

WHAT PART CAN THE CHURCH PLAY IN HAVING A TRANSFORMING
EFFECT ON VALUES AND ATTITUDES IN JAMAICA

THE MORAVIAN CHURCH IN JAMAICA AND THE CAYMAN ISLANDS
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Greetings

A man and his dog were walking along a road. The man was enjoying the scenery when it suddenly occurred to him that he was dead. He remembered dying and that the dog walking beside him had been dead for many years.

He wondered where the road was leading them. After a while, they came to a high stone wall along one side of the road. It looked like fine marble. At the end of a long hill it was broken by a tall arch that glowed in the sunlight. When he was standing before it he saw a magnificent gate made of mother of pearl, and the street that led to the gate looked like pure gold. He and the dog walked toward the gate and as they got closer he saw a man at a desk to one side. "Excuse me, where are we?" "This is heaven sir," the man answered.

Wow! Would you happen to have some water? The man asked. "Of course sir; come right in, and I'll have some icewater brought right up." The gate keeper gestured and the gate began to open. "Can my friend," gesturing toward the dog, "come in too?" the traveler asked. "I'm sorry sir, but we don't accept pets."

The man thought for a moment then turned back toward the road and continued the way he had been going with his dog. After another long walk, and at the top of another long hill, he came to a dirt road leading through a farm gate that looked as if it had never been closed. There was no fence.

As he approached the gate, he saw a man inside leaning against a tree reading a book. "Excuse me!" he called to the man. "Do you have any water?" "Yeah sure, there's a pump over there, come on in." "How about my friend here? The traveler gestured to the dog. "There should be a bowl by the pump." They went through the gate and sure enough, there was an old-fashioned hand pump with a bowl beside it. The traveler took a long drink himself then gave some to the dog. When they were full, he and the dog walked back to the man who was standing by the tree. "What do you call this place?" the traveler asked. "This is Heaven," he answered. "Well that's confusing!" the traveler exclaimed. "The man down the road said that was Heaven too." "Oh you mean the place with the gold street and pearly gates? Nope. That's hell." "Doesn't it make you mad for them to use your name like that?" "No, were just happy that they screen out the folks who would leave their best friends behind."

Our society is in a crisis. And it is more than the crisis of values faced by the man in my story who was tempted to abandon his faithful friend for what at first glance appeared to be a luxurious life. The murder of our children, particularly our young girls, instead of being a freakish and abhorrent act, seems to have become an almost weekly occurrence. Reports of children seriously maiming and killing other children have also become commonplace. It is now not unusual to come across children who have lost a family member to violence.

The school population is very different from when we were children when the most serious problems were petty theft and cheating on tests. Today many schools have to be policed in order for students and teachers to feel any degree of safety. Recently we heard of a headmaster being kidnapped as

he prepared to go home from school. Thankfully, he was able to escape and return to safety

Home is no longer a safe haven for the many women and children who are victims of domestic abuse, carnal abuse and incest. The functional family is very much the exception than the rule.

Recent police statistics which state that we have had 15 fewer murders between January and April in 2009 than we had during the same period last year is little comfort, as 474 murders in four months, by any measure, is far too many.

Jamaica continues to be a country in crisis. Things have to change, and we do look to the church to play a major role in bringing about this change.

As you contemplate the way forward I congratulate you on the recognition that as an institution the church has, from time to time, to look inwards to see what it needs to do differently in order to deal with the environment in which it finds itself.

I commend your humility in the acknowledgement that good advice could come from one outside of the community of acknowledged religious leaders. I am very honoured and humbled that you considered me an appropriate choice to assist in this process of self-exploration. As a businessman that has had to deal with the challenges presented by the transformation of the marketplace by the phenomenon of globalization in the past decade, I am very aware of how important it is for any organization to regularly reflect on the value it brings, and if necessary, reinvent itself to become more relevant to its stakeholders.

This is certainly not the first time that the church in Jamaica has had to deal with a moral crisis of gigantic proportions. Since the beginning of our recorded history that witnessed the collision of cultures resulting from European colonization of the hemisphere, the church has had to grapple with issues of morality.

The philosophy of Christianity...through the perseverance and commitment of the beleaguered missionaries within the Caribbean and their counterparts in England...triumphed over prejudice, bigotry and economic expedience to contribute significantly to bringing about the end of the slave trade and eventually slavery.

Upon Emancipation it was the church which had the task of helping the newly-freed population to establish itself as a society. It succeeded in this effort and modern Jamaica owes much of its foundations to the work of these early Christians.

When we look back at the growth of education in Jamaica we see the church at the helm. Even during slavery when education of the slaves was strictly prohibited, missionaries, disregarding the danger to themselves, persisted in their attempts to educate the enslaved. Sam Sharpe, our national hero, was a product of the Church's educational zeal. Paul Bogle, another of Jamaica's national heroes, was also a product of the church.

In attempting an explanation for the drastic shift in values that we are witnessing today, I decided to look at the strategies implemented by the church to disseminate the teachings of the Bible in the early decades of the twentieth century and even up to my own childhood into the 50s and 60s.

