless life, embracing and integrity in some disarray. In that situation, political control becomes weak and gets easily manipulated, as seen with state capture in South Africa. No government or state can police against bribery. The national health requires citizenry to adopt self-discipline.

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K.T.R. is the sole author of this research article.

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