

BUILDING A CLEANER WORLD

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ABSTRAK

Korupsi dalam artian luas telah menembus semua zona dan lapisan hidup sosial masyarakat. Suburnya korupsi mencerminkan lemahnya suatu sistem pemerintahan yang memungkinkan tindakan koruptif yang merugikan banyak orang. Ketidakadilan dalam dunia hukum memperlebar peluang untuk berkorupsi. Apakah korupsi memasuki lembaga-lembaga keagamaan? Apakah mereka yang terjun dalam dunia keagamaan (departemen pemerintah dan non-pemerintah) juga terlibat dalam dunia korupsi? Tulisan ini berusaha menggali kenyataan dalam dunia keagamaan.

Introduction

When spending my summer holidays in Huettlingen (1995), a suburb parish in the Archdiocese of Rottenburg, Western Germany, an old-wise parish priest told me that a parish priest's collection bag had no bottom. At the beginning I wondered about that meaningful saying. A few minutes later I tried to grasp what he meant. Normally in the name of humanitarian needs and activities, a parish priest can easily collect money from his parishioners. After that, how does a parish priest manage the donation and collection? Does he manage it in a transparent way?

Most of the parish priests in the Catholic Church manage such a collection in coordination with the parish's pastoral council, who control the financial affairs in the whole parish. An open financial management in a parish emphasizes two fundamental elements, i.e., transparency and accountability, which can prevent corruption in the church.

Are there any areas in the world free from financial corruption? How corruption enters the church and what is a healthy financial management in the church, will be the main point of reflection in this essay. Besides, a socio-cultural and theological dimension of the church will be analyzed in the following essay.

1. Why corruption enters the Church?

Before leaving Indonesia for the Netherlands, Fr. Roland Filthaut, a former treasurer of Pontianak's Archdiocese, Indonesia, commented that if the Catholic Church's financial management is around 20% better than the civil society's financial management, the financial atmosphere in the church is still good (Willy, 2012). Up to now not all parishes or church's organizations have transparent and accountable financial administration. Sometimes, the financial field in the church is like a "mystery" for the people.

The Archdiocese of Pontianak (2016) emphasizes the importance of transparency and accountability of financial administration. An open financial management is needed. Each parishioner can check the financial situation of the parish. This signifies that each parish priest is responsible for the financial situation in a parish. A good and clean financial administration based on honesty is presupposed in running a good parish.

A couple of years ago, incredible news appeared in Singapore. A Roman Catholic priest was jailed because of financial scandal. He was accused of misusing the church's money for his private needs in Singapore and in England. How could he collect and save so

much money? How could he misuse it without any control? Where was the church's control mechanism in finance?

Our church is an integral part of the world that values money as power. Those who take power tend to corrupt and realize their vested interests as human beings. The tragic consequences of financial corruption are not always wisely considered. Without any systematic control the public finance in a parish may be misused. Therefore, the church needs to establish a control mechanism in a small parish or in an interior station of the parish. An active prevention of financial corruption is very urgent.

Seminarians or candidates of priests normally have no specific lecture on finance during their formation in minor and major seminaries. They do not learn about accounting. They are fed with sacred sciences, such as Scripture, Theology, Liturgy, Canon Law and Religious Spirituality. Hence, most of the priests are not skilled in managing financial problems. They are not experts in finance, because they are prepared to be men of prayer and good shepherds for the people.

Social atmosphere influences much of the priest's life style and activities. Nowadays, as human beings they also have to meet their daily needs as pastoral ministers, such as books, computers, mobile phones and even comfortable facilities. Some of them are saving for their future. These needs push them to work hard and collect money from day to day. In fact there is a possibility to misuse people's collection for a priest's personal needs. Recently in Indonesia some parishioners, who are experts at managing finance, have profited from religious institutions, congregations, parishes or dioceses. This experience teaches the whole Church to be much wiser and more careful about managing religious institution's finance's in the future.

It is evident that corruption enters the Catholic Church because of a lack of professionalism, transparent and accountable financial management. Not all parish priests are financial experts. Lay people have the right to get involved in managing finances in a parish. They can also control all financial mechanism in a parish or diocese. A good and healthy collaboration between a parish priest and professional lay people is needed nowadays. How is the financial situation in a parish or a diocese still credible?

2. Spiritual corruption

Is there any hidden link between financial and spiritual corruption? Based on Augustine's reflection on sin, spiritual disorder always influences our human beings' daily life. Such a disorder contradicts the eternal law (cf. *Peccatum est factum, dictum, vel concupitum contra legem aeternam*). Our daily activities express the inner climate in our hearts. The cleanness and generosity of our hearts will cleanse our life. Daily financial corruption is an expression of spiritual corruption.

Spiritual corruption can be paralleled with human beings' sins that principally destruct the conscience. A clean and clear conscience helps us to avoid so many bad things. Normally the main root of the spiritual corruption lies in human selfishness. They only think of themselves and fulfill their own needs. They forget the social dimension of their salvation. They do what they will. God's will and commandment have no room in their lives. They don't consider much about the good and evil in daily life. Gradually spiritual corruption blinds their conscience and the fundamental options.

