Bribery sabotages economic systems, whether national or international. There are now signs that bribery is increasingly being accepted, or even required, as a normal form of payment. Since payments are essential to an exchange economy, to normalize bribe-payments is to embark on a course of self-destruct. The very traits that make bribery profitable for a few in the short term inevitably leads to long-term decline for all.

Long-term planning requires insight into the phenomenon of bribery, its history and its predictable consequences for the future. There is need to be aware of the entire phenomenon, to understand its meaning, to judge its relevance to human values, and to decide on policies based on informed judgments. In response to this need, a number of in-depth studies are being conducted.

HISTORICAL STUDY

One historical study is an 839-page book entitled “Bribes” by John T. Noonan, Jr.¹ This is a monumental study and, despite the author’s modest protestations, encyclopedic. It covers a vast span — five millenia — of data on bribery, and analyzes these with a wide repertory of scholarly skills including hermeneutics of over two hundred scriptural texts, more than one hundred cases of criminal law, and hundreds of moral cases from ancient, medieval and modern history, all minutely referenced in responsible publications. This encyclopedic achievement successfully reveals the magnitude of the problem of bribery, for the problem is as old as

sin and nearly as difficult to grasp, let alone solve.

To review Noonan’s monumental book adequately would need expertise in jurisprudence and will not be attempted here. Our modest aim is to select some general configurations that it has uncovered, particularly those that are most relevant to the papal encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, to the technical analysis of Bernard Lonergan, and to the present economic travails of debtor countries like the Philippines.

Philippine problems of insurgency, poverty and bribery are intimately interrelated. Poor people turn to violent insurgency when they lose hope of competing for public services against those who can better afford to bribe public servants. When perfect competition is thus frustrated, market laws of supply and demand are easily manipulated by bribing fiscal and monetary agents and thus become inoperative; decision-making processes become oligarchic, plutocratic, monopolistic or dictatorial, concentrating all power in the hands of one man or one dynasty, with bribing power as the principal instrument or even the norm of succession. This degenerative scheme of recurrence becomes a long-term spiral of decline: a new Dark Age looms over democratic civilization.

Noonan concludes his compendium of reflections with an act of faith that the “thrust of a dominant moral idea” will progressively be incorporated into legislations that will eventually make bribery obsolete.² Whether or not his faith is fulfilled, his purpose is insight in aid of legislation.

FOUR TRAITS OF BRIBERY

This is a tall order and his book is a noble attempt towards achieving this purpose. For this, he posits a descriptive definition of bribery as “an inducement improperly influencing the performance of a public function meant to be gratuitously exercised.”³ This definition enumerates the four elements in bribery: (1) inducement, (2) impropriety, (3) public function, and (4) gratuity of function. In concrete situations, these four elements are conditioned by the particular culture in which they are found. The particular set of meanings and values in each community deter-

². Ibid. 706.
³. Ibid. xi.
mines what is and what is not considered bribery.

In the thinking of an economic community that considers bribery as an acceptable form of "payment" for goods and services: a bribe "induces" but does not coerce; this inducement is quite proper when briber and bribee are consenting adults; the general public tacitly tolerates such private transactions; and the transactions are as gratuitous as the public function being peddled.

From this description, it can be deduced that such an economic community sees man only as an individual and prescinds from his social nature. A different type of economic community would explicitly see man as both individual and social. As social, he is responsible for the human community, both its present members and its future descendants.

SOCIAL MORALITY

Man's social nature is the ground on which Noonan bases his four reasons why bribery is likely to continue to be morally condemned: (1) bribery is universally shameful; (2) bribery is a sellout to the rich; (3) bribery is a betrayal of trust; and (4) bribery violates a divine paradigm.4 Of these four reasons, Noonan's second and third reasons are particularly relevant to an economic system:

Selling out to the rich minority of a community ignores the communitarian function of "payments" in an economy. This cannot be left to the arbitrary option of briber and bribee despite their mutual consent, allegedly adult. The allegation of adulthood is belied by irresponsibility for communitarian concerns.

