

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 18

Volume 18 • Number 3 • July 1994

Evangelical Review of Theology

*Articles and book reviews original and selected from
publications worldwide for an international
readership for the purpose of discerning the
obedience of faith*

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Published by
PATERNOSTER PERIODICALS

Alternatives to Bribery: Philippines

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Reprinted with permission from Bribery and the Bible (Singapore, Campus Crusade Asia, 1991) Chapter 7.

*The author distinguishes between transactional bribes, variance bribes and extortion. A **transactional** bribe is a payment made to a public official so that he will accelerate the performance of his duty; for example, to speed-up the process of granting a visa. In the Philippines this is called 'grease money'. A **variance** bribe is payment to an official to secure the suspension or non-application of a norm; for example, granting a visa to a person who is not qualified to receive. **Extortion** is the action of an official to extract from a person what he has no legal or moral right to; for example, an official refuses to grant a building permit unless money is given. It is similar to robbery and the complement of bribery.*

In the earlier chapters the author discusses Old Testament and New Testament perspectives on bribery and extortion but makes no reference to the relationship of conscience to moral law. We suggest that more attention needs to be given to the relationship of Natural Law to Revealed Law in discussing moral issues with people of other Faiths, especially those who have no knowledge of biblical law.

Editor

BRIBERY IN THE PHILIPPINES

Bribery became deeply embedded in the Philippines during the Spanish colonial rule and continues to be tolerated today. The continued toleration of bribery can be explained in part by the conflict in values in a society in transition from a traditional way of life to a modern one. Although most Filipinos believe bribery is wrong, many either practise it or have **P. 249** a fatalistic tolerance of it. They tend to distrust the government and rely more on *family* ties, intermediaries, and reciprocal relationships than on the prescribed procedures.

Several cultural values, including a fatalistic acceptance of the status quo, work against resisting bribery and extortion and favour following the path of least resistance. An array of social problems and inequities continues to provide an atmosphere conducive to corruption. The government has progressively increased its intervention in the domestic economy, requiring Filipinos to interact with governmental agencies more than ever before. It has taken some steps to reduce corruption, but the efforts to reduce bribery and extortion have for the most part been ineffective.

I. VARIANCE BRIBES ARE CONDEMNED

In applying the scriptural teaching on bribery to the Philippine context, let us first consider which practices fall under the condemnation of Scripture and which do not. Variance bribes are often initiated by the briber to evade a Philippine law. However, sometimes a government official takes the initiative offering to suspend the law in a particular case in exchange for money, even though the merits of the case do not warrant it. Most Philippine laws are generally fair and just. So it would be unusual that a variance bribe would actually support or uphold justice as might be the case in a society with

grossly unjust laws. These types of variance practices distort justice, are often motivated by greed, and clearly fall under the condemnation of Scripture as bribery.

Although most Philippine laws are fair and just, some laws are unrealistic. This is especially true of custom fees which may place duties, taxes, or fees of 100–200 percent or higher on some imported products such as electrical appliances or electronic goods. Customs officers accept bribes to overlook these items or else greatly undervalue the item. For example, a new television that sold for \$250 in Hong Kong might be valued at \$50 and the appropriate customs charges levied on that basis. Information about customs duties is not published in a form readily available to those who come and go from the Philippines. So the traveling public is often unaware of what the precise fees are supposed to be. Because of this uncertainty and because of the lack of uniform enforcement of these laws, many people take their chances and resort to bribes if it looks as if they will be charged too much.

Laws which are unrealistic and open to uneven enforcement provide more opportunity for bribery to occur. Therefore, in seeking to reduce bribery, it would be helpful if these kinds of laws were modified to be more realistic, clearly communicated to those effected by them, and evenly enforced.¹ However, although p. 250 these laws may provide an opportunity for bribery, they do not provide a legitimate excuse for it. Scripture stands opposed to those who offer or receive bribes in relation to laws of this kind. For while these laws may be somewhat unreasonable, they are certainly not grossly unjust. The primary motivation of the bribe receiver in these cases is personal gain, and the primary motivation of the bribe giver is to escape paying what is legally due.

