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Back to the Centre – Implications for Handling Power, Sex and Money

Money, sex and power are among the most powerful temporal entities that exist. This is due to their profound influence for good or evil on all aspects of the welfare of each person, locally and globally. Each of these entities works in a reciprocal and reinforcing manner with each of the others in a multiple variety of combinations - a dance of synergy as it were. The handling of power, sex and money causes the rise or fall of families, communities, churches, corporations, nations and the globe.

In recent months, alarming news about how these synergistic entities at home and abroad have been used to damage the lives of others, has disturbed the attention of many.

At this Founders' Day lecture in the 51st year of the United Theological College of the West Indies, those of us present include persons preparing for the pastoral ministry of the church, teachers and other staff, alumni, as well as supporting family members, friends, allied institutions and the invited public. With the current state of our world, it serves all of us here to reflect on the chosen theme: **Back to the Centre – Implications for Handling Power, Sex and Money.** Each of us in fulfilling our life purpose in this world of relationships and economies use some form of power and money. As created beings of the animal kingdom, we all live out our sexuality in some way. I hope, therefore, that what I have to share will further inform our insights and accountability.

Defining and Locating the Centre

As we speak of "back to the centre" what do we mean by this? I would suggest that the word "centre" in our discourse could usefully mean *"that location of one's point of view and related actions which would make the greatest desired difference in the use of money, sex or power to fulfill the goals of the user."*

From where we stand, if we are to interrogate this idea of "centre", then an appropriate weighting of the words *"the goals of the user"* needs to be on the table. We may best humbly admit that though most of us here publicly claim a certain common purpose, the private goals that help define our centres may be both varied among us and mixed within us. We may also ask ourselves to what extent does the ethical or religious/secular plurality of money, sex or power goals within the world, influence ours unconsciously or by compromise?

Nevertheless, we are here to aspire to, or support, what we have experienced and understood as a particular calling – being ministers, both clergy and lay, in the Caribbean. Thus, for us the centre is what will make the greatest desired difference towards fulfilling the goals of Christian Ministry.

Here, as public figures of influence and members of collective entities, the temptation could be to define the goals of the Christian Ministry "centre" in terms of a location along popular and ideological spectrums of **religious orthodoxy**, **political correctness** or **cultural acceptance**. Along these spectrums the centre could be seen as either *what a particular extremist group holds as axiomatic* or it could consist of locating one's considerations "in the middle " as a *centrist compromise.*

Rather than use the path of "ideological spectrum", I propose that we apply **an actionable and functional consideration** using the *question "what will bring the best to all i*n the handling of power, sex and money?"

We can now further interrogate the goal that is to be most effectively fulfilled, by asking "*what is the core functional and actionable goal of the calling of Christian Ministry?* "

Here, I will invoke the mandate given by Christ to his twelve disciples. "*Jesus called the twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases. Then he sent them out to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick."* (Luke 9:1-2, TEV.)

Thus, all the levels of consideration of "back to the centre" lead us to further contextualize the more general definition of:
"that location of one's point of view and related actions which would make the greatest desired difference in the use of money, *sex or power to fulfill the goals of the user"* by using the words *"given the goal of Christian ministry".*

The mandate of Christ, just recalled, now defines this goal as "having and living out a mindset or paradigm of **fulfilling a Divinely given stewardship of bringing about the well-being of the whole person."**

Thus we locate the *outcome* of this stewardship *goal* at our centre of handling power, sex and money as the well-being of the whole person.

As we seek to live out of this stewardship given to us by God of power, sex, and money, we may have little or much of these. Yet we will handle them as being the true possession of God given to us for the fulfillment of His mandate for our action. This is the action of proclaiming the Kingdom, or reign of God, while simultaneously being used by Him to execute its end of the "greatest good" or "summum bonum." This end of the Kingdom is the healing of the whole person.