What is the 'communitarian function of payments in an exchange economy? This is analyzed by Lonergan in his 1980-83 series of lectures at Boston College entitled "Macroeconomics and the Dialectic of History":5

The moral intentionality of payments in an exchange economy is to promote the flow of goods and services demanded by an emergent standard of living of entire populations. Into this inten-

4. Loc. cit.
5. A 395-page xeroxed draft of these lectures can be found in the library of the Loyola School of Theology. Reflections on these have been published by the author in two articles of which the present article is another sequel: "Lonergan's Probabiliorism for an Economic Civilization," in Landas 2 (Jan. 1988) 81-92; and "Economic Dysfunctions," also in Landas 2 (July 1988) 194-203.
tionality there enters the calculation of a "just price." Here Loner-
gan uses the Ignatian *tantum-quantum* norm, and this requires a
calculus of probabilities whereby pricing can be analytically esti-
mated to be functional or dysfunctional.

Bribery is *dysfunctional pricing*. Bribery sabotages the proper
functioning of an economic system. Bribery confers oligarchic
powers on those who can best afford to bribe. Bribery corrupts
the economy at the roots.

Perhaps briber and bribee do not fully realize how their
behavior effectively limits the standard of living to that tiny
sector of a population that can best afford to bribe. Does this
not relegate the other sectors to a standard of dying? If so, what
other option is open to those who refuse to die except to resort to
insurgency against the system?

Yes, insurgency can be temporarily stemmed by military mea-
sures and/or by employment programs. But as the historical expe-
riments of Hitler, Stalin and Marcos show, military measures led
to economic disaster. As for employment programs, inflationary
spirals will in time raise the price of public service beyond the
reach of wage earners who cannot afford inflated bribery. There
emerges the hypothesis that world insurgency is a measure of in-
ternational bribery. Is this why millenial civilizations rise and fall?

Noonan’s third reason is about the betrayal of trust. An eco-
nomic system can function properly only through the mutual
interdependence of producers and consumers, buyers and sellers,
lenders and borrowers, entrepreneurs and traders, all trying to
live and let live in a living standard commensurate with its eco-
nomic growth and the size of its population. The necessity of
social trust is obvious. Bribery, essentially a secret transaction,
dermines this social trust.

Social distrust spreads like an epidemic. The suspicion of
secret transactions destroys the reliability of all public accounting.
In the absence of reliable accountability — or what comes to the
same thing, in accountancy that includes larger and larger "invis-
sibles" — how can the circulation of payments be accurately
optimized by fiscal and monetary agencies? And if this redistribu-
tive function becomes dysfunctional at the roots, how can an
economy survive?

Noonan’s first and fourth reasons, although less directly relevant
to economic processes, are equally important in the context of
social morality. The shame universally associated with bribery is like the feeling of being seen without the fig leaves: it is somehow indecent, beastly, subhuman. However, a licentious brazenness can now be observed in the robber barons of today who apparently feel no shame when they victoriously proclaim in coded nuances their adventures in and conquests through bribery. These codes are intelligible only in the sanitizing departments of transcontinental casinos, whose linkages with codified bank accounts furnish jurisprudence with no evidence that will stand up in court. Some day they will, but not until intelligence arouses intellectuals from their escapism.

As for the violation of divine paradigm, Noonan himself admits that belief in God will not work "in a secularist society where [it] is either not admitted or not acknowledged to have consequences." But even secularist minds believe that there exists a "measure of all things": failure of economic decisions to measure up to this norm will certainly have consequences that inevitably destroy the system. The divine paradigm is not only transcendent, to be learned only from supernatural revelation; it also exists immanently within the technical constraints of an economic system and can be empirically discovered by scientific analysis. At certain moments of history, it makes a bloody entrance and thus teaches an important lesson. Learning it will be a very laborious task.