Dishonesty is the first fruit of spiritual corruption. Being honest is a process of living the truth in daily life. Honesty should be the first lesson in every family. Living in the truth and telling a truth is a typical character of Jesus' disciples. Honesty is one the greatest virtues in social life. Without honesty there will be no trust, no true dialogue and

no good collaboration. In this modern world it is very hard to live honesty in whatever field. A professor of a university has a tendency to commit plagiarism in his academic research. A bank's treasurer tends to enrich him/herself by misusing finances. A President of a rich country has a big chance to commit corruption. Why? According to Augustine, humans use their free will to promote their own selfish desires. Evil is the consequence of the poor choice of the free will. It takes much time to live honesty in social life. Normally those who live in honesty will emphasize fairness in relationship to others.

Since spiritual corruption influences our daily life, so to a well ordered spiritual life is needed in the context of bettering a person's conscience. How can we put such a spiritual life into practice? The following three important steps will guide us to reach this harmonious spiritual life.

Firstly, on one hand it is necessary to reform and renew our spiritual life day by day in the light of the Holy Spirit's presence that transforms the person's selfish tendency. Spiritual discernment guides our whole life to the process of rebirth as children of God. On the other hand, a spiritual openness from each of us is presupposed in the context of spiritual reform.

Secondly, a spiritual reformed life will help us to live in a better and much wiser way, although a crisis of spiritual value challenges our modern world. As a socio-religious system each religion cannot guarantee a human beings' religious transform. Religion is only a means that shows us the religious value that will help us to be united with God. Without God's intervention there will be no spiritual change.

Thirdly, a spiritual corruption can be overcome if there is a good collaboration between people of different background and social groups who have the same vision and mission to better daily life. Jesus' call to become salt, light and yeast is a call to bring spiritual change in our thought (*metanoia*), change of our heart (*metocardia*) and newness into our world. This call is very urgent for a better and cleaner world.

3. Building a cleaner world

Corruption spreads all over the world, although the intensity of corruption is quite different from one country to another country. Why does corruption grow so rapidly in whatever field of our lives? How can we build a cleaner world?

When a financial control system is weak, normally there will be a great chance to misuse finances in an organization. In fact a strong tendency to realize ones vested interests is undeniable. An elected president, for instance, will appoint those who can protect him from whatever danger which could happen during his governance.

An Indonesian accountant who controls NGO financial reports commented that financial corruption also takes place in NGO activities. Much money goes into the personal pockets. How can NGO movements apply a just system in their humanitarian activities? On one side the NGO members are to investigate and improve a social system; but on the other hand they also misuse the trust given by their sponsors. It is quite hard to look for clean members of any non-governmental organization.

Law enforcement is a pre-conditional requirement to create a cleaner world day by day. Our society is waiting for the coming of distributive and legal justice in daily life. Manipulation of civil and canonical laws destructs the whole system for a cleaner world. A better world and society presupposes a good collaboration of those who take part in taking decisions and spending money for social needs.

A well organized education system is one of the most influential elements for a cleaner world. All members in a society should take part actively in building a cleaner world. If everybody is clean at home, schools, work places, offices, churches, mosques, temples and public places, automatically the whole society will become cleaner and cleaner. A cleaner world is only a dream that cannot be realized in daily life if there is no effort to actually realize it.

4. Towards a healthy financial management

In the 83rd General Chapter of Capuchin Order in Rome from 28th August to 17th September 2006, Fr. John Corriveau, O.F.M Cap, now a Bishop of Canada, highlighted the importance of transparency and accountability in financial management.

Firstly, financial transparency has a spiritual dimension. St. Francis of Assisi' spirituality of transparency is one of the most influential spiritual foundations for financial transparency. This spirituality is based on the pure and sanctified simplicity. He is conscious that God is omnipresent and omniscient in the world. God knows and sees everything. There is nothing hidden before Him. In this transparency Francis emphasizes the value of honesty before God and others. He speaks and acts honestly. A mutual trust is emphasized in a transparent system. Lying is an act that cannot be tolerated. Everybody may know exactly what is happening. A constructive critique is needed for bettering the future.

Secondly, accountability in finance is a vital value for a healthy financial management. Everybody should be responsible for what he has done. Financial accountability is based on concrete data and facts in a transaction. There should be no financial manipulations in a religious institution. A fictive report contradicts with the spirituality of transparency. Besides, all financial contribution should be managed in a transparent way. Parishioners also have their right to know how their donation is managed for the sake of humanitarian activities. People's systematic control can avoid financial misuse in daily life.

Thirdly, an open management is an undeniable demand for today's people when discussing about financial atmosphere. This management will help us to see the concrete situation in the Church. Do parish priest and all members of parish council take responsibility for the usage of the money? Do they make a parish's budget regularly?

Conclusion

Our consciousness of financial corruption motivates us to be honest to handle finance in whatever field we get involved. A sense of responsibility will help us to manage it in a transparent and accountable way so that financial abuses can be prevented. How can we face the strong tendency to misuse finance in pastoral ministry? All pastoral policies and activities should be motivated by the spirituality at workplace.

A good habit is presupposed when managing finance in ecclesial organizations. This habit should be based on the good motivation to better the whole financial system from day to day. Without any transparency in handling a financial problem, there will be a big chance for the Church to mishandle it in the context of ecclesial ministry. Misuse of pastoral power will worsen financial corruption of the Church.

A good education system is needed for building a better and cleaner world. All seminarians need to be trained as good shepherds who are really responsible for managing a clean financial system. Collaboration among all the social systems will influence a more honest financial world. Parents, teachers and pastors are the main educator for a healthier financial management. How can we realize it?

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Vol. 1, No.2, Desember 2016

MABIS

Jurnal Ilmiah Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Ekonomi
Widya Dharma Pontianak

ISSN : 2088-4605