Being such a steward or servant was the declared ministry of Christ himself which he announced as His mission statement in the Nazareth synagogue. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recover sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people" (Luke 4:18, TEV)

Being on centre or off centre in lifestyle motivation

If we are to return “back to the centre” as defined, we now need to describe what it means to be “off centre”, because this is what we need to avoid.

I suggest that we can do this usefully by contrasting the notion of living out a lifestyle motivation of a **Stewardship of Discipleship** to that of **Accumulation through Desire.**
I will, at this stage, point out that *these lifestyles of being on centre or off centre and getting back to the centre need to be applied both to ourselves as well as to others.* If not, as Christ said, the blind will be seeking to lead the blind and both will fall into the ditch. (Matthew 15:14).

Accumulation through Desire is based on a mindset or paradigm of life where power, sex and money are seen as being exclusively our possessions, whether personally or collectively. From this flows the consequently related world view of secular humanism where all that we own is to be within human control and the universe is devoid of any spiritual reality to which we are subject. All our impulses become related to enlightened self-interest as a primary value, even when there is generosity. Our task is to accumulate as much as is possible the benefits and sensual delights of power, sex and money in order to fulfill this desired enlightened self-interest. In the absence of accountability to any higher power, subjective moral pragmatism grounds what is “right” in in the realm of self-interest, even if “accumulation” comes at the expense of others.

In Biblical theology terms, this underlying world view of Accumulation through Desire is a form of idolatry. Putting the created before the Creator leads to power, sex and money becoming ends in themselves rather than being means to a higher end. Without the guidance and enabling of the Creator the evil of narcissism and the dysfunctions of our human vulnerabilities put us off centre. The resulting destructive manifestations and consequences are well recorded in Biblical and other accounts of human history as well as in our own personal memories.

If we wish to be on centre, then the lifestyle motivation, or mindset, of this **Stewardship of Discipleship** needs to be worked out in our day to day living. It must govern how we all manage our *thinking*, *emotions* and *relationships*. This needs to occur in all of our *life tasks* of work, love, play and worship. It goes through all our *life stages*: childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old

age. It will govern our biology, our theology, our financial planning and fulfilling our social roles and responsibilities.

The off centred world: doing a workable situation analysis.

To assist our locating or relocating at the centre in handling power, sex and money, individually and collectively, we need to do a situation analysis of the off centered world and of our off centered selves that will meaningfully enable effective praxis, or action. For this task to be adequately fulfilled, we need to carry out in-depth **contextual research** using intellectual rigor**.** As leaders and individuals too often we respond to the crisis of an off centered world by engaging in a panic driven echoing of the problems using the rhetoric of generalizations. We are too often fooled by the seduction that speech equals action. It is always good for leaders, citizens and faith community members, to have some knowledge that "all is not well". Yet where a doctor's knowledge is little it can be dangerous to the patient. To be contextually and intellectually sound we need to analyze the relationship of the realities of history, culture, religious traditions, politics and various economies to being off centre. We also need to discover how these intersect with one another in their roles. It is further necessary to attend to the place of human vulnerabilities in areas such as personal psychopathology, as in the case of sick Jim Jones-like religious cultism or Hitler's "National Socialism".

To be usable, our situation analysis of challenges, outside and inside of self, also needs to be **narrative based**. As we meet persons affected negatively by the abuse of power, sex and money we need to hear and enter into their unique individual stories. Only then can we truly gain the empathy and understanding needed for the Stewardship of Discipleship involving meeting whole person needs. Our own stories are also part of the narratives of the human condition.

Accurate situation analysis calls for a proper grasp of the **relevant literacies** involving power, sex and money. We need to have not merely a passing acquaintance, but a working knowledge of what these realities are all about. This involves the science of how they function and the art of using them effectively in terms of the best they can offer. Without knowing the language of "science and art" we will be inadequately equipped for both situation analysis and the resulting

effective praxis, or action, which will enable others and ourselves to return to the centre of handling power, sex and money.

Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman illustrates how well he employed these principles of useful situation analysis while discussing her being a victim of the mishandling of power, sex and money. This disempowered social outcast had a dysfunctional sexuality which likely served the purposes of economic survival. She was eventually transformed as a whole person by Jesus. To do so, he explored the implications of her religious, cultural and gender context and insightfully entered into the intricacies and literacies of her narrative. No wonder she invited her community to "*Come see a man who told me everything I have ever done*"(John 4:29, TEV).

Going back to the centre: effective praxis, or action

From the platform of a workable situation analysis, how can we shape effective praxis, or action?

Firstly, as it becomes informed by intellectually rigorous contextual research, effective action, and advocacy, on behalf of others and ourselves in an off centred world, must be **needs based**. This means that the targets we address will not be dictated by personal fads, one-sided passions or misconceptions. They would be fully at the centre of the needs of whole persons in terms of the realities of who, when, where and how these persons are.

Being needs based calls for a presence where things happen. This would involve being present both at the *centres* of influence of power, sex and money as well as showing up at the *margins* where victims are.

Secondly, effective action will need to involve "**hands on" engagement through community.** Whether we are in the role of leader, enabler, or co-participant, we can get be back to the centre of handling power, sex and money only when we truly *co-participate* with the other as indeed also with self.

Being off centre usually involves human beings and collectives constructing walls in order to exploit one another. This includes walls in the context of power distancing, classism, racism,

ethnic xenophobia, anti-immigration sentiments, religious separatism, sexism, homophobia or economic marginalization.

The Stewardship of Discipleship for meeting the needs of the whole person needs to involve a total interpersonal engagement with each other in relating to power: ”theirs” and “ours”; sexuality: “theirs’ and “ours’; and money: ”theirs” and “ours”. *Such hands-on engagement in community starts at the reciprocal “I-thou” level of relationship.* The “power of two or more” is the foundation on which any fulfilled enterprise rests. Christ himself attested that He is always present to bless where there are the “two or three” followers gathered for an intentional community of stewardship in His name (Matthew 18:20). In this two or more, we, as much as others, share a stewardship to each other. Here we are as much accountable both to God and to each other. How can abuse of others through exploiting power, sex and money thrive in such a lifestyle of community?

It is always the reality of a wider community, that enables hands-on engagement between two or more persons. The “beloved community” of which Martin Luther King spoke and dreamt was what he saw as the basis for the coming into being of that justice, peace and equity to be found back at the centre of handling power, sex and money (Erskine & King,1994).

Thirdly, as we are appropriately informed by the personal and collective narratives coming from relevant situation analysis, **healing of vulnerabilities** of the whole person becomes the end action of being back at the centre.

Exploitation and dis-empowerment of individuals, families, communities, churches, organizations and nations by each other across the boundaries of each other’s power, sex and money is a universal aspect of the narratives of all. I often need to reassure my patients who bemoan how worse off they rate themselves in comparison to others. A truism that I use is that despite our public masks and appearances of power, virility and prosperity each and every one of us bears the burden of one or more of “the three S’s” – a skeleton, a scar or current suffering. Across the barriers of exploitation both the oppressor and oppressed are victims, equally in need of healing.

Jesus’ praxis, or working out of His acknowledged God-given stewardship of whole person transformation was indeed at once needs based, relationally hands on engaged and involved in

the healing of vulnerabilities. Purposing to be present with the “other” on either side of the wall of victimization, he as much sought out Zacchaeus, the corrupt wealthy tax collector, who eventually made reparations, as he did Bartimaeus, the despised blind beggar, who through his healing re-entered the economy from the other end.

In the treatment of our topic so far, we have sought to interrogate of definitions and understandings of “centre” as well as of being “on centre and off centre”. We have reflected both on the methodological implications for situation analysis of an off centred world or personal situation and on the criteria for effective praxis, or action, and advocacy needed to get back on centre.