II. EXTORTIONERS ARE CONDEMNED

Much of the crime committed by policemen or soldiers in the Philippines involves extortion. 'For example, traffic policemen extorting motorists for unauthorized, on-the-spot "fines" are a common sight on Manila's busy thoroughfares.'² This may occur when a motorist violates a traffic law and a policeman uses his discretionary powers to extort a variance bribe for his own personal gain rather than justly enforce the law or issue the appropriate warning. A policeman may resort to overt extortion, threatening greater adverse consequences than what is just under the law or extorting money when no law has been broken. All these practices clearly fall under the condemnation of Scripture. The Old Testament condemns extortion in general, and John the Baptist specifically condemned extortion by soldiers. These types of practices involve the unjust use of authority, oppress the victims, and undermine the public confidence in those sworn to enforce the law.

Another common practice in the Philippines occurs when an official requires a person to make an unauthorized payment to ensure the official does what he is supposed to do in the first place. This is extortion of a transactional bribe. While Scripture does not categorically condemn transactional bribes, those who extort them are guilty of extortion

¹ Myrdal cites a study in India which recommended reducing to a minimum the discretionary powers of civil servants in their dealing with the public as a short-term means of reducing bribery. It also recommended 'simpler and more precise rules and procedures for political and administrative decisions that affect private persons and business enterprises.' Myrdal, 'Corruption: Causes and Effect,' 543. Gorospe adds, 'Law is not the main problem in the Philippines, but the unwillingness or inability of corrupt officials to enforce the law equally for all.' Gorospe, 'New Morality,' 361–362.

² 'Crimes in Philippines,' *Orange County Register*, 04.

and are thus condemned. Both the extortioner of transactional bribes and the extortioner of variance bribes are condemned by Scripture.

The extortioner of transactional bribes is guilty of oppressing the one who is entitled to his services. He is also guilty of failing to carry out his official duties without inducements other than what is prescribed by law. For many years the Philippine Penal Code has classified bribery and extortion as 'crimes committed by public officers'.³

In bribery both the giver and receiver are guilty. In extortion the guilt falls primarily on the extortioner. John Ting says, 'In the Bible, the greater condemnation seems to be leveled against those who exploit their power to demand bribes than those who give under pressure.'⁴ Philips states, 'Moral justifications and excuses for complying with the demands of an extortionist are easier p. 251 to come by than moral justifications and excuses for offering bribes.'⁵ According to Joseph Farraher, moral theologian of Gregorian University, giving a bribe to an extortionist 'may be tolerated ... if it is the only practicable way to obtain a decision that should be made'. But Farraher adds that 'efforts should be made to change the system which permits such action'.⁶

Unfortunately, it is not always easy to distinguish extortion from bribery in the Philippines. The distinction between bribery and certain forms of extortion is often not clear. This is because the official may be very subtle in his solicitations from the petitioner. He may deliberately set aside the petitioner's papers to continue reading the newspaper or say, 'Oh, it's time for *merienda* [coffee break].' These cues tell the petitioner that if he wants his request attended to without delays and problems, he should give something to the official. The petitioner, not wanting problems or delays, often slips the official some money. He may even say, 'This is for your *merienda*.'

Another contributing factor to the blurring of the distinction between bribery and extortion is the Philippine cultural value of maintaining smooth interpersonal relations. Filipinos often anticipate and read subtle cues in order to maintain smooth interpersonal relations. The petitioner would usually rather pay than cause a scene, as long as the amount is not too great. The petitioner is a victim, but not exactly a reluctant victim. He has come to expect this and quickly complies.

Although the government might not approve of this practice, it is not likely to do much to stop it, as long as it receives the payment due under the law. One Cabinet under-secretary stated,

The bureaucratic nature of government lends itself to extortion of bribes. If a petitioner for any sort of favor wants to receive timely attention to his request, he must be prepared to pay a bribe.⁷

Unless extortion is overt, habitual, and the victims are willing to testify against the extortioner, it is hard to gather evidence and prosecute such crimes even if there is a desire to do so.

