



Make Corruption History

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by Daryl Balia

■ reviewed by David Murray

Make *Corruption History* fills a gap in a little-populated area of the anti-corruption literature. The author approaches his subject from an explicitly Christian point of view. Daryl Balia is a South African Methodist minister and was Chief Director of Ethics in Nelson Mandela’s government.

Balia is highly qualified academically, with doctorates in both theology and public administration. He also has a track record as an anti-corruption activist with Transparency International in his own country.

He structures the first two parts of his book around four questions: What is the problem with corruption? When and why does it happen? What can be done to fight it? And what are the costs and benefits of the fight? Following an insightful case study on South Africa he asks two further questions: What does the Bible say on the subject? And what can churches do?

There is much of value throughout the book, and my challenges here should not be taken as discouragement from reading it. However, was it meant as an academic analysis or targeted at practitioners? I tend to lose patience with abstruse theorising on a subject which calls for action, but did not lose patience reading this. However, I do question whether to search as he does for a comprehensive theoretical definition of corruption is to chase after an illusion. Corruption takes so many practical forms which call for different approaches.

He does not fall into the trap of identifying corruption as a legacy of colonialism. Certainly this has played a significant part; most colonial administrations were themselves

guilty of various forms of corruption, and the serious neglect of advanced education and training of public officials in the decades before independence was a disgrace.

However, independence for most of the major African countries came many years ago. A Kenyan parliamentary report in the latter years of the Moi era pointed out that a critical turning-point in Kenyan public sector corruption had been the decision to allow government officials to own and operate their own businesses. Mistakes have been made, many practical steps could have been taken, and still can be, but just as in the United Kingdom political will is often inadequate.

On approaches to fighting corruption it is good to see the attention given to Jeremy Pope’s “National Integrity Systems” model. The systemic approach, however is not the only one available. Specific types or areas of corrupt activity can be addressed in an highly focused way, an example being the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative which addresses the diversion of natural resource revenues in financially-poor but resource-rich countries.

The chapter on Bribery and the Bible could have been longer. I was not convinced by his client-patron analysis of passages in Luke’s gospel but was delighted to see his emphasis on “the new standard for life in Christ”, and this highlights a vital role of the churches. Balia correctly welcomes the re-emergence of churches and Christian bodies into the public square but they also have a job to do amongst their own people, teaching and re-teaching that life in Christ is to be one of totally transformed behaviour, seven days of the week. ■

David Murray

David Murray, a retired international management consultant, is chairman of the Faith in Business management group, was Deputy Chair of Transparency International UK (2001-2005), and served as Senior Advisor to the Chairman (2005-6) during the setting up of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative.