LABOREM EXERCENS

To this task, everything that Pope John Paul II says about human labor in his encyclical letter Laborem Exercens can be applied in a most eminent way. Referring to the Book of Genesis (1:28), he speaks of man as

. . . the image of God partly through the mandate received from the Creator to subdue, to dominate, the earth . . . [These words] embrace equally the past ages of civilization and economy, as also the whole of modern reality and future phases of development, which are perhaps already to some extent beginning to take shape, though for the most part they are still almost unknown to man and hidden from him.  

Almost unknown and hidden from man at present is the crucial distinction between authentic payments that lead to economic accelerations and bribery that terminates the system in irreversible deceleration. Insights into situations that lead to acceleration or to deceleration are required if man is to dominate the earth’s economy instead of being dominated and oppressed by its counterfeits. Hence, the encyclical says:

If the biblical words “subdue the earth” addressed to man from the very beginning are understood in the context of the whole modern age, industrial and post-industrial, then they undoubtedly include also a relationship with technology . . .

The recent stage of human history, especially that of certain societies, brings a correct affirmation of technology as a basic coefficient of economic progress; but, at the same time, this affirmation is accompanied by and continues to be accompanied by the raising of essential questions concerning human work in relationship to its subject, which is man. These questions are particularly charged with content and tension of an ethical and social character. 8

This emphasis on social ethics makes individualist morality obsolete. In modern economics, the caveat emptor practice, suggestive of Cain’s rejection of the role of a brother’s keeper, must now give way to a rational process of pricing that protects unwary consumers.

The process of pricing is no longer simple. One reason is the increasing complexity of fluctuating velocities and accelerations of flows in world economy. A second reason is the unreliability of public accounting, due either to shame or distrust. Until this improves, the rapidly advancing computer technology can facilitate “thought experiments” for testing various applications of Loner-gan’s schemes of recurrence to the productive process, whereby pricing operations can be optimized. A search for software programs relevant to these thought experiments is now being conducted and their adaptability explored. Furthermore,

[The questions being raised] therefore constitute a continual challenge for institutions of many kinds, for States and governments, for systems

8. Ibid. no. 5.
and international organizations; they also constitute a challenge for the Church.\(^9\)

These institutions certainly include educational and research institutions, for these are missioned to discover and disseminate the creative insights needed to meet the challenge. The problem is so big that it can paralyze the energies of specialists who thus fail to find or seek opportunities for creative dialogue with one another. This is very sad indeed. Lonergan’s analysis reveals a parameter of irreversible deceleration of the world’s economy.

**INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH**

Radically innovative research institutions are urgently needed. Educational institutions may find inspiration in Noonan’s herculean determination as a specialist in jurisprudence to seek the help of specialists in biblical, historical and philosophical disciplines in order to discover new insights that will promote creative legislation.

Legislation is certainly necessary but by no means sufficient. Lobbyists assume that legislators can be bribed. The assumption includes other public servants at high levels: law makers and law enforcers, judges and journalists, preachers and teachers are often unaware of the subtle strategies of bribery working on their subconscious minds. Camouflages of bribery cannot be detected except by those who are highly gifted with self-knowledge, humility and discernment of spirits.

**DOMINATING THE EARTH’S ECONOMY**

The papal encyclical also warns against an "economistic perspective."\(^{10}\) This denies human domination over the economy. It denies the human dignity intrinsic to the two factors of production, labor and capital, erroneously considered as impersonal forces and set in conflict with each other, in total disregard of the social morality that ennobles interpersonal relationships. Against this perspective, the encyclical affirms the primacy of the human

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10. Ibid. no. 13.
subject over the material parameters of the economy and of the ethical norms that dignify human collaboration. Here, Lonergan's analysis of the pricing function renders an important service, not merely in clarifying the parameters of the system, but especially in evoking creative insights in the human subject. Even if these insights are ignored by briber and bribee, they will help the more responsible majority to protect their economy from a fatal disease and thus ensure its long-term survival. Through these insights, they will learn more and more to dominate the pricing parameters and not be dominated by their corrupt counterfeits.

Many more specialists of the calibre of Lonergan and Noonan, each in his field of specialization, are needed in confronting bribery and struggling against it. Our struggles are not against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against world rulers of this present darkness.