My thesis, drawn from Biblical and scientific understanding, is that if we become committed to the meaning, and in turn, to the practical working out of this interrogation and reflection, we should be significantly enhanced in achieving the task of going “back to the centre”. This would be both in the contexts of our pastoral or lay Christian ministries and with regard to our own spiritual and whole person formation.

Before we conclude our journey together we would be well served to consider some illustrative data. This could help us to better visualize both the dilemmas of being off centred and the practical possibilities for “on the ground” action. Here we can get a better picture of how, both individually and collectively, power, sex and money, execute their dance of synergy off centre and on centre.

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Snapshots of global and local challenges and practical possibilities.

The literacy, or science and art, of power indicates that it is best used from the standpoint **not of “power over” but instead of “power for” and “power with”.** Also, as stewards in Christian ministry, we believe that even if it is socially delegated or derived from our expertise, all power eventually comes from God to be used for the wholeness of others.

Furthermore, even power that is legitimately assigned through national democracy or legal institutional appointment can become corrupted. This can be by means of the self-serving

manipulation of others through deceptive charisma, coercion as well as by the selective sharing of information and rewards.

The off centred abuse of power through Accumulation of Desire has expressed itself in the violence of our Caribbean post-slavery and post-colonial society.

- Statistics of the misuse of power by murder, amidst the political divide and in our communities and homes puts Jamaica in the global definition category of civil war. We have six times the world's average at 50 per 100,000. (Gayle, 2017)
- Boys are three times more likely to be brutally beaten in the home than girls. They are three to five times more likely to be consistently hungry or underweight, and three times more likely to be rejected by a father. (Gayle, 2017)
- In fact, over 85 percent of our children experience violent discipline. (UNICEF, 2016)

To spare them from further severe disempowerment, our boys need special services including: corrective *gender and sex education*, *training in conflict management*, *mentorship*, as well as *skill apprenticeship*.

The mishandling of power globally and locally carries over to **sexuality**. In the world, misuses of power and money provide troubling data gleaned from various research results:

- One in every three women worldwide is the victim of domestic violence. This behaviour of mostly male perpetrators occurs across all categories including class, occupations, religions and ethnic groups. (World Bank, 2017).
- Across 33 low and middle income countries almost one third of women report a coerced inability to refuse sex with their partners. (Khokhar, 2015).
- In most of the world no place is less safe for a woman than in her own home. (Khokhar, 2015).
- Child marriage and female genital mutilation are widespread globally. (Hallett, 2016).
- The initial sexual encounter of 33 percent of Jamaican girls ages 10 to 15 has been nonconsensual or abusive. (UNICEF, 2005).
- In Jamaica 46 percent of females under age 13 have had a partner 6 or more years older (Reproductive Health Survey N.F.P.B., 2008).
- Daughters, mothers and grandmothers in Jamaica can be 10 to twelve years apart and often compete for the same man. (Hannah, 2017).

- Most girls are abused by known older men, many of whom have socially defined protective roles including father figures, police and pastors.
- Transactional sex is becoming more prevalent with mothers pimping out their daughters to older men or through hypersexual traumatized girls forcing themselves on males,
- There are at least 1,084 pornography videos of Jamaican schoolgirls on the Internet. (Hannah, 2017).

Our churches and members will never be back to the centre unless we can protect our girls and women adequately by action and advocacy. This includes the following considerations:

Sexual literacy tells us that *sensuality* is the awareness, acceptance of and comfort with one's own body and enjoyment of one's own body and the bodies of others. This is one aspect of sexuality that is given to humans as a gift of God. *Intimacy,* as the closeness coming from emotional giving and receiving, is another aspect of sexuality. So are sexual *health and reproduction, sexual orientation and gender identity.* Another aspect is the reality of *sexualization,* or the use of sexuality to influence, control or manipulate others.

