

FREE FOR ALL?

**– a question
of morality
and
community**

Rev. Dr. Burchel Taylor





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After three years of dealing with subjects of a mainly economic nature, the Grace, Kennedy Foundation turns its attention this year to the urgent question of attitudes, principles and morality. We have been fortunate so far in the calibre of persons secured to deliver each Grace, Kennedy Lecture. This year, as we change our emphasis, we are equally fortunate in the calibre of our Lecturer.

Rev. Dr. Burchel Taylor is a most respected preacher, scholar and lecturer. He is a conference speaker in great demand in the Caribbean and beyond.

Pastor of the Bethel Baptist Church, Half-Way-Tree, he has served two separate periods as President of the Baptist World Alliance's Study Commission on Ethics and Communication.

He is a Lecturer at the United Theological College of the West Indies in the field of Christian Social Ethics.

Dr. Taylor is a past student of Cornwall College and Calabar Theological College and holds degrees from London University (Bachelor of Divinity), Oxford University (MA) and the University of Leeds (Ph.D.).

Dr. Taylor has been Baptist Chaplain to the University of the West Indies (Mona) and Review Editor of the *Caribbean Journal of Religious Studies*.

He and his wife, Anna are parents of three sons.

Rev. C. Samuel Reid
Director, Grace, Kennedy Foundation
Chairman - GKF Lecture Committee

Preface

In 1988, when the Grace, Kennedy Foundation conceived the idea of mounting an annual Lecture, its decision was founded on the conviction that a formal forum was needed for the examination and analysis of the variety of serious problems existing in the society, economy and politics of Jamaica and the rest of the Caribbean. Further, the Foundation was of the opinion (and still is) that it would not be sufficient to dissect, but that examination and analysis should be followed by an attempt to prescribe - to offer possible solutions - and disseminate the discussion among as wide a public as possible.

It was within this context, therefore, that the first three Lectures were launched: the inaugural Lecture in 1989 by the Hon. G. Arthur Brown on *Patterns of Development and Attendant Choices and Consequences for Jamaica and the Caribbean*; followed by Sir Alister McIntyre on *Human Resources Development: Its Relevance to Jamaica and the Caribbean*; and, in 1991, *The New Europe, The New World Order, Jamaica and the Caribbean* by the Hon. Don Mills.

The issues probed in these Lectures were primarily, though not exclusively, of an economic nature. It was decided that this year (1992) we would turn to look at the social arena and that the Lecture would focus on examination of a problem and of related issues existing within this non-economic, non-material area. The Foundation is, therefore, very pleased that the Rev. Dr. Burchel Taylor consented to deliver this, the 1992 Lecture, on one of the most serious and fundamental problems which have been plaguing Jamaica and some other Caribbean societies over the past two decades. This is the issue of morality.

We have been living in a period in which an emphasis is being increasingly placed on material values; in which other values such

as the ethical are not only being relegated to the bottom rungs of the hierarchy but are, in fact, being sacrificed. To say this is not to deny the imperative of having basic material needs satisfied; but the issue centres on the degree and, as Dr. Taylor puts it, the almost total dismissal of moral concerns as they relate to community and the public sphere.

As the Rev. Sam Reid's introduction of the Lecturer reveals, Dr Taylor is eminently qualified by his education, training and experience to deal in depth with these fundamental socio-ethical concerns. In this Lecture, *Free for All? A Question of Morality and Community*, he raises issues concerning the rise of secularism in modern societies, the decline in the hitherto dominant role of the church in our society, the loss of moral certainty and the necessity for moral education. Dr Taylor's dissertation continues and is consistent with the standards of excellence, which have been set by the previous Lectures in the series.

In addition to the usual practices of publishing the Lecture in this book and of its delivery on radio (in successive sections) copies on tape will be provided for schools which take part in the essay competition.

Professor the Hon. Gladstone E. Mills, O.J., CD
Chairman
Grace, Kennedy Foundation

Introduction

The subject of ethics and morality and its relevance to the matter he was discussing was referred to by G. Arthur Brown at the end of his Grace, Kennedy Foundation Lecture, *Patterns of Development and Attendant Choices and Consequences for Jamaica and the Caribbean*. He observed that he did so knowing full well that there were those who would consider the introduction of such a subject into the discussion as being out of place. That was in 1989, and it is still the case at this moment in the minds and practices of many far and wide.

Their opinion is that morality is something to be confined to the realm of private opinion or to the narrow confines of special interest groups but that it is not worth public discussion. To engage in this discussion devoted specifically to morality as it relates to community could therefore be regarded as something of a calculated risk. The topic could be dismissed without even being given a chance to be heard and reflected on. However, it is here considered to be a risk worth taking and the support given by such gracious sponsors as the Grace, Kennedy Foundation is a great encouragement.

Morality is too integral to our humanity and our life in community for its banishment from the public sphere to be accepted without further thought. This is the basis of our discussion as we look at certain developments that have affected the moral situation in our midst, consider the place of morality in our social existence, and reflect on the kind of society that will give faithful expression to morality when it has been assigned its rightful place. It is hoped that in the course of the discussion it will become clear what is meant by morality. This is considered to be a better method than beginning with a definition that would run the risk of being abstract or which would lead to an inevitably abstract discussion and defense of what would simply be one among many other

possible definitions. Basically, it is more in this practical mould that the whole subject will be examined.

Morality - A Lost Cause?

The Jamaican society now stands at a most critical point in its self-understanding and in the working out of its own future shape, form and structure at the most fundamental level. In this respect, it is like many other societies which fall into a similar relationship with the larger and dominant centres of Western civilization (Western Europe, the United Kingdom, North America) and which share a somewhat similar socio-political history and experience and face similar developmental challenges and issues. This is evident in nearly every area of Jamaican life - social, political, economic and cultural. There is no area, however, in which it is more evident, than in the area of morality. Even though it may not be readily acknowledged, the lack of acknowledgement itself, which may also represent a lack of interest, is very much a part of the critical nature of our present situation.

In this particular situation, the society appears to be at a point where it is both catching up with and being carried away by the spirit of the times. On the one hand it seems to be belatedly coming to terms with what for some time was known as the spirit of the modern age, associated with Western culture and civilization - and originating in the eighteenth century. This represented a new framework of thought and new rational criteria for reflecting on life, investigating reality, relating to nature and managing human affairs. It meant that previously unchallenged, and presumably unchallengeable, sources of knowledge and moral authority were brought under scrutiny and considered, in some instances, to be found wanting. A new sense of individual liberty and an awareness of the ability of human beings to think through their problems and provide their own self-determined and self-sufficient answers became dominant factors in Western thought. It has taken some time, but now this is a prevailing spirit in our midst.

There are some specific and significant ways in which this spirit has manifested itself. The following are worthy of note.

The Growth of a Secular Outlook

Religion, particularly the Christian religion, has long played a dominant role in our society. It is often claimed that there are more church buildings to the square mile in Jamaica than anywhere else in the world. Whether this is really so or not, it is speaking to a perceived religious saturation of the society. Continued formal and semi-formal gestures of recognition (not necessarily appreciation) accorded the church and its representatives seem to testify to the continuity of traditional assumptions of power, authority and influence. The influence of religion on the day to day speech and vocabulary of the people would seem to bespeak widespread religious allegiance.

The fact of the matter is, however, that the secular option has become very real and the spirit of secularism has been having a very decisive formative influence on general viewpoints, attitudes and policies of action throughout the society.

The church, a long-standing source and centre of moral authority and influence, can no longer take for granted that it has any special right or privilege to be heard and to have its dictates respected and followed. No longer does it have the almost universally accepted role of being the predominant shaper of the public moral consciousness and chief guardian of public morality. It can no longer simply press for legislation and, codes of conduct that presuppose everybody is religious and, more specifically, Christian or accepting Christian ethical convictions and codes. In addition, there are today areas of life, social, cultural and political, in which the church is no longer considered to have the competence or right to comment on or offer counsel and advice. Above all, there is a greater readiness as well as a sense of freedom to reject outright

any religious opposition, which is considered to interfere with people's individual rights and private lives. Whether the issue is gambling, attitudes to holy days and seasons, forms of entertainment and revelry, the content of popular local music or the morality of male-female relationships and the quality of family life, the church's voice of protest and moral instruction no longer bears the authoritative significance it once did.