II I. TRANSACTIONAL BRIBES ARE QUESTIONABLE

³ Abueva, 'What Are We in Power For!' 203.

⁴ John Ting, 'Biblical Ethics in a Fallen World', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 7 (October 1983): 329.

⁵ Philips, 'Bribery,' 630.

⁶ Joseph Farraher, 'Bribery', *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Religion*, 1979:1:524.

⁷ Bernard Wideman, 'Cracking Down on the "Backsliders",' *Far Eastern Economic Review* 86 (November 29, 1974): 24.

What about the transactional bribe in which the petitioner freely offers a bribe in exchange for speedy service? Some might look at this as a 'tip' given for fast service. Many people would tend to look at this as a bribe rather than a tip, since they regard a tip as something offered after the service is performed. However, in some cultures a pre-service tip is extended in anticipation of prompt service. My experience in the Philippines and interviews with Filipinos indicate the appropriate time to tip in the Philippines is after the service is rendered. Tips are given openly and encouraged in P. 252 the Philippines, while transactional bribes are usually given subtly. Almost all the Filipinos whom I interviewed made a clear distinction between a tip and a bribe. Two out of every three people I interviewed indicated it is not appropriate to tip a government worker. It should also be noted that it is more than timing that differentiates a transactional bribe from a tip. The transaction bribe is given to 'a public official, and a sanction, though often mild [such as delays], is often imposed for nonpayment.'⁸

In examining transactional bribes from a scriptural viewpoint, we discovered they were bribes if they resulted in partiality in the administration of justice. It was suggested earlier that we ask key applicational questions including, 'Is it undercutting impartiality and promoting favouritism?' But the answer to this question is not always clear. To time-oriented people with a 'first come first served' mentality, serving a person who came later before one who was there earlier, would show favouritism. Many Filipinos would not view it this way.⁹ As long as his request is approved, he would not necessarily feel that he was treated unfairly if someone's request, submitted after his request, was approved before his.

Furthermore, in many instances in the Philippines it is not a case of giving the official something so that he will attend to your request instead of someone else's; but rather that he will attend to your case instead of leaving the office early or taking a long coffee break. The net short-term result may be that he processes more requests than he would have if no grease money had been offered.

However, studies indicate the long-term results are less than desirable. Francis Lui used a queuing model to test the results of customer service when bribery is permitted in order for the server to receive more bribe revenue and thus speed up work output. The results were compared with those when bribery is not allowed. Lui's abstract states, 'None of the customers are [sic] better off with bribery.'¹⁰ Gould and Amaro-Reyes report on findings in India that show 'the practice of giving "speed money" was actually the cause of administrative delays because civil servants got into the habit of holding back all papers from the clients until some kind of payment was made to them.'¹¹ Uzobeyi Anigboh reports similar results in Nigeria where the expectation of bribes is 'directly responsible for causing' administrative delays.¹²

⁸ Reisman, *Folded Lies*, 70.

⁹ Although the average Filipino may not be as time-oriented as the average American, those whom I interviewed indicated time is an important motivator in relationship to transactional bribes. The most frequent response I received to the interview question 'Why do Filipinos sometimes offer bribes?' was 'to speed things up.'

¹⁰ Francis T. Lui, 'Essays on the Economics of Corruption (Queuing, Bribery, Deterrence, Crime, Punishment)' (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1985), abstract.

¹¹ Gould and Amaro-Reyes, *Effects of Corruption*, 33.

¹² Uzobeyi A. Anigboh, 'The Extent to Which Corruption Has Hindered the Effective Implementation of Economic Development in Africa: A Case Study of Nigeria from 1970 to 1983' (Ph.D. diss., Howard University, 1984), 289.

