

Corruption Has Ancient Roots.
Posted On:January 01, 1970

Political corruption is as old as civilization (the birth of city-states). It is a big issue in the dysfunction of the entire world today, but there are differences in the way different cultures regard it.

Political corruption is abuse of power by those in trusted authority: people that Plato in his imagined perfect society (The Republic) called "the guardians." He, like most great civilizations after ancient Greece, recognized that leadership has responsibility and that rule of law must not be for sale. Plato went further than anyone else in imagining that such guardians (law makers and soldiers) must not be tempted by money. To this end, he designed his utopia so that the guardians never had biological families, thus eliminating the handing down of wealth.

The Republic is a fantasy, of course, but the issue of the corruption of leadership has always roiled every great civilization. What matters is how the civilization regards corruption and how it punishes it. The United States jailed a group of congressmen taking bribes some years ago. The worst, and most difficult corruption to address, however, is local, when police and small town mayors create a state of intimidation for their citizens. But eventually these too are apprehended.

Western civilizations long-held distaste for corruption has roots in the Jewish scriptures. The example was that of King David, who used his power to send the husband of a woman he coveted to the battlefield front lines where he was killed. He was punished by God and his countrymen and was compelled to publically repent his abuse of power.

Christianity began with objections to corruption: both the corruption of the Romans in a brutal occupation, and the corruption of their own leadership: both king and priests. In the late Middle Ages, corruption again became an issue with the selling of indulgences by the Vatican. Distaste for this corruption of religion played a role in the rise of Protestantism, which introduced strict ethical values not only for their rulers, but also their citizens. We are all the heirs of this system of ethical responsibility, and even when we fall from that standard, we know we are wrong.

The Chinese developed the world's first system of civil service, in which officials (Mandarins) were appointed after passing rigorous exams. Their purpose was to have the most intelligent and talented bureaucrats rather than the most politically connected. This did not prevent all corruption, but it did better than most other systems of the time.

The outlier in this examination is the Muslim world, which is particularly suffering from corruption on all levels of governance today. This should be no surprise when we see cults such as ISIS enacting the basic historic values of their religion. Recently ISIS overran an Iraqi city with Iraq's remaining Christian minority. They arrived and announced that the citizens had a choice: convert to Islam, pay the religious tax (protection money), or leave immediately. When asked about their possessions, ISIS told them that they must leave them as booty for ISIS.

We must remember that Islam began as a religion of the Arab Bedouin, whose only livelihood came from raiding and looting merchant caravans. The Prophet Mohammad spent ten years as a missionary who attempted to persuade peacefully, but his last ten years were as a warlord conquering, forcing conversion, executing resisters, and taking as booty possessions and women. This became a model thereafter throughout the conquest of the great swath they occupied.

Many scholars praise Islam's religious toleration: that people could keep their religion if they paid an annual tax, not noting that this tax-paying was supposed to humiliate the payer publically, and was usually extortionate. The purpose was to make conversion a better option, until the first Caliph realized that they needed money more than they needed hordes of new converts. They quit pushing conversion for a few years.

Today, where clan is more important than conscience or nation, corruption is the normal mode of operating. Global criticism and widespread communications are helping to expose this bad practice.

676 words

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