



**ADDRESS TO THE STAFF OF CAMPION COLLEGE ON THE IMPORTANCE OF  
CHARACTER FORMATION IN 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY EDUCATION**

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Allow me to first express genuine appreciation for your invitation to address the staff this morning, as you know this session form part of your strategic planning exercise and I can say that my understanding of Campion's immense achievements and extraordinary successes has grown immensely on being told by Principal Grace of the breadth and depth of information gathering that goes into this process. I can only hope and wish that other schools, including my own St. George's College would emulate this kind of strategic planning exercise.

You have asked me to speak on the importance of ***Character Formation in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education***. You will forgive me if I start with the very basic. What do we mean by character? And here I acknowledge me debt in this definition as well as in other aspects of my presentation to a paper published

in February 2015 by the Centre for Curriculum Redesign. They suggest and I agree that “character encompasses all of agency, attitudes, behaviours, dispositions, mind-sets, personality, temperament and values”. Character qualities therefore are distinct from skills which represent the ability to effectively use what one knows. I might add that character refers to qualities, more so than traits because the latter are often assumed to be fixed and mutable while, in my opinion, character can be learned and acquired to a certain extent. I would like to link this to the mission of Campion College “a school committed to building the Kingdom of God – a world characterised by social justice, love and respect for the dignity of every person”.

Towards this end, your mission statement pledges “to give every student opportunities to achieve his or her maximum potential ...so as to develop as a confident critically conscious and useful citizen who will shape a more just society”. Very clearly this includes but goes well beyond building academic prowess or intellectual capacity. It may be gratuitous for me, but I do ask you to note what jumps out at me in the mission statement; namely “shape a more just society”. Shaping I understand to mean not just chatting about a more just society; less so complaining about injustice. In this regard I note the intersection between your mission and the National Pledge “to stand up for

Justice, Brotherhood and Peace so that Jamaica may under God, increase in beauty fellowship and prosperity, and play her part in advancing the welfare of the whole Human Race”. I am happy to say and you should be proud that so many of your graduates, particularly some of the recent Rhodes Scholars with whom I have had the privilege to work are indeed fulfilling this mission seeking to shape “a more just society”. This imperative assumes the greatest urgency as the 21<sup>st</sup> Century advances in Jamaica, and indeed globally. I put it bluntly we here and I dare say “the whole Human Race” are in the midst of a deep and broad crisis of economy, of governance and most profoundly of values.

I would like to sum up this crisis drawing heavily on one of the most recent encyclicals of Pope Francis: **The Apostolic Exaltation Evangelii Gaudium**. Chapter Two is entitled “Amid the Crisis of Communal Commitment”. The Holy Father frames the crisis in the following way: “in our time humanity is experiencing a turning point in its history, as we can see from the advances being made in so many fields. We can only praise the steps being taken to improve the people’s welfare in areas such as health care, education and communications. At the same time... the majority of our contemporaries are

barely living from day to day... a number of diseases are spreading. The hearts of many people are gripped by fear and desperation even in the so-called rich countries. The joy of living frequently fades, lack of respect for others and violence are on the rise, and inequality is increasingly evident. It is a struggle to live and, often, to live with precious little dignity. This epic change has been set in motion by the enormous qualitative, quantitative, rapid and cumulative advances occurring in the sciences and in technology... an age of knowledge and information which has led to new and often anonymous kinds of power”.

Pope Francis sums up the characteristics and contributing to the crisis as encompassing a number of elements which have to be rejected. These are:

- A culture of increasing materialism, individualism and secularisation. In this context “a growing deterioration of ethics... an information driven society which bombards us indiscriminately with data – all treated as being of equal importance and which leads to remarkable superficiality in the area of moral discernment”.

- An economy of exclusion. In this economy Francis tells us “it is not a news item when an elderly, homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points”. He goes on “some people continue to defend trickle down theories which assumes that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power...meanwhile, the excluded are still waiting”.
- The new idolatry of money “the worship of the ancient golden calf (cf. Ex 32:1-35) has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose”. The Pope then correctly indicates “the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by those happy few”. We note in passing that Jamaica has the second highest income gap of all the countries in the Western Hemisphere. “To all this we can add widespread corruption and self-serving tax evasion, which have taken on worldwide dimensions”. In Jamaica the Minister of Finance indicated to the Parliament recently that 25% of entities earning a billion dollars

in revenue and above were neither filing tax returns nor paying company taxes.