There were the scheduled church services on Sunday or Saturday, depending on the denomination, at which the main message was given as well as services on Sunday evening and during the week. There was Sunday School at which the youngsters were sensitized to the Christian philosophy through Bible stories. There were the various programmes of the youth ministry in which the older teenagers and young adults further explored the word of God while also using it as an opportunity for socialising. There were holiday camps for teenagers and young adults and even older adults. In these settings participants would enjoy good fellowship while also validating Christian principles and behaviour.

Again, in looking at our educational institutions of the time, the pioneering role of the Church was evident. Many basic, elementary, preparatory, primary and secondary schools were established by the Church. In case of the latter, we can point to many of our traditional high schools — Munro College, Jamaica College, St Hugh's High School, Immaculate Conception, Alpha Academy, St George's College, Calabar High School — were all established and run by the church. In some cases the principals were required to be priests or at least members of the denomination to which the school was affiliated. Tertiary institutions, primarily teachers colleges, were also established by the Church.

Consequently, a major role in the shaping of the curriculum and the appointment of teachers, was in the control of the churches and thus religious education was an important part of the curriculum. It meant that teachers concerned themselves with the status of your religious as well as your academic development. Were you considering confirmation? Where did you worship? The bond between school and church was one that that

facilitated, even required, the consistent presence of the church and its principles in the lives of the students and, by extension, their families.

How are things different today?

Let us look first at our educational institutions. With the need to increase accessibility to education successive governments since Independence have had to assume increasing control of the funding and running of schools. While in some cases the churches have been able to retain some level of influence, that is not so in others. Additionally, most of the new schools that were constructed were completely administered by government. Thus, as the control of education became increasingly the purview of the state, the influence of the church in the day-to-day lives of students waned.

During my childhood, families attended church together. Sunday School was not an optional activity. Families, for the most part, dined together and the gracing of the meal was an important element of dining.

Things are different today. Many families do not worship together and many not at all. Older children are allowed to choose whether they attend Sunday School or not and the family dinner is now an anachronism. These point to a decrease of the influence of the church in the life of the family as well as the school.

What is urgently needed is a revival of the influence of the church in the lives of the population and while this includes increased church attendance and conventions, that is not where I would place major emphasis.

Today networking is considered a necessary skill for any professional who desires success within his or her field. Networking simply means that you try

to increase the number of people you know within a particular area with the objective of furthering business contacts that may be of benefit to you in the future. This is a strategy that the church consistently uses, although you may not refer to it as such. What has happened with increasing secularization of the society is the breakdown of your networking strategy and it is here that the church needs to regain its strength.

President Obama created history last year by being the first Black president of the United States. Most of my contemporaries did not believe that we would live to witness the swearing in of a Black president in the most powerful country of the world. His motto was “Yes, we can” and a major contributor to his ground-breaking success was his ability to motivate the youth to take an interest in the elections and to vote for him.

The Church in Jamaica can learn much from President Obama’s campaign strategies. We must believe fervently that we will bring about change, “Yes, we can”, and place our confidence in the youth that they have the ability to change. So, it is among the youth that we must seek to broaden and deepen our social networking arrangements.

The Church must revitalize the youth ministry. The same energy and attention that is placed on the main service must be placed on Sunday School. Sunday School cannot simply be the place that parents leave their children while they are at service; it must be a major part of the Church’s schedule of services. That being said, we must also recognize that today’s children are different from the children of yesteryear. No matter what their economic circumstances, they have been exposed to the most sophisticated telecommunications technology. Consequently, Sunday School, while

maintaining the purity of the Christian message must update its format to be able engage the children's attention.

“How do we do this?” you may ask. Form focus groups among those young people who are currently attending church and get their input. They are technologically savvy and they know how to engage their peers.

In addition, we need to be bold in leadership and not adopt a live and let live attitude. Find out from your membership why their children are not attending Sunday School and insist that ensuring their attendance is not only an important part of their Christian duty but is of great import to the moral development of their children.

Call on Godparents to do their duty. Despite the fall off in church attendance and Sunday School, most parents have their children christened or baptized. This is the time to help them to understand that christening or baptism is not an isolated incident, but the beginning of a relationship with the church and one that they will be required to sustain.

The church should reclaim its place in the educational system. Naturally the relationship will not be as it was before. But, new relationships can be forged. Perhaps the easiest way to penetrate the school community is through its PTAs and past students' associations. I believe that most Jamaicans are deeply concerned by the crime, violence and general indiscipline in society and will welcome the efforts of the church in trying to turn around the negative values and attitudes that are currently overwhelming us.

Reintroduce the holiday camps. I think Moorlands is one of the few camps that still operates. I know that they are generally oversubscribed. Here is an

opportunity for partnership with the private sector. I am well aware that most, if not all churches do have summer schools, but a special situation is created when children are completely removed from their environment and can be immersed in the values we want them to learn. A week of having to say grace before every meal and of having to be polite to and considerate of your fellow campers will have an impact.

The church's involvement in activities in which the young people are involved is integral to the success of rebuilding networks. Various clubs abound in all aspects of sports. The Church must find opportunities to become involved with these groups. It is the habit of most of our sportsmen and sportswomen to say a prayer just before they perform. They cannot then be averse to having the church as a part of their club activities and their training.