After discussing the arguments p. 253 given by those who point to the benefits of corruption versus those who point to the negative effects of corruption, Gould and Amaro-Reyes conclude with the following statement:

The available data suggests that corruption has a deleterious effect on administrative efficiency and political economic development. Even under circumstances of benign corruption, the costs incurred in administrative and political performance far exceed the benefits derived from relative gains in economic efficiency.¹³

Alatas shows that those who claim to see some positive aspects of corruption do so on the basis of theoretical models or deductive theories rather than actual instances.¹⁴

The actual negative effect of bribery in less developed countries boggles one's mind.¹⁵

Earlier we acknowledged that asking the Key Applicational Questions previously stated may show that a transactional bribe is not really a bribe in certain cases. However, there are dangers in offering transactional bribes even under the 'purest circumstances'. Transactional bribes tend to foster greed and lead to more extreme forms of bribery and corruption.¹⁶ This in turn perpetuates the cycle of corruption that tends to exclude the poor, who cannot afford a bribe, from 'many public services designed for their benefit'.¹⁷ The missionary who gives transactional bribes may unwittingly be contributing to the oppression of those people at the lowest end of the socio-economic scale, those for whom the Scripture tells us God is especially concerned. Because transactional bribes fall into the category of doubtful things, this problem needs to be examined thoroughly by the Filipino Christian community.

Filipino Christians and missionaries as the people of God need to be careful not to perpetuate the cycle of bribery and corruption in the Philippines. Instead they should model the ideal behaviour as the apostle Paul did with Felix. In the Philippines the ideal behaviour is not to give or receive bribes. By avoiding even transactional bribes whenever possible, missionaries and Filipino Christians reinforce ideal values and help break the cycle of bribery.

This does not completely rule out showing appreciation to an official for his assistance in the form of a gift. But to avoid the dangers we have discussed money should not be given. Also, it would be better to give the gift sometime after the service has been completed, to give things that are not very expensive, and not to give something every time. For example, after a customs official has inspected a shipment of Christian books or Bibles, it might be appropriate to give him one. Or you p. 254 might give a clerk with whom you regularly deal a small gift at Christmas or on his/her birthday. Gifts like this can be given openly, show appreciation, and are unlikely to create favouritism or encourage corruption.

IV. A CALL TO PREACH AND TO TEACH

¹³ Gould and Amaro-Reyes, *Effects of Corruption*, 28.

¹⁴ Alatas, *The Problem of Corruption*, 30.

¹⁵ Summaries of some of the negative effects of bribery are found in Rafailzadeh, 'Economics of Bribery,' 240, and in Alatas, *The Problem of Corruption*, 25-26, 92-97.

¹⁶ Alatas affirms, 'The type of bribery alleged to promote efficiency has the tendency to develop and extend the habit in areas where it is difficult to promote efficiency.' Alatas, *The Problem of Corruption*, 18.

¹⁷ John S. Nichols, 'The Real Victims of Foreign Bribery', *Revista del Desarrollo Internacional*, 18 (1976): 39.

Filipino pastors and foreign missionaries need to teach what the Scripture says concerning bribery. During the eight years I lived in the Philippines I never heard a sermon or message that addressed the subject. Only a few of the Filipinos whom my wife or I interviewed concerning bribery could recall having ever heard a priest, pastor, or missionary speak on the subject. Yet, all expressed that bribery was a significant problem in the Philippines. It seems strange to me that a 222-page book entitled *Philippine Social Issues from A Christian Perspective*, written by six authors from the Philippine context, says nothing about bribery. Although the book addresses many important social issues, only one page is devoted to 'The Public Servant' with only a few sentences related to providing impartial treatment to the people.¹⁸

Rodney Henry indicates that in the Philippines Christianity in general and Protestant Christianity in particular has answered many of the ultimate questions in life, but has often not seriously addressed many of the questions of everyday life. Henry applies this to the spirit world, but it also applies to many other areas of life.¹⁹ Nacpil make a similar charge when he states, 'The churches do very little to equip their people for life in the real world; they train their laity mainly for participation in the activities of the church.'²⁰ Jacano charges that Protestants on the island of Panay have often failed to teach the Bible in such a way that the people grasp how it relates to their everyday life.²¹

This is a crucial time to address this subject. One reason is because of the transition taking place in Philippine values. The dilemma of conflicting values during the present period of transition helps create a hunger to know what is right and why it is right. Teaching what the Bible says about bribery can help solve this dilemma by reinforcing those values that work against corruption.