Frequent vandalism of church property and robbery of churches, emergent and increasing anti-clericalism and more open questioning and dismissal of the teachings of the church are recent phenomena that bear out evidence of a new attitude that does not accord a certain respect and regard to religion and its representative institutions, persons and traditions. Much greater freedom is being displayed, on more than one level, in rejecting or ignoring religious protests made on presumed moral grounds against certain socio-economic policies and lifestyle pursuits.

All of this undoubtedly is part of the general sidelining of the religious influence with its strong claims to moral knowledge and authority. Whereas opinion polls at the present moment would still show that a majority of persons in our society share some form of religious beliefs and conviction, there is no doubt that the secular spirit is growing.

So much of the continued acknowledgement the church receives is more the relic of a perception of past significance than an appreciation of current relevance. The church is no longer an almost universally accepted source of moral authority. It has lost its power, and even its confidence, to define and dominate areas of public debate concerning, among other things, the community's morals. There is now in evidence a falling away from the belief that the society is a Christian society along with the corresponding moral implications.

a) Multiplicity of Moral Options

The emergence of the secular option and the onset of the spirit of secularism also mark the growing recognition of the existence of a multiplicity of religious perspectives, world views, moral frames of reference and preferences of lifestyles. Not only has the hegemony of mainline Christian denominations been broken by a proliferation of other Christian and religious groups, including our very own home-grown Rastafarianism, but other viewpoints, philosophies, world-views -borrowed, copied, adopted and adapted - have become, and are increasingly becoming, part of daily life. Controversies, disagreements, competing claims, differences, variation and variety rather than agreement and consensus, or even dialogue and conversation, are becoming more and more the order of the day. The opinion and letter writers' columns in the press, radio-talk shows, 'Vox Pop', sermons, public speeches, and street talk all convey this.

Indeed, even in terms of the once dominant Christian moral perspective, obvious internal divisions appear. In the recent debate over the reintroduction of a lottery, we witnessed one church leader coming out with full page statements in one of our daily newspapers chiding those Christian groups which opposed the lottery and expressing the view that, essentially, that should not be the concern of the church.¹ One church group dissociated itself from the call of others for church groups and their members to consider curtailing their business or cease doing business with the Bank of Nova Scotia Jamaica Ltd., which is the custodian, wholesaler and retailer of the lottery tickets.² There were also constant queries as to the right of the churches to dictate to people on such a matter. It was taken for granted that the church was overstepping its bounds in seeking to dictate in such an area.

Both within the ranks of the church and outside, a plurality of viewpoints manifested itself. This is but a recent dramatic

example, but it reflects what is taking place at several levels, on an ongoing basis. It is a growing trend. No single voice of morality is recognized as having any absolute right to dictate proper moral behaviour. In this we can see an indication of an abandonment of any universally accepted source of moral authority. The society is becoming one of open options. A variety of moral frameworks is being recognized, providing alternative options for the individual. Indeed, there are even some individuals who might not recognize any of the existing options as the norm, but establish their own. Such a situation now prevails in our present social context.

b) Individual Moral Autonomy

There are those who can recall a time when, generally speaking, most, if not all, persons accepted or acknowledged the same rules or codes of conduct in their society. Whether everybody was faithful to them or not, everybody regarded them as important and warranting being observed and obeyed. There were rules and codes of conduct sanctioned by the traditional centres of moral authority, for example, the church, the school and the home, which were themselves, for the most part, mutually supportive in this regard. It cannot be said that such a situation obtains today in our society. With burgeoning pluralism there is the relativizing of morality and a corresponding individualizing of the moral decision making process. There is what Mervyn Alleyne regards as a confrontation of cultures, the traditional collectivism of the Jamaican culture being met head-on by European individualism.

In the case of the latter, emphasis is placed on individuals being responsible for their own personal welfare. They should be free from all restraint as long as they remain within the constraints of the law and, to a lesser extent, also within the bounds of morality. The goal of life is the individual's own personal success which invariably is achieved mainly at the expense of others. Those who do not work to achieve this goal are regarded as lazy and 'good for

nothing'. It is a matter of two worldviews in which there are different orderings of priorities.³

Increasingly, people feel that they are confronted with a variety of moral options with no overarching moral consensus or absolute moral authority that they are obliged to obey. The autonomous self assumes the ascendancy - each person chooses his or her own moral frame of reference and preference as seen fit. There is really no right or wrong lifestyle. It is essentially a matter of personal opinion, personal wishes, personal likes or dislikes guided by a combination of enlightened reason and self-interest. There is an absence of what Peter Berger refers to as a 'plausibility structure', that is, a social framework or structure of ideas and practices that creates the condition determining what beliefs are plausible within the society.⁴ And so, whether it is a matter of what one does in terms of business practices, relationships with others, work-ethic, attitudes to racism, classism, sexism, the choice is essentially a matter of individual decision as to what is considered right or wrong, based on the individual's own freely formed personal convictions.

The assumption here is that people should not be brought under any pressure by the society or any group or groups claiming exclusive moral knowledge and authority to make choices one way or another. It is simply not the business of society how individuals exercise their personal freedom, providing they occasion, no harm to any other. One person's choice is just as good as another's is since there is no ultimate standard by which judgement may be passed. This spirit is well summed up by Milton Friedman who is of the opinion that ethical decisions should remain firmly in the hands of the individual, and that society should not interfere at all. As far as he is concerned: 'The really important ethical problems are those that face an individual in a free society - what he should do with his freedom'.⁵ Interestingly it would seem that Friedman's

economic ideology, which embodies this view, is itself very much a part of what is taking shape around us at this moment.

There are nostalgic longings for traditional values and vigorous calls for a return to such values. It does not matter if a measure of idealization of the past takes place in the process. Perceived changes for the worse in the present stir calls for a return of the golden past. There are cries of condemnation of and protest against in-discipline that is considered to be rampant and about to destroy the society. There are charges that the society is godless, thus causing the ills that are evident. Above all, the society is seen to be permissive. Permissiveness, in this regard, relates largely to what is regarded as loose sexual behaviour and an accompanying tolerance of that behaviour. The very nature of some of these frequent protests concerning the changed moral situation testifies to its undeniable impact.

In the spirit of the present situation, however, such protests are invariably considered to be coming from reactionary elements that have chosen to continue to live behind the times. The fact is that this new spirit has actually been seen to bring about a welcome openness, tolerance, greater awareness of individual rights, an assumption of greater responsibility for what individuals do with their own lives. Increasingly, it is argued, there will be less self-righteousness and hypocritical silence; less denial and concealment of behavioural patterns and individual conduct enjoyed although hitherto frowned upon by social conventions and traditionally established moral institutions and authorities. People's private conduct becomes their own concern. There will be greater freedom and flexibility in dealing with new and complex issues that arise, affecting human conduct and decision making. Traditional values and moral authorities did not have to contend with these new problems and are, in fact, inadequate to deal with them. The tyranny of legalism, moralism, and the authoritarianism of

structures, systems, organizations, institutions, dogmas, and leaders are seen for what they are and challenged accordingly.

There is not only greater individual awareness of freedom to determine a lifestyle but there is also a greater sense of individual rights. When these are lacking, they are demanded. At the same time, there is a greater sense of equality in terms of the individual's right to be heard. Nobody's views or ideas can be dismissed merely because of the person expressing them. The popularity of radio talk shows bears this out in our society. All these new attitudes are conceivably gains to be celebrated as the result of the new conditions encouraged by our society embracing the spirit of modernity. Society has caught up with the spirit of the modern age or, as some would want to say, it is the spirit that has caught up with society. However, what is true is that a new moral situation has emerged as a result of an increasingly secular outlook and the multiplicity of options for moral decision making associated with the spirit of the modern age.

Moral Uncertainty and Collapse

The truth is that while our society is catching up with the influence and possibilities of the modern spirit, it is also being influenced by a new wind that is blowing. This wind takes us beyond the dominant features we have just looked at. It is a post-modern spirit. Among its characteristics is a noticeable shift from hitherto accepted certainties and established confidence. For example, things concerning the nature of the world once considered self-explanatory no longer seem to be so. The celebrated self-sufficiency of human reasoning no longer inspires the same confident affirmation. Belief in the steady march of inevitable progress in human affairs and development has been challenged by serious reverses in the human situation. Dreadfully devastating wars, the great threat to the human environment that accompanies technological advance, tragic and painful underdevelopment of

vast numbers of people and nations side by side with the development of others join with such stubborn problems as racism, sexism, oppression and exploitation that continue to divide humanity to undermine the concept of inevitable progress. It has often been a case of the achievement of progress without sufficient sensitivity to the human cost at which it has come about.