- A financial system which rules rather than serves.
- Inequality which spawns violence “until exclusion and inequality in society and between people’s are reversed, it will be impossible to eliminate violence... no political programmes or resources spent on law enforcement or surveillance systems can indefinitely guarantee tranquillity...because the socio-economic system is unjust at its root”.

I have cited Evangelii Gaudium at length because I believe it is a document which well sums up the foundations of the crisis of our times and indeed, goes on to indicate that one element of coping with this crisis, especially in Catholic institutions is exactly the topic of our session today, namely, character formation and values centred education.

Social scientist, particularly, political scientist and sociologists have done surveys over a number of years mapping the cultural changes to which

Francis refers. You may wish to take a look at the **World Values Survey** where, without going into detail two major dimensions of cross cultural variation are discerned in the modern world: one, traditional values (the importance of religion, parent –child ties, deference to authority; rejection of divorce, abortion, euthanasia) is giving way to secular rational values (less emphasis on religion, traditional family values and authority, acceptance of divorce, abortion, etc.) and two, survival values emphasising economic and physical security and incorporating low levels of trust and tolerance, especially in developed western economies, though unevenly so is undermined by self-expression values, including growing tolerance of gays and lesbians, rising demands for participation in decision-making and increasing concern with environmental protection.

In much of what I have said regarding the developing crisis of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, we can see, as we in Jamaica would put it that the “head of the stream is dirty” and therefore much cleaning has to be done at that level if the bottom of the stream is to be successfully purified. Let’s take a brief look at what had been happening at the head of the stream in our financial and political sectors recently:

- 2012 – HSBC admits to widespread anti-money laundering violations including taking over \$800M from notorious Mexican and Colombian drug cartels. HSBC is fined \$1.9B.
- May 2014 – Credit Suisse fined \$2.6B after pleading guilty to helping US Citizens evade billions of dollars in tax over several decades.
- June 2014 – BNP Paribas fined \$8.9B for wilfully and knowingly breaking US sanction laws. According to US Regulators the bank “with the knowledge of multiple senior executives engaged in a longstanding scheme that illegally funnelled money to countries involved in terrorism and genocide”
- 2015 – United Office of Drugs and Crime estimated the amount of money laundered globally each year is 2 to 5 percent of GDP or 800B to 2 trillion in current US dollars.

Now to the head of the political stream, just in the last few months:

- July 2015- South Korean Prime Minister indicted on corruption charges.

- September 2015- President of Guatemala Otto Perez Molina indicted for corruption and three years earlier Silvio Berlusconi former Italian Prime Minister found guilty of tax fraud and sent to prison for four years.

I dare say none of these bank CEOs or political leaders were uneducated. I am sure if you did an investigation you would find that many of them passed exams with flying colours. Clearly, in the values system of these and so many others we could mention the idolatry of money and greed for high living would have been a dominant characteristic.

Perhaps we may come closer home at this point and ask ourselves what could have driven so many Jamaicans, many with degrees, some quite well off to invest in Ponzi schemes which promised 10% per month increase on principal as, the convicted criminal and money launderer did? And home come so many of these unregulated schemes, despite now being declared illegal are still attractive to so many of us? We should note in passing that according to a 2009 study done by the International Monetary Fund, the amounts invested/lost in OLINT, Cash Plus, Worldwide, LewFam etc is estimated at 1 to 2 billion United States dollars that is 12.5% to 25% the high percent lost to

GDP except for Albania of eleven countries surveyed in the IMF paper. Approximately, fifty thousand investors/accounts were involved about 2% of the population.