In addition, the shocking corruption under Marcos and the sad state of the Philippine economy has set the stage for Filipinos to seriously consider the subject. It illustrates the truth of [Proverbs 29:4](#), 'The King gives stability to the land by justice, but a man who takes bribes overthrows it.' The systematic tearing down of the Philippine economy and the resulting devastation brought p. 255 upon countless Filipinos provide a powerful illustration of the destruction that bribery brings to the nation. It should be used to help jar people out of a complacent attitude toward bribery. In addition, the betrayal of Jesus by bribery and the bribery associated with the 'cover up' story about the resurrection should serve as strong illustrations in the Philippine setting where Good Friday is the most sacred and faithfully observed holiday of the year. It would be wise to point out the progressive escalation of bribery in that account and compare it to what has happened in the Philippines.

In the past it has largely been the press and politicians who denounced bribery. The press wrote about corruption, at least in part, to sell newspapers. Many politicians denounced bribery largely for political reasons—to attract attention, or cover their own corruption, or increase their own power base by getting rid of public officials from the opposition party. It is time for the people of God, who have purer motives for denouncing bribery, to address this issue.

¹⁸ Richard P. Poethig, ed., *Philippine Social Problems from a Christian Perspective*, (Manila: United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 1963), 135–136.

¹⁹ Rodney Henry, *Filipino Spirit World*, (Manila: OMF Publishers, 1986).

²⁰ Nacpil, 'A Gospel for the New Filipino', 120.

²¹ F. Landa Jocano, 'Conversion and Patterning of Christian Experience in Malitbog, Central Panay, Philippines,' in *Acculturation in the Philippines: Essays on Changing Societies*, ed. Peter G. Gowing and William Henry Scott (Quezon City, Philippines: New Day Publisher, 1977), 65.

Simply teaching that bribery is wrong is insufficient. Long-standing practices change slowly unless the values behind them change.²² Values change by instruction and example which demonstrates a better way. Instruction on the character of God is foundational. The natural tendency of man to think he can manipulate God needs to be effectively counteracted. Gorospe states, 'Many Filipino Catholics make novenas to obtain favors from God. They feel they have done something for God and expect Him in turn to reciprocate.'²³ Confession, praying to Mary, attending Church or Mass and doing good deeds replaced former animistic sacrifices and rituals as ways of gaining God's favour. Teaching on 'God who cannot be bribed' and to whom we owe 'a debt of gratitude' brings the character of God into clearer focus for Filipinos in both Christian nurture and evangelism. From the foundation of God's character, we should give specific application showing why we are not to show favouritism or offer or receive bribes. It should be shown that bribery contradicts God's impartial character, distorts justice, tears down the nation, and is a form of dishonest gain.

Paul's experience with Felix in [Acts 24](#) should be employed when teaching concerning bribery because it contains many parallels to the current Philippine setting. Illustrations from people in the Philippines who resisted extortion and solicitations of bribes and who refused to accept bribes should be incorporated into the instruction. The biblical teaching on contentment should not be overlooked.

The giving and receiving of variance bribes and other practices which distort justice, such as the use of one's office to extort transactional bribes, should be strongly condemned. Since transactional bribes do not clearly fall within the scriptural boundaries of a bribe, and [p. 256](#) given the history of bribery in the Philippines, the foreign missionary should not be too quick to condemn those who submit to extortion or those who give or receive transactional bribes. An understanding approach of suggesting and demonstrating alternatives would be more appropriate. If Filipino Christian leaders determine a more vigorous approach is appropriate, then it would best for them to take the lead in advocating it.

Instruction concerning bribery needs to be related to Philippine cultural values. Gorospe believes that many Filipinos are not consciously aware of the conflicting values present in their lives. Therefore, he calls for helping people to become aware of the 'two inconsistent norms of morality' which are operating in their life. One norm he calls 'the ideal Christian norm of morality'. He calls the other 'the actual Filipino norm of morality'.²⁴ Bringing people to an awareness of this conflict of norms in their own life is an important initial step to reconciling the conflict.