One of the most disturbing features of the changing society has been the clear loss of moral certainty and an almost overwhelming sense of moral confusion. Diminished moral commitment and purpose seem to be evident on a wide scale, touching every area of life. In an important comment on the present period, Alister McIntyre the philosopher and ethicist, has characterized it as one, which retains the rhetoric of morality, while morality itself has actually vanished from it. 6 It is a period without morality.

The Jamaican society is undeniably showing signs of being in a moral crisis. There is a serious collapse of morality throughout the society. An equally disturbing sign is that the serious implications of this collapse are not being recognized nor are the negative consequences which are already evident. It is here realized that any assessment of and conclusions about moral uncertainty and breakdown have to be made bearing certain things in mind. In a changing world where old frameworks and perspectives are challenged from time to time, there have been constant charges of moral uncertainty and breakdown at different periods.

Moral dilemmas are inescapable by the very nature of moral problems, which in turn make moral uncertainty inevitable. The more complex moral problems become, the more evident the uncertainty and the possibility of resulting confusion. This is something to be contended with in any given situation. Today, with greater openness about hidden forms of behaviour that were once condemned, more widespread information about what is taking place, often communicated with a measure of sensationalism and

exaggeration, there is the possibility of things appearing worse now than they have ever been.

It is important to remember that the increased population includes an increased number of people engaged in what may be regarded as questionable behaviour, thus giving a superficial impression that there is more widespread misbehaviour than hitherto. Percentage-wise this might not, in fact, be substantially the case. It is also true that at times it is not always easy to decide whether certain behavioural patterns are the natural outcome of social dislocation or whether they represent more deliberate forms of moral disregard and breakdown.

Even when the factors that demand caution in assessment of moral breakdown are taken into consideration, there are definite signs that the society is in the midst of a moral crisis. With the dislodgment of morality from the grounding of an ultimate and transcendent centre, shown by increasing secularism and pluralism, a moral vacuum has developed. Morality is effectively reduced to a matter of one's own private interests, ideas, and desires. Some of the worst features of a 'free for all' morality are now evident. There is rabid individualism, unmindful of the rights, concerns and sensibilities of others. There is a very high level of in-discipline in general behaviour. As far as public commitment and the ordering and management of public affairs are concerned, there seems to be a near absence of sufficiently noticeable moral consciousness. There is flagrant materialism that makes the Market with its assumed self-regulatory mechanisms the model for the whole society. As a result, money and property become the ultimate determinants of all values. This bears threatening implications for true community, the family, and the value of the individual and the natural environment.

There are signs of an ever-widening gap between the fortunes of the people at opposite ends of the society, those who are rich and

those who are poor. There is further erosion of whatever modicum of stable family life there ever was and wanton disregard for the integrity of the environment. There is an inconsistency coupled with an ambivalence that allows for great harm to be done great injustices to be perpetrated and corruption to be excused without general moral protest. This takes place because often what is regarded as one person's in-discipline is defined and defended as another person's individual right, a state of affairs that speaks eloquently to the current moral uncertainty and confusion.

It is not that there are not some voices of protest. Neither is it that there are not expressions of concern, instances and examples of moral conduct and commitment, but the dominant ethos that is developing belittles morality and, worse yet, shows signs of a loss of moral sensibility. As a society, we are still uncritically fascinated with technology; our planners and policy-makers are still betraying belief in inevitable progress with obstacles to that progress seen as temporary aberrations. We are still impressed by what appears to be omni-competent human reason. Nonetheless, we are beginning to feel the impact of the moral dislocation of the postmodern era. We are faced with the great danger of not only thinking that we can shape our society without an essential moral foundation or shared basic moral vision but of also busily trying to do so. The danger signals of what this will mean are already appearing to such an extent that even those who are otherwise indifferent to moral values are sometimes frightened. Of course, these results will not necessarily be recognized as arising from the breakdown of morality in the society.

If our society wishes to be authentically human, morality cannot be dismissed willy-nilly nor can the death of our collective moral consciousness be allowed. If this should happen then humanity itself would become a lost cause, for morality is about human responsibility and accountability in the ordering of our lives, individually and collectively. This is definitely one of the

implications of the Judeo-Christian concept of humans being made in the image of God.⁷

There is no aspect or area of life that is independent of morality and moral decision-making, despite claims made to the contrary. For example, certain free market enthusiasts commit themselves only to 'the invisible hand' of self-regulatory principles or forces in the pursuit of self-interest. This is exactly what seems to be carrying the day. Indeed Professor G. E. Mills, in a letter to the *Daily Gleaner* protested against the reported claim, by one who seemed to have been a businessman, that moral concerns were not of utmost importance in business operations and decision making.⁸ The pursuit of profit is the chief end, presumably even at the expense of moral considerations. Of course, this is itself a moral position; though not necessarily acknowledged as such. There is no doubt that it also bears the possibility of grave moral consequences for life in community, the worth of the individual, the integrity of the environment, and the meaning of family life, as pointed out before.

All this means that the question of morality, as it relates to our present social existence, our understanding of life in community and the hope we have concerning the shape and form this life takes is one of great importance. It remains an essential part of the process of coming to terms with and maintaining control over their existence that is incumbent on human beings. Far from being a lost cause, morality is a critical necessity for the development of our society.

The Necessity of Morality

It is part and parcel of our current social crisis that morality has become a very badly neglected factor in our vision of what we are and what we want to be as a society. What makes it even more alarming is that there is more than a little hint that this neglect is of a studied nature. It is taken for granted that the neglect of morality is a pragmatic necessity since it really has no place in the public sphere. Morality is seen as essentially a matter for the private person, concerning what that individual wants to do with his or her own life. In this sphere, values may be considered to have relevance as a matter of individual choice. However, in the public sphere it is facts that have relevance rather than values.

This treatment of morality in the post-modern era is certainly a clear example of how some of the benefits of modernity, in terms of human self-understanding, self-expression and self-determination, have been transformed into dubious or, at best, ambiguous social realities. Other causes also can, and will, legitimately be advanced for the various instances of serious social and moral dislocation in our midst but one of the most critical causes must be seen as the marginalization of morality itself as a necessity for community existence, from the centre of our corporate life. It is the whole matter of morality being relegated to the realm of the private, quietly hidden away from the centre and being more aesthetic than normative.

Morality, Humanity and Community

Whatever general failures may be attributed to our present situation, social moral failure must also be included. Furthermore, other aspects of such failures can be identified as consequences of the more basic moral failure, even though the connection may not generally be acknowledged. This certainly leads to the observation that, given the importance of morality, which it is hoped will be

established here; no genuine social success as a whole can be celebrated unless it is also a truly moral success. Morality has to do with human needs, interests and purposes in terms of the individual and in terms of the wider community. These needs, interests and purposes are related to human responsibility and accountability, individually and corporately. They are a necessary condition for human wellbeing. What this means is that morality, humanity and community going hand in hand? If this is the case, as one believes it is, it must follow that one of the most urgent needs confronting the society at the moment is for morality to be given its necessary central place in our social order and existence - in our socio-economic, political and cultural policies - and in our policy orientation. It must become essential in our self-understanding as a people and in what is worked out in our social order and existence. This requires more than theoretical commitment. It must be reflected in our social practice.

Making the case for the necessity of morality in this way does not mean that there is any desire to suggest that we abandon the gains of modernity, for example, the greater sense of individual liberty, awareness of individual rights and openness to alternative options in decision making. It is not intended to be a call to the kind of neo-conservative and fundamentalist reaction witnessed elsewhere - and not without representative voices in our midst. Nor is there any suggestion that all the problems being experienced now would immediately be solved if morality were to be given its rightful place in the ordering of our social existence.

Certainly, all the problems are not themselves of a moral nature nor do they all raise moral issues. Apart from this, even among those that are of a moral nature and raise moral issues, some are so complex that to take any simplistic approach to them or to offer any quick and easy answer would simply compound the problem. It is a questionable moral practice in itself for readily available moral dicta to be applied without further thought to complex moral

problems and problems that might also be otherwise of a technical nature. Such a practice can give the impression that ready-made solutions can easily be found. One must concede that there are instances where the impetus to marginalize morality sometimes arises because of the complexity of the issues and problems that are faced and require solutions. It is felt that to introduce moral considerations, which are themselves, problematic is only to create further problems. It is best to leave out moral considerations and give attention to what is of pragmatic significance and value. This concession, however, does not mean that it is taken that it provides a sufficient reason to encourage the setting aside of morality, understandable as the urge may be.