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- All this need to be a part of *sexual literacy training* for ministers and other leaders in the church as well as community, schools and other institutions..
- Access to related services of *sexual health education* is needed.
- *Counseling* for sexual issues and abuse, inside and outside of marriage, needs to exist.
- *Sexual health services* need to relate to such issues as safe sex, reproductive control, maternal and child mortality prevention, abortion decision-making, post-abortion crises, Sexuality Transmitted Disease, HIV and AIDS as well as sexual abuse, sexual assault, sexual harassment and domestic violence.

We need to enhance protective factors, including the following:

- Enabling, for girls and boys: *caring relationship building* in the home, church and our church schools, *youth clubs*, *hobbies and sports activities*, and developing *high self-esteem building.*
- Enabling several *safe houses* for abused women and advocating tirelessly *for protective laws that work with ease and rapidity*. Without this we are wasting our time to say that we are protecting such women.

- Developing *protocols of interaction* in churches where pastors and other leaders protect themselves and minors by proscribing any possibility of sexual abuse or pedophilia.
- Including reflection on one's spirituality and sexuality in highly recommended *spiritual direction* for pastors and church lay leaders.
- The Jamaica Theology Forum has commented on a need for a documented and affirming *theology of sex* which includes handling celibacy as not meriting the popular ridicule in our culture. They advocate that when leaders struggle with sexual transgressions, church members and leaders should *proscribe extreme responses* of silence one one hand and "flaying", rather than supporting, victims of abuse on the other. (Perkins, Lawes, Cassells et.al, 2017).

The Church in the Caribbean cannot escape the growing evolution of a global movement across various organizations that seeks for sexual rights that are not only *negative,* or oriented to non-discrimination, but also inclusive of what is seen as *positive rights.* This relates to such as freedoms for abortion choices, marital forms, open sexual orientation preferences, and bathroom access to transgender persons. In these situations we need to interrogate our own prejudices as well as discover true guidance from God as to how to be on centre with our stewardship of the well-being of the whole person.

What about **money** in our off centred world? Here are some realities:

- Globally, eight males only, own the same wealth as the bottom half, or 3.6 billion, of the world's population. One in ten persons,survives on less than 2 US dollars daily. (Oxfam, 2017).
- Most of the super-rich are not self-made. They either inherit much of their wealth or prosper due to dodging taxes, driving down wages and prices paid to producers. There is also investing less in their business, corporate cronyism and corruption with political bedfellows. (Oxfam, 2017).

What about the Caribbean?

- In Jamaica crime and violence cost us 3.99 percent of gross domestic product. (Jaitman, 2017).
- It is no wonder that in Jamaica 50 percent of children in our schools are on the PATH welfare programme indicating our degree of poverty.(Cross, 2017).

The off centre dance of handling money relates to gender too.

- Women, as more than 50 percent of the world population, own only one percent of the world's wealth.(Peace Corps, 2017).
- In developed and developing countries they shoulder the majority of unpaid work. (Hallett, 2016).
- Yet they are outnumbered 4 to 1 in legislatures. (Hallett, 2016).

We in the local and global church need to do the following:

- *Advocate for a more responsible and socially oriented capitalism* versus a system that is unregulated and exploitative.
- Develop *financial literacy and empowerment* for all congregation constituents and outreach target populations.
- Develop a resulting mix of appropriate *money management strategies* including: thrift, entrepreneurial risk taking, using structured, formal, committee based and documented and externally evaluated procedures as well as using the best talents.

Some case vignettes of action in our communities.

We need to use action research to *discover, affirm and replicate the several examples of best practices* that exist of institutions and communities engaging in action for getting back to the centre in handling power, sex and money. These are some brief case vignettes:

1. "Establishing the Three Hills Farmers' Association was the aspiration of Kentucky Johnson….One beloved member of this farming community is Gloria East…..' While working as a teacher someone gave me some cabbage suckers to plant. When I reaped them, I realized that the money I made was much more than I received by teaching." (Fairclough, 2017).