Bulatao thinks one reason why Filipinos are often unaware of the inconsistency of values in their 'Split-level Christianity' is because they have not seen 'actual models in whom the split has been overcome'. He believes if Christian authority figures get closer to the people and the situations they face, they will be better able to translate the 'Christian system of thought and action' into the everyday life of the people.²⁵

Gorospe acknowledges certain Filipino values have contributed to corruption. But he advocates integrating Filipino values with Christian values rather than discarding Filipino

²² Mydral points to changes in moral values as a key long-term solution to bribery. Mydral, 'Corruption: Causes and Effects,' 543.

²³ Gorospe, 'Filipino Values,' 211.

²⁴ Ibid., 196.

²⁵ Bulatao, *Split-Level Christianity*, 10-14.

values 'as altogether evil'.²⁶ He believes, 'We should accept and preserve whatever is positive and good and reject what is exaggerated, corrupt or evil.'²⁷

Espiritu and other Philippine sociologists also recommend this approach. They suggest exploring, understanding, accentuating, and reinforcing the 'positive aspects' of Filipino cultural values while discouraging 'their negative aspects'.²⁸ For example they advocate balancing the desire for smooth interpersonal relations, which may sacrifice 'truth, accuracy, and precision, ... with the value of sincerity and authenticity so that the Filipino individual can become tactfully truthful, considerate but firm, kind and consistent'. Concerning *utang na loob* they emphasize it 'reflects deep gratitude, thoughtfulness, and appreciation for any act of kindness received and in turn a willingness to be of help when needed'. However, 'when abused it can be manipulative and a hindrance to freedom of decision'.²⁹ Therefore, it should be balanced by teaching *utang na loob* toward God in response to Christ's voluntary sacrifice for us. That truly is a debt that we can never repay but one which demands our highest allegiance and commitment. Gorospe also refers to Jamie Bulatao's suggestion p. 257 to modify *utang na loob* to apply not only to individuals but also the people of the community in order to foster a loyalty to what is best for the community as a whole.³⁰

Likewise, *hiya* (shame) has positive aspects, but it can be a problem when it is given a higher place than honesty, impartiality, and responsibility. One possible correction is to expand *hiya* to include *hiya* toward God to avoid being ashamed before him. Passages such as [Mark 8:38](#) can be utilized to instill a desire to avoid being shamed before God as an even higher priority than avoiding being shamed before other people.

V. A CALL TO DEMONSTRATE ALTERNATIVES

In addition to teaching on bribery and reforming cultural values into harmony with Christian values, foreign missionaries and Filipino Christians can help break the cycle of bribery by demonstrating alternatives. For example, when I moved back to the Philippines in 1981, I was careful to abide by the Philippine customs laws in shipping my household effects. The broker handling my shipment told me that he would need some extra money to facilitate the release of our shipment through Philippine customs. I responded that I was willing to pay any customs and duties owed to the government, but that I would not pay grease money. He said in that case I had better go to customs with him, because the customs men would think he had been given 'grease money' and would expect him to give them some. Even though it meant I had to make a long trip to Manila when our shipment arrived (probably costing more than a transactional bribe would have), I went to customs with my broker. I sought to be pleasant and patient with the customs officials. Although, it usually takes a day or more to get through port customs, we finished in a few hours with no problems. When we were almost finished the broker leaned over to me and whispered, 'God is with you.' My actions were not only a powerful witness to the broker, but also demonstrated an alternative to a transactional bribe.

²⁶ Gorospe, 'Filipino Values,' 208.

²⁷ Ibid., 209.

²⁸ Espiritu and others, *Sociology Philippine*, 75.

²⁹ Ibid., 76.

³⁰ Gorospe, 'Filipino Values,' 223.