Reference has already been made to the inter-relatedness of morality, humanity and community. Human life is of such a nature that there can be no true fulfillment, individually or corporately, if morally related needs, interests and purposes are not realized. There must be some basic moral frame of reference or structure, of an objective nature, extending across the range of social forms shared by everyone in the community. This will disclose the ultimate meaning, priority values and basic norms for commitment for all within the community, whose lives duly influence and are influenced by that community. It is at this level that some moral consensus ought to be expected about what is good for the wellbeing of the community as a whole and for its individual members. This should give social coherence concerning the common good at a basic level without endangering or denying the general plurality of views existing otherwise within the community. There could still be dissent but it would be within the framework of shared intentions as to the common good. It could also mean that particular conceptual schemes or belief-systems would be able to see the basic moral structure as reflecting or representing their own richer and more all-embracing world-view. The evidence, however, is in support of the need for basic moral

consensus as a necessary condition for the fundamental wellbeing of the community.

The removal of morality as a matter of concern from the overall consideration of where our community should be or of what is relevant for its good, opens the door to the kind of moral subjectivism and relativism which makes every person a law unto himself or herself, even in the most basic elements affecting the life of the community. This is so quite apart from the fact that just about anything or everything that one does is of some social significance in the longer or shorter run.

Lack of Social Coherence

The need for a basic framework that should guide and inform us in the ordering of our social existence can be clearly seen as we look at what negative effects its lack has had on the society as a whole. Predictably, it contributes to the dissolution of social coherence. This becomes particularly evident in the glaring absence of any shared basic vision of the kind of society we want or the kind that ought to be.

The framework for meaningful life is community. However, there does not even seem to be any serious indication to show whether there is any keen sensitivity to the fact that such a framework is both lacking and necessary. The awareness of the need for a viable and authentic society, a true community of persons with a shared vision of the common good, as being of paramount importance, is not evident. Instead the society appears to be one of competitors, rivals, opponents and aggressive sectoral lobbies motivated by self-interest without any accompanying thought of the good of the community. The pervasive nature of divisive party politics that obtains, the persistent self-serving practices and demands of interest groups and the yawning gap that exists between the wealthy minority and the poor majority in our society are evidence

of this. Privileges conferred by class and wealth are jealously guarded without regard for the disadvantages to others. This, too, points in the same direction.

There have certainly been numerous political manifestos and development plans offering some overall concept of the desired shape of our community and the means to be employed in achieving it. Very often, however, these themselves are not unaffected by the lack of a shared basic moral vision and the resulting absence of relevant social coherence that such a vision would encourage. Such plans are the work of technical experts and politicians. Inevitably they embody the ideological presuppositions of those who are ultimately in charge of the society.

When such plans are presented for endorsement and support, the basic view is that the issues of life involved in the formation and development of a community are largely, if not totally, technical in nature. It is argued that sufficient technical expertise; knowledge of the relevant facts and adequate material and technological resources will do the job of shaping our social existence effectively.

Political ideology has the capacity to inspire passionate loyalty as well as to impose conformist unity that conceals basic disagreement, and at the same time to create fundamental disunity. It cannot be a substitute for that deeper underlying moral framework that can and will inspire fundamental social coherence in relation to the common good without denying diversities of view and outlook. These diversities may even be reflected in the detailed application of the actual values suggested by the shared basic moral vision of the kind of society needed for the common wellbeing.

The lack of social coherence carries with it a basic contradiction noticeable in our midst. In the absence of this coherence, rugged

individualism takes over. Yet, from time to time, the need for community is nevertheless called for, a need that the whole order of the individualistic morality denies. Here we see that what is denied or being destroyed is what is needed but its worth is recognized only when vested interests are threatened by its absence. Some of the most selfish groups and people can be heard calling for national unity at certain times without recognizing the contradictions implied by their own activities and way of life. That social morality has been pushed to one side is exposed by such a situation but the fact remains unacknowledged because the relevance of a code of morals observed by the whole society continues to be questioned by the individualistic ethos.

While this disregard for social coherence goes on, especially with the absence of a shared basic moral vision, the same technology which is increasingly being accepted without thought by many as the solution to all problems is actually exposing the interdependence of our human life. Shared knowledge and expertise make the society work. Technology shatters the dream of isolated self-sufficiency that is often attached to it and at the same time creates the need for its own network of interdependency. It does this in a world and at a time now eager to celebrate the final triumph of individualism. It will be interesting to see how this contradiction works itself out.

A fragmented social order split by continuing controversies, contradictory purposes and conflicting ideals at the most fundamental level is daily bemoaned. Nevertheless each person, group, organization or institution continues to act according to individual taste and individual assessment of right and wrong. Where the concept of individual freedom not only permits but also includes the right to follow individual plans and programmes without caring for the greater social good, the best interest of a society will always be at the mercy of the self-interest of powerful individuals and groups. It thus becomes impossible to mobilize a

sustained collective commitment to community as a shared moral vision and obligation. Yet such a vision is absolutely essential for social coherence which is, in turn, a basic need in order to guarantee the possibility of a satisfactory life in a meaningful social order. In the absence of the shared moral vision that determines or defines the goal of the kind of community we want, the best that can be expected is the formation of pockets of concerned individuals or small groups that cluster around the real issues that make for the good of the community. Such concerned individuals and groups often have to fight against great odds and are put at great disadvantage by the lack of social coherence occasioned largely by the total unconcern of the majority as to the need for a shared basic moral ethos.

Absence of Public Moral Discourse

Often a society exposes its weakness by what it leaves out of its public conversations and debates. In our society the lack of a basic moral consensus leads to the absence of meaningful public moral discourse. This in turn leads to a lack of a developed and mature moral sensibility relating to issues of a moral nature that inevitably affects every person's life, not only in its private capacity but also in its public dimension. As life changes constantly and all that affects life and life itself become more complex, such public moral issues will inevitably arise. Despite current moral subjectivism and relativism there will be need for open discussion. It will be forced upon us whatever happens. Uncertainties about society's attitude to capital punishment, abortion, homosexuality, the disabled, public probity, the environment, business ethics and practices and other matters of a similar nature have emerged. The possibility of a resolution of such uncertainties however, suffers from the absence of any meaningful public discourse concerning them. This is largely because morality is not now considered to be one of the most important things in the ordering of social existence and community life. It is, instead, a private matter for those who are

inclined to be concerned about it. Public discourse on issues, therefore, tends to take the form of the expression of personal likes and dislikes with accompanying and equally individual support or condemnation, agreement or disagreement.

That there has been decline in the area of public moral discourse and debate is obvious. Even a book written as recently as 1983, Neville Callam's, *Pregnant Teachers and Rebellious Cricketers*, which discussed the public debate taking place on the two issues, **9** seems to present a higher standard of discussion than, for example, the recent controversy about gambling. As could be expected, the discussion of the two issues chosen by Callam was, to some extent, subjective and relative, and unavoidably so one might think. But, in some notable instances, there was some attempt to put the debate in a framework beyond the subjective. This was not the case with the more recent debate, especially on the part of many, who were in favour of gambling, though some of those who opposed it were no better. Indeed, the Prime Minister himself summarily dismissed the moral argument, in this case, going for a pragmatism that he thought really made moral arguments irrelevant.

More and more it seems as if morality is considered to be irrelevant at the public level. The effect on the ordering of our social life is that less public moral discourse takes place with any serious attempt at objectivity; that is, when it takes place at all. Those public moral issues that do get discussed show people being dismissive, abusive, and scornful in attitude - with a strong suggestion being conveyed that to raise any moral argument is to become meddlesome in what is essentially a private matter and to be dealt with on an individual level. There is no common ground that could become the basis for debate nor any common ground about the common good of the society we would wish to have. As a result, meaningful dialogue, conversation, comparison of conceptual schemes and worldviews, as they bear directly on morality and its implications for the social whole, are lacking. But

such discussions are necessary for advancement in moral understanding, maturity in ethical decision making, informed insight in making moral judgements and offering counsel and advice.