2. "She is not an adult, but she has been selling in the market to support herself and her family … But school has not been easy for Stacey (not her real name) ... Her fights at school has led to her being enrolled in the Dispute Resolution Foundation based School Intervention Programme (SIP) … a relapse coincided with the date Stacey's sister was

killed in 2013 … But the SIP has done wonders for Stacey and this little market vendor is preparing for life after high school." (Jones 2017).

3. "… a pot of porridge bubbled sending a welcoming aroma to droves of children looking forward to a healthy breakfast before school. A small, safe space created by Ricardo Burke, founder of the Foundation"… Activities include homework assistance, health fairs, senior citizens' care packages, an Internet Café, and library. "Shouting, bad behaviour and all indecent activities are banned ... for the children as well as the parents … the members of *Yutes 4 Change* hope they have made life better for even one child." (Robinson, 2017).

Summary and conclusion

We have explored the theme **Back to the Centre - Implications for Handling Power, Sex and Money.** Here we have defined the centre as "t*hat location of one's point of view and related actions which would make the greatest desired difference in the use of money, sex or power to fulfill the goals of Christian ministry on the part of the user*. This goal involves having and living out a mindset or paradigm of **fulfilling a Divinely-given Stewardship of bringing about the well-being of the whole person.** Thus going back to the centre calls for living out a lifestyle motivation of a **Stewardship of Discipleship**.

This is compared to a lifestyle of **Accumulation through Desire** which takes us off centre. Making either choice and experiencing the resulting positive and negative consequences apply to both others and ourselves. We have proposed some criteria for *a workable situation analysis* of features of the off centred world. These include contextual research, being narrative based, and involving relevant literacy. Suggestions for *feasible praxis, or action* for going back to the centre include being needs based, involving hands on engagement through community as well as healing of the vulnerabilities of the whole person.

To inform our reflection through visualization, we explored data provided by some "snapshots of global challenges and of practical possibilities" as well as local case vignettes of best practices.

In closing the treatment of our theme I encourage that we not only think globally, but that we be thoroughly contextual in our theological reflection and ecclesiastical action at the local level. This is best served by the process of indigenization. To serve this purpose in our Caribbean setting I draw on most relevant reflections by two profound West Indian thinkers.

The economic historian Sir Hillary Beckles has summarized well a core dilemma of our lack of a socially oriented stewardship of our resources and power in the post-slavery and post-colonial Caribbean. This drastically influences our being off centre . He has stated that:

> *"…..citizens are riddled with self-doubt and primed for a race to further fragmentation. As a community we now see the primary opposition to our indigenous ideas as residing within…..we have turned inward our vexation, violently unleashing rage upon ourselves…. Citizens are casting aside community needs and placing self above state…. the state has cut adrift vulnerable citizens as a conditionality of its own survival ."* (Beckles 2007).

Burchell Taylor, noted theologian and pastor, explains the overarching theme of liberation theology. This informs well our indigenous reflection and action for getting back to the centre :

> *"The recovery of the social and public dimension of faith sets it free not only to identify and expose the social distortions that result in human suffering, but it also sets it free for an understanding that commits it to solidarity with those who suffer."(*Taylor, 1991).

Let us seize the moment through the mindfulness and timely prayerful engagement which is essential in all that we commit ourselves to. Let us not retreat as we struggle inwardly and outwardly with our own mortality and with a broken world to get back to the centre. As disciples who are stewards of healing through Him who is the "light of the world" let us not forget his words to the original disciples and to us today. *"The world will make you suffer. But be brave! I have defeated the world!* " (John 16:33, TEV).

As one Jamaican dancehall sign posted to advertise a session said *"Serious things a go happen"* (Walters, 2016). If, then, we remain true to our God-given goal of locating Christian Ministry "back to the centre", especially as it relates to handling Power, Sex and Money, expect that "serious things" will happen!

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