Perhaps at the lower end of the income scale are the lotto scammers. Once again greed compounded by lack of opportunity, compounded further by flawed morals and character formation fuelling murder and mayhem. By the way, not only is murders up to September 2015 gone up by 25% over September 2014, but believe it or not over two hundred children have been slaughtered in Jamaica over the last 5 years, an average of almost one per week. No one can doubt the deepening crisis of values, fuelled at the top by greed and at the bottom by need and that this represents a palpable decay in our society. Two more quick illustrations might underline the point. Norman Washington Manley, one our National Heroes, as an outstanding attorney ranking with the best in the world worked hard “to shape a more just society”. In 1968 he died having had to sell his house in order to survive and after he passed his wife, the outstanding Jamaican artist, not being able to afford a motor car. Contrast this reflection of self-sacrificing values and behaviour with some current first term members of Parliament. By whatever means,

they have achieved what was part of their mission – to build palatial mansions. Manley served 6 terms. Some of our current crop have yet to complete one. Second illustration from my own experience of how values have changed. In the 70s and 80s in organising to build the UAWU into the national union it has become, one organising tool which attracted much applause and appreciation was my the indication that I was not being paid by the Union and this was voluntary service, in the 70s and 80s workers applauded. By the end of the 90s when this was revealed, it had an opposite effect; the workers concluded looking at one another in great puzzlement that I was slightly mad, a dramatic change from admiring to denigrating service and sacrifice.

To attenuate much less mitigate and transform the culture and value change in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is a tall order but as you know, crisis provides opportunity. In that attenuation, mitigation and reversal character education shall play a critical role in educational institutions like this one and across the board. But let us not fool ourselves character formation at this level has to be complimented by other mechanisms at another level. Concretely you tell me how you will instil the understanding that “honesty is the best policy” or

“crime and corruption does not pay” if the dishonest and the corrupt in high places, enjoy the fruits of the good life and do not meet their just desserts – investigated, prosecuted, brought before the courts, found guilty and jailed. Hence another critical tool in dealing with the crisis is the efficient functioning of the justice system and the fair application of the rule of law. Similarly substantial changes will be required in media content and in the approach of other institutions of socialisation such as the household and the church, as well as, in community organisations.

I would like to turn now to some of the top qualities which the situation requires to be inculcated in character formation, to seize the opportunity presented by the increasingly obvious evidence that the dominant trends accompanying the technological revolution of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century shall have to be reversed if humanity is to survive much less to develop. Again I am indebted to the Centre for Curriculum Redesign in these thoughts on what is required. I mention the following qualities:

- Ethics – by this I mean an understanding of the difference between right and wrong. A quality of fairness, decency, a high regard for integrity, justice and equity.

- Mindfulness – by this I mean a sense of self-awareness, knowing one’s strengths and weaknesses, being able to self-manage, to listen, to share, to have compassion.
- Resilience - perseverance, tenacity, self-discipline, the ability to come back from set backs
- Courage – the ability to stand up for what is right, to overcome fear, to resist peer pressure when peer pressure points to wrongs and not rights
- Leadership – the ability to persuade, influence, guide others by as much through what you practice as what you preach, to empathize with, connect with followership to carry them forward in a transformational relationship.
- Curiosity – willingness to probe beneath the surface of things, to learn at all times not to be content with received wisdom to be open-minded towards the new and the positive

These are but 6 of the key features of character which shall have to be assiduously cultivated to cope with the negatives of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century environment. I am encouraged to learn the extent to which Campion is already making efforts in character education, with Christian Living Classes from first through sixth form in which the emphasis I understand is placed on the practice of lived faith. I am encouraged to hear that the social teachings of the church are brought to fourth and fifth forms and that the over forty clubs and societies each have a service component. In that last regard, last year NIA conducted a pilot experiment in three schools, in St. Hugh's, Holy Trinity and guess, St. George's College in the establishment of Integrity Clubs. The experiment showed promise. Out of it came a manual which I would commend to you as a framework for exploring the establishment of an Integrity Club at Campion. I was very encourage just last week in addressing the first of three Youth Consultative Conferences sponsored by the Governor General to see the extent to which teachers and student leaders, head boys, head girls and prefects from across the County of Cornwall expressed an interest in establishing such clubs in their institutions. I hope that there is a similar motivation here, as a formation of this type is going to be of some importance

in the character formation that we would wish to see and in the development of a social movement for integrity amongst our young people and older age cohorts to cope with the crisis of our times.