Any development within a society that is not served by a mature moral outlook shared by most of the society will remain seriously defective, no matter what technical and statistical evidence may be brought to show success or to impress with possibilities for success. In such a situation, humanity and community, the most important elements in the developmental process, will be fundamentally at risk and this in turn will call the whole enterprise into question.

Again we see an element of contradiction emerging. While public moral discourse seems to have been ignored, with relativism taking its place, the society is quite willing to pass judgement on events taking place in other societies. For example, Jamaica has a proud record of protest against apartheid in South Africa. But surely for a society in which there is a growing feeling that morality is a matter of personal preference, the right to protest against grave moral wrongs such as apartheid, torture, oppression and injustice, wherever they exist, must be severely reduced. This presents a challenge to our society to examine the necessity for a social moral consciousness and commitment that does not give way to complete subjectivism and individualism.

Devaluation of Moral Education

In a society where a basic moral consensus is not thought to be necessary, little or no value will be placed on moral education sooner rather than later. Much will be said about the importance of education and the merits of various aspects of education will be advanced, but moral education, as such, will not be seriously considered to be relevant. No doubt this is essentially because it is

seen to have no direct market value and, therefore, nothing to contribute to social existence. Moral education is seen to be peripheral. Churches are considered to be the institutions that would have special, indeed vested, interest in this area of life, but churches themselves are losing their place of importance in a secular society. They are accused of meddlesomeness when they raise moral questions. Home and family are also considered to be a source of moral education but they do not receive the public support needed to reinforce them. Yet if there is an inseparable link between morality, humanity and community, moral education is worth examining on a wider basis. Moral values that are essential for the shaping of any genuine human community cannot be neglected or left to chance at the community level. Without moral education, proper understanding of self and of social responsibilities cannot be achieved.

The moral education being referred to here is not education for conformity, for uncritical acceptance of dogmas and cultural absolutes. It is, rather, a preparation for understanding and reflection, for participation in decision making on a wide scale, the pursuit of moral responsibility and meaningful sharing in the critical and creative endeavour of shaping the society. It is education that releases the potential for self-realization, which also involves ethical commitment. The whole range of our human life is affected. School, church, home, citizens' organizations and interested people's groups all have a part to play.

As long as human needs and problems are conceived of as being exclusively technical in nature and as long as those who manage public human affairs justify what they do by appealing primarily to the technical experts and functionaries, then moral education will not be given its rightful place in the scheme of things. Education will increasingly be largely seen as equipping the young for practical, technical existence. It will not include development of the human person, enabling each person to fulfil his or her human

potential in a true relationship with the community. Moral skills are needed for this, since, as we have already seen, morality, humanity and community are closely bound up together. Conscious effort must be made to communicate such skills, along with moral values and ideals, formally within the public educational system. This must be done for the good of the society and its individual members.

The church, the formal institution of the dominant religion of our society, has an obligation through its own proper self-understanding to engage in moral education. This will have to be done despite the increasing spirit of secularism and the obvious pluralism that are now part of the social order. It is, however, a task to be undertaken with humility and courage. Various possibilities suggest themselves. There is a service to be rendered simply by keeping before the society's attention the necessity of morality for wholesome community. There is need for a serious attempt to be made to define moral issues and their implications without over-simplification or any claim to have exclusive rights to the correct answers and solutions. There is a place for commitment to moral ideals and values that transcend political party strategy or sectoral self-interest. There is need for the teaching and the practical embodiment of such ideals and values while recognizing the imperfection that constantly threaten them. These are all roles that the church can play in the attempt to give moral education its rightful place in the development of our society.

The home often overburdened and vulnerable to the very weaknesses of the society which is said to depend so much on it, is also significant for the moral educational process. This is said with the awareness that, in line with the point just made, home and family in our society have peculiar problems, some of which are of a historical and socio-cultural nature. While, therefore, part of the challenge is to understand and address these problems as part of the commitment to the moral development of the community, it is

to be expected that within the existing family framework some form of moral education ought to take place. At the least it presents a base for understanding what it means to live in community; for inculcating values that lead to appreciation of the human person; for introducing moral skills such as simple decision making, and for presenting ongoing opportunities for family members to fulfil their potential. All of this will, of course, takes place in more or less sophisticated ways and with the support of other groups including civic and community organizations. The latter also have their own roles in the moral educational process as they seek to make their contribution to community development.

The media, both print and electronic, are worth a thought at this point. Critics of the media, and especially of television, may very well exaggerate their negative moral influence. However, the opposite claim of moral neutrality often made on behalf of the media, especially by the media themselves, may be a stronger claim in theory than in practice. If it is argued that the media are means rather than ends or that they reflect what happens rather than create what happens and therefore, in themselves, exert no moral influence, then there are two things worth considering. First, there are occasions when it seems that the media are more than a means, such as when they create what are referred to as 'media events' or 'media personalities'. Such events are the media's own projections, measured solely by their impact. This capacity must be of some significance in terms of at least potential moral influence for good or for ill. Without some positive effort, it can be more for ill than for good. Second, in playing the role of reflecting rather than creating, the media may reshape what is being reflected in one way or another and in a manner that might no longer be morally neutral.

All this is said with the understanding that the media are a very powerful source of influence in general. Their potential moral influence cannot be minimized under the assertion of moral

neutrality. It is their great potential as a positive moral influence, which must be considered, just as their potential on the negative side must also bear some watching. Therefore, the media have to be alert to pretensions that too easily become associated with them, such as being all-powerful, all-knowing and above criticism. They too are not above being conditioned by balance-sheet considerations or by stereotyping, whether racial, political, national, cultural, religious or sexual. Such influences could, in turn, affect what the media communicate and this would not be without moral implications in terms of impact. At least, in this regard, there is a moral obligation that ought to lead to self-critical analysis of the way the media shape what is reflected and reported and of the way they define the terms on which they do this. Whether directly or indirectly, they share in the educational process. Morality cannot totally be divorced from this.

Absence of Public Moral Accountability

The marginalization of morality and the denial of its necessity in the ordering of our community's social existence have had some of its most dramatic results in areas of the most critical importance. The devaluing of morality leaves such areas totally unaware of any need for moral accountability although the life of the entire population at the profoundest level and on the most extensive basis is affected by them. These areas are our political culture, business practices and private sector operations. The situation here corresponds to what Michael Novak refers to as the 'shrine at the centre being empty'.¹⁰ Our view is to refer specifically to the shrine of morality being empty, simply because it is considered out of place or not pragmatically wise to allow morality to have any real influence on politics or business.

No serious code of morality regulates these areas in any way, which would suggest a true consciousness of moral responsibility and accountability to the wider community. The general

presupposition is, instead, that of a great divide existing between public practice and private morality. The result is, therefore, what Jurgen Moltmann calls 'Governmental power politics without morality and private morality without power'. 11. The upshot is the establishment of a political culture that loses its sense of moral commitment and responsibility. Public office tends to be transformed from a sacred trust into a personal possession with its accompanying power and authority. This takes place notwithstanding the fact that the rhetoric of sacred trust may be resorted to from time to time. What then happens is that the concept of sacred trust, which presupposes the possession and maintenance of integrity in relation to what is entrusted and to those by whom it has been entrusted, is no longer a dynamic moral motivating factor. In the same manner, authority is transformed from being conceived of as essentially a service to the society into a means of control and domination. Those in authority, therefore, do not necessarily see that authority as being best expressed in the service they render on behalf of the people who gave it to them. They see it more in terms of being both an opportunity and an instrument of control, domination and manipulation. Such a situation shows how easily power can corrupt ideals where there is no strong and sustained moral commitment in the area of public service. In the end, it not only tends to undermine the character of the well intentioned but also to attract the wrong kind of person to seek public office.

One of the most troublesome outcomes of this situation is that the absence of moral accountability has made it possible for corruption to find a settled place within the political culture of Jamaica. Political life has now come to be identified with corruption - corruption of practice, purpose, and procedure. Unfortunately, it seems almost impossible for the most honest person to be engaged in political activity or to be part of the political establishment without coming under suspicion. The whole administrative structure, including the public service, also suffers from this.