I can imagine the impact that a Christian government official would have, if when offered grease money, he would graciously decline it saying, 'Don't worry. I will help you. Use that to help some needy person.' Indeed, during the course of interviewing Filipinos, I came across a former university professor and lawyer who is now a government employee who does this. He indicated that when he is offered a bribe he turns it down. But to soften the impact of repudiating the person's offer he suggests the person give the money to the church. In doing so he does not compromise his convictions or office, but he also maintains smooth interpersonal relations and does not shame the one making the offer.

[Luke 14:12-14](#) and [Ephesians 6:7-9](#) are helpful passages from the perspective of the official who turns down bribes. Both passages establish the principle of divine reciprocity i.e., God pays for the poor ([Lk. 14:14](#)) and God rewards for good service ([Eph. 6:7](#))—if not now then p. 258 at the future resurrection. Officials who refuse to use their office for personal gain should receive praise and encouragement from the Christian community and be regularly assured that God will reciprocate in his time.

The example of the widow's persistence with the unrighteous judge in [Luke 18:1-8](#) demonstrates another alternative to bribery applicable to the Philippine context. Persistence and prayer go a long way in obtaining appropriate action in the Philippine context if you treat those in authority with respect. The standard reply for a request at many Philippine government offices seems to be 'Come back tomorrow.' My standard reply is 'It's okay—I'll just wait here.' But such a reply should be given graciously with a smile on the face and a prayer in the heart. Getting angry, losing patience, or telling off the clerk are not only a poor witness, but are often counterproductive. While waiting it is important to keep visible. 'Out of sight, out of mind,' is an adage which should not be forgotten.

Jose Rapanut, an officer in the Baguio City Department of Local Government and Development, suggests another alternative to bribery. Rapanut says that it has become customary for Filipinos to file their transactions with the government at the last minute which produces an atmosphere of bribery. Bribery occurs because a person wanting to beat the deadline is willing to pay a bribe so that his papers will be attended to immediately. A Filipino attorney whom my wife interviewed also pointed to the habit of waiting until the last minute as one reason why Filipinos sometimes offer bribes. Rapanut believes that bribery could be diminished if people would file the papers well in advance.³¹

However, not all situations will be easy. A Filipino under the threat of extortion may face far greater pressure than a missionary would face, because the missionary often has a relatively high status and more resources upon which to draw. Just as the Psalmist prayed that God would preserve him from oppression ([Ps. 119:121-122](#)), so missionaries and national Christians can pray that God would preserve them from those who seek to extort bribes. While in the midst of the pressure to offer a bribe, they need to cling to God's promises, remembering God promises life to those who hate bribes ([Prov. 15:27](#)) and justice to those who ask and trust him for it ([Luke 18:7-8](#)), and remembering that the righteous who refrains from bribery 'will never be shaken' ([Ps. 15:5](#)).

Resisting extortion and refraining from bribery in the Philippines may result in suffering. [1 Peter 3:13-17](#) brings God's perspective to that situation. Blessing results for those who suffer for doing what is right (v. [14](#)). The believer need not fear the threats of corrupt men; but he should remain steadfast to Christ and be ready to give an answer in

³¹ Jose Rapanut, comments made in class on Christianity and Social Issues, International School of Theology—Asia, Baguio City, Philippines, 1987.

defence of his conduct (v. [14-15](#)). In the Philippine context, he may be asked such questions as 'Why don't you give me something to take care [p. 259](#) of it for you?' An answer given 'with gentleness and respect' (v. [15](#)) which upholds God's standards is likely to have a significant impact in that setting. The missionary or national Christian who does not give grease money will probably spend more time, effort, and even money in dealing with officials than those who give grease money. But he will probably have more opportunities to witness and demonstrate genuine Christian character in places where compromise and corruption have become common.