The point that I am trying to make is that opportunities for the increased involvement of the Church in the lives of the youth abound and the church should actively seek these out. I realise that the human resources of the church are limited, but you will have to look to the committed members of your congregation to assist you in this effort.

I return to President Obama's campaign strategies. His campaign was revolutionary in the use of modern communication technology in building his support base. Here, too, the church in Jamaica can follow his lead. Our youth are using this technology, particularly the cell phone, to do more harm to themselves than good. We were bombarded last year with reports on the dissemination, via the cell phone, of pornographic material which involved

high school students. What we can do is to disseminate messages which will share the values and attitudes we want our students to practise.

Text messaging was a major strategy in the Obama campaign. Here in Jamaica we see the cell phone companies competing to find creative ways of enticing the youth to send text messages, and they are usually very successful. Attempt to engage these companies in campaigns that will positively impact our values and attitudes. The Church must establish its own social networking sites on the internet to attract the attention of our youth in our bid to reclaim Jamaica's future.

Technology is a tool. It has no values. It is up to us to use it as a channel for positive rather than negative results.

I embrace the fact that I live in a country of religious tolerance, and that I have the freedom not only to pursue my own religious path but am welcomed in the places of worship of all religions. Jamaica was one of the first countries to practise religious tolerance, hence the migration of the Jews to Jamaica very early in our history.

Our successful ecumenical approach to worship encourages me to believe that the idea I am about to put forward has an excellent chance of success. My idea is this. I recommend a national values and attitudes campaign that would see concerted action on part of the church in Jamaica. In pursuing this campaign the individual denominations would put aside doctrinal differences to share messages that focus on inculcating Christian values and way of life.

This campaign would adhere to all the tenets of any major public education campaign in which one is attempting to bring about behaviour change. It would pay attention to targeting the appropriate audience – the youth; it would select the most appropriate media for disseminating the selected message and it would ensure effective coverage. Important elements would be the use of music, drama, dance as well as the participation of youth ambassadors. In short, the Church would elicit the services of a team of top-class communications consultants to design such a programme and to assist in its implementation. In terms of the payment of such consultants; no doubt your membership includes such professionals who would be happy to make their contribution to creating a better future for the Jamaica in which they live.

I mentioned earlier that the campaign should avoid dogma. What then would the message be? The messages on which I would focus the campaign are the most basic and, to my mind, most powerful messages in the Bible. The first is found, among other places, in the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 12 verse 30 — “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.” The second message would be the second commandment of Christ — “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”—Matthew 19 verse 19. The third message of the campaign is universally referred to as the golden rule and is found in the Gospel of Mathew at Chapter 7 verse 1 —“All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.”

These messages are the foundation of ethical and moral behaviour. If we love the “Lord thy God”, then we will want to live by his principles, the first of which, and recognizably the most difficult, is to love “thy neighbour”. When we accept the differences between ourselves and others and are able to love and respect them, we will more easily treat them with respect, as we want to be treated with respect. We will not, then, steal from them, hurt them, tell lies on them, but will try to live in harmony with them.

If we could focus on these two messages and find appropriate illustrations in today’s society to demonstrate the practical implementation of these Christian laws, we would be well on the way to attracting back to the fold, many of those who have become disenchanted with organized religion.

Sometimes, even within the Christian Church, we become so focused on pointing out the differences in our beliefs and the superiority of the beliefs of the denomination to which we belong, we forget that, in the final analysis, we all believe in the same God and the same Christian principles. Let’s learn to be less judgmental and more discerning.

Jamaica’s only hope is unity. The Church has the responsibility to lead by example. There is a poem by an unknown Author which expresses it beautifully. It’s titled *The Better Way*:

I’d rather see a sermon than hear one any day;

I’d rather one should walk with me than merely show the way.

The eye’s a better pupil and more willing than the ear;

Fine counsel is confusing. But example’s always clear;

And the best of all the preachers are the men who live their creeds,

For to see the good in action is what everybody needs.
I can soon learn how to do it if you'll let me see it done,
I can watch your hands in action, but your tongue too fast may run;
And the lectures you deliver may be very wise and true,
But I'd rather get my lesson by observing what you do.
For I may misunderstand you and the high advice you give.
But there's no misunderstanding how you act and how you live.

I firmly believe that the Jamaican Church has the potential to lead us out of this crisis, in the same way that in the past it has provided guidance in the darkest of times.

I want to share an observation that I have made in relation to the influence that the Church continues to wield among our youth. Over the past 25 years the GraceKennedy Foundation has implemented a scholarship programme that sees us funding the tertiary education of the best and brightest in our country. These are the students whose performance puts them among the top 15 in the island based on their performance in the CXC and CAPE examinations. I have noted a consistent factor among the large majority, if not all, who qualify for interviews. They are all active members of their Church.

God is present everywhere. He lives within every human being including you and me. This was Jesus' message to us. I wish you all God's guidance and blessings in your thoughts, words and actions.

Thank you.