Professor G. E. Mills has summed up the phenomenon as well as anyone could in as brief a span as possible:

There is no doubt whatsoever that the incidence of unethical behaviour and corrupt practices have increased significantly over the past decade and a half and this is an understatement. Indeed, the practice has become so prevalent that it has become almost the norm; we now take it almost for granted.¹²

Mistrust, suspicion and cynicism have become a standard reaction to this state of affairs that is tantamount to the institutionalization of conduct that is immoral and yet for which there is no normal accountability within the community. This is certainly symptomatic of what takes place when there is a moral vacuum in such a significant area as the political culture of the society. If it is as bad as it seems, it matters little if it can be shown that there are places where it is much worse than in our society. The consequences are nonetheless terrible for the society.

With the political culture itself becoming so directly identified with corruption and attendant misdemeanours, it has not taken much for it to be blamed for all the ills and consequences of malpractices of a public nature. Politicians themselves are guilty of doing this in the partisan political charges and counter-charges, which they trade. Yet such things are not always necessarily attributable to the political culture or to it alone. The business ethos is another area that seems to display no obvious sense of moral accountability. This becomes more and more evident as the private sector assumes a higher public profile in the control of the economic order. Its own practices are coming under closer scrutiny. Greater uneasiness, suspicion and criticism are being expressed than hitherto about the absence of moral concern when it comes to business advancing its own interests. Again, the shrine of morality is empty at the centre. Materialism and pragmatism are the principal factors. What is good is what works to achieve desired ends: such ends are of a material nature - profits. Economic

values are ultimate values. Pragmatism guided by the profit motive becomes, for the most part, the chief and only justifying principle for what is done. Whatever vision of possibility there is which will give fullest expression to the profit motive is invariably turned into a law of necessity. By whatever means possible, such a goal must be achieved. The constraints of wider community consciousness become secondary. Indeed, in terms of community consciousness, the market becomes the model for the whole society rather than being one aspect of it. That model is essentially one of possessive individualism without the constraint of moral values as a primary factor ensuring a sense of responsibility related to the common good.

All this does not mean that public or social moral responsibility is not endorsed on occasions, especially under the heading of good corporate citizenship. These gestures, however, do not necessarily signify that moral responsibility is being linked to moral accountability. Good corporate citizenship now means charitable expressions and exercises, sometimes of generous proportions. However, felt moral obligations as they relate to economic goals and means of achieving such goals are a completely different matter. In practice, if not in theory, there is hardly a genuine sense of the common good as a rule. What is often regarded as the common good is an aggregate of individual good, rather than a shared common reality to and for which there is a shared responsibility and accountability. Much of a particular kind of religious sentiment contributes to the idea of the common good being no more than the aggregate of individual good. Protests by churchmen against the church's campaign opposing the Instant Game Lottery referred to earlier fall within this category. Yet the biblical perspective itself holds a vision of a common good that is more than the aggregate of individual good by its emphasis on covenantal relationships, fellowship and the corporate body. This vision is held without denial of individuality as opposed to individualism. Individuality with its self-awareness and self-

expression finding self-fulfillment as it affirms its community relationship is achieved as a result. This individuality in turn is served by a moral sense that commits it to upholding social cohesion within the community as being of fundamental importance.

Increasing Dependence on Legislation

It is an interesting and noticeable phenomenon that people have come increasingly to depend on legislation to provide the answer to every problem that arises in the community. Calls are always going up for legislation of one kind or another to deal with social issues or problems, apparent or real. The powers-that-be themselves do make promises and do seem to enact legislation at an increasing rate, sometimes even in an emergency, to deal with all kinds of problems that arise or which are persistent. At the same time, complaints and criticisms are regularly made about Government regulations or 'red tape', which seemingly hinders efficiency in the pursuit of business and may even hurt people's genuine interests. Sometimes the complaints and the criticisms come from those who themselves call for legislation in other areas or who see legislation as the answer to most social ills.

The truth is that very often when the moral shrine becomes empty at the centre and there is complete moral relativism, there has to be more. And more dependence on the law to regulate behaviour so as to ensure ordered life within the community and the protection of individual rights. Very often in our society the laws and 'red tape' procedures that are complained about and which can undermine efficiency or unduly slow up the process of operations are put in place to ensure minimum acceptable standards of conduct. This happens particularly in areas where the morally unscrupulous will exploit perceived weaknesses for their own self-interest to the detriment of the common good. Of course, there have been long and complex debates over what the relationship between law and

morals should be whether morals can be enforced by law and if so to what extent, and whether any attempt to do so should be made.
13

This debate is not being joined here. All that is being suggested is that it seems that where there is an absence of a shared basic moral perspective there will be increased dependence on laws to ensure minimum acceptable standards that protect the rights of and serve the common good. In the absence of all basic moral consensus, legislation gains even greater importance in terms of what is essentially personal conduct. It may reach the stage where there are complaints that a country is over-legislated or that laws are being used to enforce morality. Martin Luther King, Jr. has some important words worth bearing in mind here. He writes:

Morality cannot be legislated, but behaviour can be regulated -judicial decrees may not change the heart but they can restrain the heartless. The habits if not the hearts of people have been and are being altered every day by legislative acts, judicial decisions and executive orders. *14*

While making the case for laws playing this kind of role. King did not consider this to be an adequate substitute for morality itself. He saw the need for there to be an inner transformation of lives leading to transformation of vision and attitude which would, in turn, better serve the common good and ensure a more wholesome society. He sums it up this way:

Something must touch the hearts and soul of men so that they will come to ether spontaneously because it is natural and right. *15*

Humanity, as he sees it, has a 'dark and demonic' aspect that constitutes a great hindrance to social integration. This terrible factor will be removed only as human beings are possessed by the invisible inner law that inscribes on their hearts the conviction that all human beings belong to one another and that love is humanity's most powerful weapon for personal and social transformation. An

over-legislated community does cede certain of its cherished freedoms but this is the price that has to be paid for the marginalization of morality from public life in the very name of wanting more individual freedom. If everybody wants to behave as he or she sees fit, then serious community dislocation, are in the offing. How responsible can it be to have this state of affairs? This in itself is a question of deep moral significance.

Morality is a necessity for human life, individually and collectively. Without some shared basic moral frame of reference, community suffers and social existence is undermined. The absence of social coherence will erode the moral development and maturity, which are essential for overall improvement. There will follow the undervaluing of moral education necessary for proper self-understanding and awareness of responsibility. Moral accountability will be absent from vital areas of life affecting, and responsible for, community welfare. The regulation of life by law will take the place of moral commitment, which would ensure greater individual liberty and a more meaningful social existence.

A Responsible Society

Morality is a necessity for our social existence. This is the point I was attempting to demonstrate earlier by indicating the ways in which the absence of a shared basic moral frame of reference affects our social existence. What it amounts to is that the ordering of life in society becomes severely affected and there is a possibility that community will eventually become considerably diminished. This, of course, strikes at the very root of our humanity since it is in community that our humanity finds its true fulfillment. It does seem that, at the very outset, community itself must be seen in terms of being a moral category rather than being purely and simply technical. Whatever else may be involved, values and virtues are absolutely important for community.

When community is seen as a moral category, it becomes important for it to have a horizon of ultimate meaning that will unite basic human needs, interests and purpose with certain moral values in the shaping of social policy and the structuring of community itself. This is a necessary condition for social wellbeing. Such a horizon will supply the unifying vision for, the society that will afford the best opportunity and create the most significant possibilities for all its members. In this sense, the technical experts and all the technical necessities that will shape our society cannot be morally neutral nor can they be values-neutral. The values of the moral vision will determine the priorities of the society and undergird its ability to survive.

This raises important questions. What kind of society is wanted? What kind of society is currently being shaped? The dominant values that are now evident in the determinative priorities hold the answer.

At this moment these values seem to be predominantly economic, promoting inevitably a rugged individualism. Self-interest is in the

ascendancy. It undermines all other interests except those, which may be exploited for self-interest's sake. The society therefore tends to become one of greed, dreadful disparities and inequities, domination and dependence, structural disadvantages and, essentially, deeply divided, with all the attendant social ills. These include corruption, large-scale deprivation at the most basic levels of human need, in-discipline, violence, hopelessness and cynicism. Such a society urgently needs an emergent moral consciousness to become a *responsible society*.

A responsible society is not a paternalistic society, as the concept is sometimes understood to be. It is a society that is guided in its decision making by values that affirm the humanity of its members. It is controlled by a sense of moral accountability at all levels. It means that the outcome of the policies pursued and the state of the society itself are morally accounted for by relevant persons and, ultimately, by the whole community. It is an accountability that is grounded on the shared vision of what is the desired society and which its members are committed to shape, embodying the values associated with that vision.