Sometimes in our eagerness to carry out our 'mission' we may overlook those opportunities God gives us in unpleasant or routine situations to carry out an 'unanticipated mission'. The unanticipated mission may at times have a greater impact than the announced mission because it demonstrates true Christian conduct in the kind of everyday situations with which Filipinos can easily identify. The gospel has been lived out far more in the hospitals, schools, and churches in the Philippines than in government offices. Yet, an authentic Christian lifestyle and witness in those offices may have the greater impact. This conclusion is reinforced by Alatas. After an extensive study of corruption in Asia from a historical and political viewpoint Alatas states, 'Saintly and charismatic religious personalities have been the most important single factor mitigating corruption throughout Asian history.'³²

Missionaries and national Christians should also remember the consequences when King Asa, under pressure, sought to work things out by a bribe, rather than relying on the Lord ([1 Ki. 15:18](#)). Although the bribe accomplished the short run objective, which it often does, the long range consequences were disastrous ([2 Chr. 16:9](#)). Conversely, we should remember how Paul withstood Felix's solicitation for a bribe for two years. This provided Paul with the opportunity to give a strong witness for Christ to Festus and King Agrippa. It should also be recalled that God used the foreign King Cyrus to free the exiles and rebuild Jerusalem without giving Cyrus any payment or bribe ([Isa. 45:13](#)).

Filipino pastors and Christian leaders need to help their fellow countrymen as well as foreign brothers forge ways of dealing with these difficult situations and encourage and help those who suffer for their stand. 'It may not be easy to conform to Biblical standards in our fallen world and if a member of the community suffers in doing so, the community needs to support him.'³³ Remember God is looking for people to intervene on behalf of those who are unjustly oppressed.

The Christian community should support government actions to clean up corruption, to provide an adequate wage for civil servants, and to modify unreasonable laws which provide much latitude for corruption. Appropriate prophetic denunciation of gross injustice may also be called for although it would be wiser for national Christians rather than foreign missionaries to take the lead in matters of civil action and prophetic denunciation. [p. 260](#)

Finally, mission boards need to devote more attention to helping missionaries deal with this issue. Special attention should be given to the new missionary because it is often when the new missionary first arrives that he faces these situations at customs or immigration. Just as God alerted the young nation of Israel to the problem many years ago, mission boards today need to alert new missionaries to the bribery problem and to suggest ways to deal with it. Ready or not, many young missionaries will come face to face with the solicitation of a bribe.

³² Alatas, *The Problem of Corruption*, 54.

³³ Ting, 'Biblical Ethics,' 333.

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Traditional and Present Day Values and Ethics in Melanesian Society

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This anthropological study of traditional Melanesian value systems and ethical practices and the new alternatives being created with the introduction of a money economy is of significance in understanding how conscience operates in societies without any knowledge of the gospel. It shows how motives and actions are good or evil depending on whether or not they advance the community, for the health and relationships of the community (based on blood marriage and land) is the supreme and final value for living. While the author does not discuss the issue of conscience or Divine Law, we are given insights on how conscience is shaped by the experience of pagan communities over the centuries.

We suggest that those engaged in church planting among such changing cultures will need to understand both the continuity and discontinuity between the Church as a new and alternative community and both the traditional community and the emerging secular communities. In the development of Christian values and biblical ethics, Christ as Saviour and Lord will become the determinative factor in reeducating conscience. The well known metaphor of the exchange of a 'peace child' is but one attempt to relate the gospel to traditional ways of re-establishing broken relationships within and between communities. Readers are invited to contribute their reflections on these issues.

INTRODUCTION

Often after a course on Melanesian Values and Ethics I am asked by the participants, both Melanesian and expatriate, for something in writing on this topic. As a matter of fact I have written an article on 'Traditional Values and Ethics'¹ but since then I **P. 262** further developed the theme to include present day Melanesian Values and Ethics. In this article I shall follow and quote the former one² and add what is new.

What I present here is a bare outline of my lectures and it is geared primarily to those who took part in the courses and asked for something in writing to remind them of what has been said. On the other hand this article might help other Melanesians, or expatriates

¹ Darrell Whiteman *An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures*, Point Series No. 5 1984, 195–212.

² The original article has been published again by the organisers of the 17th Waigani Seminar: *The Ethics of Development, The Pacific in the 21st Century*, by Susan Stratigos and Philip J. Hughes ed., UPNG, Port Moresby, 1987.