# Theology on the Web.org.uk

## Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:

A table of contents for *Caribbean Journal of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

# Maintaining Service and Integrity in a Stress-ravaged Jamaican society

**SANDRA McDERMOTT**
**PsyD**

**Clinical Psychologist and departmental head of Counseling Psychology, CGST**

Two cataclysmic events, September 11, 2001 in the United States of America and the December 26, 2005 Tsunami in Eastern Asia, have become watershed events which permanently altered the security and stability of global economies.[18] These pivotal events represent a geopolitical tailspin of gigantic proportions. They also highlight a sordid existential script that is portrayed on the global theatre screen which features the rapid and maniacal deterioration of human relationships, as seen in the staggering loss of life and socioeconomic chaos. Thus, the impact of the terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001 is parlayed not only as organized and orchestrated violence but the revolt of nature

---

[18]Presented at Optimist International of Kingston Region 4 of Saint Andrew at the Caribbean Graduate School of Theology, October 22, 2006.

against humanity.

Now the "fight against terror" has become the collective global beacon against orchestrated violence as the world watches the unfolding chain of events that is so deeply impacting the globe in this unprecedented period of tension and chaos. With similar regularity, the recent destruction of parts of the African and Asian continents, spanning a number of countries, suggests that humankind has not been spared the wrath of nature. As with these events, the world has been dogged by a myriad of challenges and difficulties. These include governmental incompetence, corruption, social squalor, hunger and entrenched poverty--seemly intractable problems (such as internecine tribal conflicts and ethnic cleansing) that are steeped in diseases and destruction of the untapped human potential toward socio-cultural development.

### Closer Home

Moral degradation of societal cultural mores, the general disintegration and the degeneracy of values and religious beliefs have been replaced by popular culture and the rapid rise of exported North American 'Bling" to mark a permanent place in the cultural ethos of Jamaican society. Graciousness and respect for others have been replaced by the manifestation of social anomie and social isolation, the savagery of uncouth behavior and a displaced social etiquette.

A caring and collected environment where consideration for others was paramount, has been ruthlessly replaced with the adaptation of a viral strain of American, rugged individualism. This is coupled with

the rapid pursuit of materialism-- objects of ego gratification and self aggrandizement--which is to be viewed as a parody of inner-city urban survival, a stifling of the social and moral conscience that ignores the glaring light of injustice, insurmountable poverty, and religious and moral denigration of societal values.

The issue of collective responsibility and accountability is all but a distant memory dogged by governmental failure and attendant religious apathy in the country of Jamaica. Government as a replica of State power and other influential educational and social bodies have failed collectively to rescue impressionable minds from the insidious and impacting corrupting influence of substituted factors of socialization. These socialization elements are, namely, the garrison Dons, the ubiquitous Dancehall, and imported hip-hop phenomena, as well as the hijacking of the fertile mind by the technological whirlpool. Such is the state of global affairs that has held our country in its horrifying grips.

This paper posits the view that the phenomena of human relationships are inescapable and necessary part of life. Life itself (*Zoe* in the Greek) seeks to present humans and other organisms as a response to environmental pressures and opportunities. It is the nature of relationships that we realize our dreams, enhance the quality of life and our existence in order to fulfill our God given potential for self actualization through the betterment of the human condition. The paper will also address the challenges of social organization such as the Optimist International to maintain integrity and excellence in service to the difficult challenges of 21st century life in Jamaica. The nature of the stress phenomenon as it impacts on human society will also be briefly discussed.

29

## STRESS AS EXISTENTIAL CRISIS

Wars, pestilence and natural disasters have deeply impacted the severity of emotional arousal on the human psyche throughout history. Modernization since the beginning of the industrial revolution results in "ordering of life by the clock" and a large increase on time pressured work. This results in the loss of community life and the lack of meaning embedded in the social matrix of modern contemporary society.

Antonovsky *et el.* (1987) posited the factualness of research that people who have some purpose or meaning in their existence are less likely to have very severe stress reactions. Albert Camus (1960, 5), an existential writer in the late 19th century, sums up appropriately the existential malaise: "In a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels like an alien, a stranger; his exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of the promised land". But new era of the industrial revolution is not without benefits.
 1. One benefit of industrialization is the enhancement of freedom and the economic well being of individuals.
 2. The removal of economic and social barriers gives one an array of choices in terms of careers, and friends, where we live and the choice of value systems. However, one wonders whether these benefits are not outweighed by their attendant challenges. For

example, in the absence of choice and maintenance of fixed belief and value systems, French sociologist described a type of existential angst-called ANOMIE which has made itself manifest in the breast of modern man. It is believed that with the increase and perception of society's inability to deal with social anomie as an existential reality, suicidal rates rise dramatically.