The Common Good

The common good must be a central feature of the concept of the shared vision. In the responsible society, therefore, the common good is not sacrificed on the altar of self-interest. Neither will individual interest disappear, subsumed by the common good. In the present situation, with the culture of individualism being dominant, there is no chance of the latter taking place. There is simply no strong sense of the common good evident. It is here that need for transition and transformation lies in relation to the 'free for all' concept. What is largely understood now, and practiced, is each person for himself or herself, doing what is considered best in the individual's own eyes. We need to see people exercising a freedom not only for self but one, which also seeks the wellbeing

of others, best, summed up in the common good. This is something that the responsible society will seek to facilitate on the widest possible basis. In this case self-interest is open to take into consideration other important factors, without which there cannot be any true human fulfillment. These factors include service, the rights of others, and community solidarity, all-important for the common good.

It must be admitted that the concept of the common good does not find favour with everybody. Many are aware that it could be appealed to and used in dubious ways, which could put people at a serious disadvantage rather than contribute to their wellbeing. It can be manipulated with seeming moral passion by vested interests which, in the end, deny people their legitimate rights, establish repressive measures to silence protests or force people to conform to unnecessarily harsh rules for their own selfish and perverted interests. Such a danger does exist but it is not sufficient to warrant abandoning the concept. If the concept is properly understood, it will itself prevent any such distortions. It is also true that there is no alternative concept that quite captures what is meant by the common good. It is not a concept that is meant to eliminate all conflict or tension. Indeed there are instances when the actual resolution of conflicts and tension may well be of great benefit to the common good.

There is the need for continuing social moral consciousness of a higher common factor; a greater shared interest represented by the common good, beyond individual self-interest but not denying ultimate individual fulfillment. Without this social moral consciousness, social existence becomes fragmented, divisive, unnecessarily competitive, threatening and unjust. There is no end to which divisive strategies will not be pursued to preserve vested interests. Those who are strong politically, economically and socially, with their own supportive network and systems, invariably operate to the great disadvantage of the weak and poor.

We can see this in our midst. There are truly telltale signs of the lack of and need for a responsible society.

It is indeed a grave mistake to perceive the society basically as a mass of individuals thrown together who are meant to live doing as they see fit, with no reference to anything else but their own individual self-interest. In this case, the only time anyone would work together with others would be on the grounds of enlightened self-interest or by intimidation and coercion or in a national emergency. This is a contradiction of a fundamental inter-relatedness predicated on the fact that the human person is a social being who finds fulfillment in community. This inter-relatedness ought to find expression in the shaping of our social existence which in turn ought to benefit from a shared moral vision. As human beings, we do have the necessity, ability and responsibility to conceive, define and develop a responsible society. This will be a society that will allow its members to live meaningfully and to honour their commitment and loyalties in such a way that their particular lives, loyalties and commitments will benefit from and benefit the common good.

Citizenship

One of the essential requisites in the whole process is a fresh appraisal and appreciation of the meaning and implications of citizenship. A responsible society is one that will give the highest significance to citizenship and allow for its full realization by all its members. Citizenship will allow a proper balance to be held between individual interest and social commitment. It will put the common good into proper perspective. Citizenship embodies such important concepts as equality and solidarity, protection and participation, rights and duties. All of these are essential. If any one of them is threatened in its basic and fundamental form, withheld, usurped, inhibited or prohibited, serious questions must be raised. The fact of citizenship is then at risk. "The spectre of

injustice is bound to appear and a responsible society becomes an impossibility. A society that does not embrace the critical factors that give expression to citizenship cannot be called a truly responsible society.

It is important, therefore, for citizenship to be given very serious attention in the shaping of our society. It is a concept that needs to be known and shared by all the members of the society, not only in form but also in substance. Too many persons tend to be more aware of and concerned about their rights rather than their duties. And there are those who seem to be in a position to secure such rights without seriously committing themselves to their corresponding duties. An even greater number of persons, by virtue of their circumstances, neither share nor enjoy certain of the basic rights of citizenship. They seem unable to defend their rights as they should, or to ensure them, but it seems easy for their duties to be imposed upon them. Their circumstances do not allow them to participate in important areas of the life of the society as they ought and they are often considered unworthy to do so.

In the society there are powerful and privileged persons and weak and marginalized ones. The latter are often objects of the charity of the former. This kind of charitable action invariably becomes the badge of the truly active and worthwhile citizen. In a sense, therefore, the weak and the marginalized are not considered to be citizens of any real value. Their purpose is to be at the receiving end of charity and voluntarism. At the same time, engagement in acts of charity and voluntarism becomes the new way of defining citizenship. Isn't there a violation and denial of something fundamental in relation to the weak and marginalized in this interchange? Certainly there will always be an important place for charity and voluntary work. However, when they are used to define meaningful citizenship while casting doubt on the citizenship of others, even those who are at the receiving end, then, unfortunately, they are being misused.

What this amounts to, in the end, is that people belonging to one section of the society, through circumstances over which they have, in a large measure, no control, are made victims by the society itself instead of being participating citizens. People are rendered powerless and alienated by the lack of economic necessities. They are without access to public information and the ongoing processes of decision making that fundamentally affect their destiny. They are deprived of the opportunity to participate meaningfully in the social heritage and to make their contribution to the shaping of the dominant culture or to its needed transformation. Citizenship for persons like these is indeed a matter of form without substance and their existence is a contradiction of what a responsible society ought to be. Ruth Lister is right when she writes:

It is not possible to divorce the rights and responsibilities which are supposed to unite citizens from the inequities of power and resources that divide them ... 16

There is a sense in which the kind of citizenship afforded the members of that society becomes an index to the character and integrity of the society. The reality and quality of citizenship shared will indicate how far the society has embodied the values and ideals that are related to good citizenship. They will also indicate how much the society is committed to being a responsible society, since meaningful citizenship for all its members is essential to the good society.

Key Factors

In a responsible society based on appreciation of good citizenship there will be some essential factors. Common humanity shared by all means that certain basic needs are common to all. There ought to be recognition of and respect for the right of all the members of

a society to have such needs met. These include the need for food, health, security, shelter, gainful livelihood and an unpolluted environment. An extension of these basic needs, going beyond the matter of physical survival to the quality of life, will embrace the right to education and information, cultural exposure, participation and affirmation.

The fundamental fact of human dignity and self-worth requires that members of the society be given the opportunity to participate in the decision-making processes in matters that will affect their well-being and destiny. The danger here is that, increasingly, the problems affecting the life of people in society are largely seen as being of a technical nature requiring primarily the expertise of technocrats, experts and consultants. The ordinary people who will, nonetheless, be affected directly and fundamentally by certain of these decisions are not considered able to make any contribution to those decisions. Surely one of the great problems facing us is, in fact, this reduction of difficulties and issues of life in community to being only technical in nature. They are not; and the people whose lives are going to be affected should not be excluded on the basis of such reductionist thinking. It is a particularly subtle way of marginalizing people or of reinforcing their marginalization.

Furthermore, the decisions taken often lead to the continued dehumanization of those excluded. Can people be helped to become more human by treating them as less than human in the process? Rather their human dignity is affirmed when they are given the opportunity to participate in the process of deciding their destiny all along the way.

Human beings are equal in the things that are basic to their humanity. It follows that the essential equality of human beings is more fundamental than the other things in which they are unequal. This is something that must be recognized and given fullest respect in the society. No social arrangements or ordering of life should

presuppose, assume, support, reinforce, create or benefit from any perception of inferiority or superiority of persons or groups within the society. If this should be the case, it will be an attack upon the responsible society. It will institutionalize inequality and establish a basis for injustice to become a permanent feature of the social order. In such a process, the deprived often become the depraved that are blamed entirely for their condition. This, in turn, is seen as good reason for nothing to be done to help them. The society can neglect them without any sense of responsibility for them.

Concerns

In a society in which the values of human solidarity, dignity and equality are given their rightful place in the shaping and formation of community, and with the proper value given to citizenship, life will take on new meaning. The responsible society will be in the making. The lot of the weakest, the most vulnerable, the disadvantaged and dispossessed will become a matter of special concern, going beyond voluntarism and charity, which can sometimes evade the real issues that affect the lives of the people. It will involve the creation of a just social order in which all the members of the society will be given the opportunity to fulfil themselves as active citizens in the exercise of their rights and duties. In this way, the welfare of the poor and disadvantaged will not be expected to be mainly provided for or maintained by charity and voluntarism.

The quality of society and the true nature of its development will be measured and judged by the way in which the weakest members are treated. It will be judged by the possibilities or the lack of possibilities, open to them for the transformation of their lives and by the sensitivity or lack of sensitivity shown for them in consideration of the impact that policies and changes of policies will have on them. It will also be judged by the willingness to

effect the kind of changes, which will lead to the creation of a more just and equitable society.

In a materialistic society where wealth, property and other material possessions confer status and give power and where highly visible and excessive consumption shows this status, it takes little for the poor and disadvantaged to become both invisible and inaudible. The existing value-system tends to be reflected in the social structures, legal system and the institutions of such a society and they, in turn, tend to overwhelm the weakest members of the society. As a result, the powerless become vulnerable and more and more burdens tend to be imposed upon them from time to time, sometimes in the name of their eventual welfare, invariably a matter of deferred hope. A responsible society will not tolerate this. It will care enough to create the possibilities for all citizens of the society to participate in its shaping as well as in their own self-development. The society will then be based on its vision of human dignity and its own integrity. The creation of this kind of society beckons us as a matter of great urgency.

There is further need for the development of institutions and organizations in the society that will, among other things, serve as a social conscience. They will seek to prevent the corruption of justice and to facilitate the giving of a voice to the weaker members of the society.

A responsible society will see to it that the institutions intended to be supportive of its order do not themselves become structures and instruments of injustice working against the people whose welfare and well being they are meant to serve. When such institutions and systems function in a distorted manner, they allow those who serve in and through them and those who are ultimately responsible to absolve themselves from guilt with apparent integrity and good conscience. Those responsible tend to claim total helplessness in relation to the adverse effects of the system on the disadvantaged.

Furthermore, they also tend to offer no hope of improvement, arguing that there is no alternative. This means that the victims of such structural and institutional injustice must accept the situation, having only the unchangeable system to blame.

This is an especially cruel form of oppression but one, which is so much part of everyday life. Indeed, there comes the time when the functionaries themselves become dehumanized. A responsible society will seek to humanize its institutions so that all concerned will be properly served rather than victimized by them, whether directly or indirectly. Those institutions will then serve the citizens in such a way that the enhancement of their humanity will be facilitated rather than threatened or undermined.

The achievement of this goal will involve such institutions in criticism, challenge and comfort. In themselves they will, as far as possible, embody and demonstrate the values and virtues that are needed for lives led truly in community. Surely the church, by the confession of its own calling, must be at the cutting edge of this development. The institutions of education and the home should also be partners in this cause along with civic and other organizations created specifically for such a purpose.

Realism

The vision of the responsible society must be grounded in realism. This certainly is not the kind of realism that will be invoked for self-excusing, self-justifying and self-satisfying purposes. It is a realism that is self-critical, open and hopeful. The society must know itself and not feed upon any illusory self-perception based upon false value systems. Nor must it be misled by the deceptions of those who act in their own self-interest by advancing themselves as leaders of thought or leaders in the affairs of the society at various levels.

This realism recognizes human weaknesses and the power of attraction of human self-centredness. It must not assume that human altruism is automatic. However lofty the vision such a society has of itself and which it seeks to fulfil, there will be those who will not necessarily share it, either out of sheer perversity or because they think they have a better vision.

The responsible society will not betray its ideals by becoming persecuting, tyrannical and closed. It will put into action whatever counteracting measures it sees fit, guided by its ongoing vision of the meaning and value of the human person. Those whom it must restrain will not be dehumanized. The society must recognize the ambiguities of its own laws, institutions, conduct, policies and conceptual schemes if for no other reason than that they are the work of human beings who, with the best will in the world, are not perfect. It will therefore be well served by the self-critical systems and structures that are put in place and by its willingness to listen to its critics and dissenters.

The society must never make its vision of itself absolute or final, either as it is or as it hopes to be. It must realize that the ultimate values and virtues which human beings are able to grasp offer a reality which judges what things are while, at the same time, it remains a goal of what they ought to be. The society can only be an approximation and anticipation of the ideal. It must, nevertheless, be constantly inspired by its ultimate vision.

Other Relatedness

The responsible society must know and be open to the challenging reality that it exists in a world community in which it has its part to play. Not totally unlike the individual within a particular society, the society must relate to the larger world community. It has its rights and duties. It has its challenges and opportunities. It cannot hope to fulfil itself if it does not have this wider vision shaped by a

concept of what the world ought to be like and playing its part in making that world a reality. This is not simply a matter of expediency or pretentious self-importance. There is more to it. The Honourable Don Mills, in his 1990 Grace, Kennedy Foundation Lecture, has done great service in highlighting certain of the technical and practical imperatives that ought to prompt global consciousness and special concern for the immediate regional area to which our society belongs. 17

The point has already been made that morality; humanity and community go hand in hand. Membership in the larger human family has its associated moral responsibility for each and every community member. Common needs, problems and concerns are a focus for moral commitment. Global socio-ethical concerns such as justice; issues such as apartheid and human rights; ecological problems such as acid rain, destruction of the ozone layer, nuclear destruction; mass threats such as starvation and AIDS all highlight the need for solidarity, interdependence and mutual responsibility. This cannot be evaded by arguing the smallness of the society or its limited resources. Moral consciousness of the common good on a global scale drives the responsible society to play its part in contributing to that common good. Like the individual within the particular society, the responsible society fulfils itself as a human community not by concentrating only on its own national self-interest but by embracing and affirming relatedness to the larger whole in widening circles of inter-relatedness, reaching its end in the global reality of the whole human family.

Therefore, the usual claims that the world has become a 'global village' cannot be made simply to celebrate the astounding advances that have been made in communication by the great technological advances our world has seen. In its own way, such a claim also bears the implicit reminder that nationalism cannot be the ultimate horizon of the moral commitment of any society. There must be the wider vision of the whole human family to

which each individual society belongs. This bears its own moral challenge. Openness to this vision is part of the challenge and commitment to being a responsible society in the shaping and formation of our self-understanding as a society.

It is easy to betray freedom in the pursuit and exercise of freedom. Nowhere does this become more evident than when individual freedom ignores community and as a result becomes a threat. When this becomes a way of life, the whole human enterprise comes under a canopy of darkness. It is, indeed, a particularly deceptive temptation to pursue individual self-interest in the exercise of individual autonomy at the expense of community responsibility. It offers its successes but such as is eventually self-destructive. True human fulfillment is achieved when individual freedom affirms and is affirmed in community. This makes *Free for All* a moral declaration of individual freedom as a right and a responsibility that benefits from and benefits the community and as influencing and being influenced by the community toward the common good. This is what contributes to the making of a responsible society.

End Notes

1. Full page statements published in the Sunday Gleaner by the Rev. J. Douglas of the Fellowship Holiness Church.
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4. Berger, Peter. *The Heretical Imperative*, Anchor Press/Doubleday, Garden City, N.Y. 1979. Pp. 7ff.
5. Friedman, Milton. *Capitalism and Freedom*, University of Chicago Press, 1962. Pp. 12ff.
6. McIntyre, Alister *After Virtue*, Notre Dame, Indiana. 1981. pp. Iff.
7. Genesis 1: 26-27.
8. Letter in the *Daily Gleaner*, September 28, 1991.
9. Callam, Neville. *Pregnant Teachers and Rebellious Cricketers*, 1983. Republished as *Deciding Responsibly: Moral Dimensions of Human Action*, Grace Social Ethics Books. May Pen, Jamaica.
10. A phrase used by Michael Novak in *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, Simon and Schuster, N.Y. 1982. p. 53.
11. In *Theology, Politics and Peace*, Theodore Runyon (ed. Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y. 1989. p. 34

12. Excerpt from a speech published in *The Sunday Gleaner*, November 4, 1984.

13. For example, the celebrated debate between Lord Devlin and Professor H. L. A. Hart in *The Enforcement of Morals*, by Lord Devlin, Oxford University Press, 1965 and *Law,*

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15. Ibid.

16. Lister, Ruth. *The Exclusive Society - Citizenship and the Poor*, Child Poverty Action Group, London. 1990. p. 68.

17. Mills, Don. *The New Europe, the New World Order Jamaica and the Caribbean*, Grace, Kennedy Foundation Lecture, Kingston .1991.