## Definitions of the term "Stress"

In order to understand the nature of the stress phenomenon as a challenge to doing justice to the topic, one has to look at the nature of the terminology "Stress" itself. Linden (2005) views the term as a mediational process in which stressors (or demands) from the environment trigger attempts at adaptation or resolution that results in individual distress if the organism is unsuccessful in satisfying the demand or stressor (Linden 2005, 2).

The *Webster Illustrated Encyclopedia Dictionary* further glosses

three important 'meanings' of the term:

1. Physical: An applied force or system of forces that tend to strain

or deform a body, measured by the force acting per unit area.

2. Psychological: A mentally or emotionally disruptive or disquieting influence or a state of tension or distress cause by such an influence.

3. Physiological: The term "stress" can be broadly defined as a state of challenge or threat to an organism.

Giradano, Everly and Dusek (1997, 7) state that the term is "the body reacting". It is basically the psycho-psychological (mind-body) arousal that can fatigue body systems to the point of malfunction and disease. There are also other indications of the term stress and there will be elaborated on for the purpose of this paper. Stress is derived from the Latin: *Stringere*-"to draw tight or pull apart". The Roman term *"Districtia"* in etymological form suggests "being torn asunder". Therefore, an understanding of the term "stress" from the Latin derivation is rooted in two themes:-

1. Non-physical phenomena as possible cause of disease or factors contributing to the disease. Conditions fitting the stress paradigm are neurasthenia, vapors, nerves, passions, worry, mental strain and tension to explain the concept of disease.
2. Psychological problems listed above seem to indicate that stress places a great demand on people who later succumb under the strain of "psychological or biological disease".

Stress was also seen in the 17th Century as an engineering concept. Robert Hooke was at that time been concerned as to whether man-made structures such as a bridges can stand up to heavy loads without collapsing. In terms of human physiology and the philosophical mindset, certainly in the 18th century, the human body was viewed as a machine and subject to wear and tear of life. Certainly with the renowned work of philosopher Rene Descartes, the mind-body paradigm emerged. The interaction of the physical

body (*soma*) and the mind (*psyche*) was seen then, as a cornerstone to bolster and to support the work of the noted physician.

George Beard, American Physician in the late 18th and early 19th centuries was noted for work on disease of the nervous system. He felt that pressing demands of 19th century life led to a circuit overload of the nervous system. The heavy taxation of the nervous system was articulated in the nomenclature Neurasthenia, which is a weakness of the nervous system (Rosenberg 1962, 240). Symptoms of the condition were morbid anxiety, fatigue, and irrational fears.[19]

Walter Cannon, a physiologist in the 20th century, first described the human body's reaction to stress. He called this the "fight-flight" response. One body will prepare itself if under threat to confront the stressor or to run away. He also coined the concept of homeostasis – the relationship of the autonomic nervous system to regulate physiological processes

My working definition, then, of the stress phenomenon will be to define stress as a mediational process in which stressors (or demands) trigger an attempt at adaptation or resolution that results in individual distress, if the organism is unsuccessful in satisfying the demand or stressor. Stress, therefore, is more than just acute

---

[19] Another noted scientist, Claude Bernard, highlighted a wellness theory for this condition: "Milieu interieur", which postulates that internal environment of living must remain constant in response to changes in the external environment (Cooper and Dewey 2004, 5).
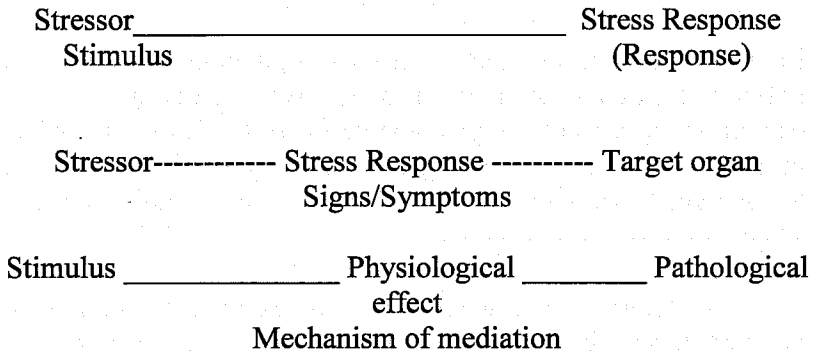
subjective or physiological activation and has its potentially most deleterious health effects when it becomes chronic (Linden 2005, 2).
Theoretical formulations of the Stress Syndrome

Excessive stress is a challenge to clinicians and to individuals who are most at risk in developing health problems due to prolonged stressors. In 1996, Murray and Lopez indicated that mental illnesses represent a significant contributor to the burden of global disease. The Disability Adjusted Life Year (DALY) represents the number of years of life lost to premature death and disability. Giradano Everly and Dusek (1993, 7) stated that the term Stress is "the body reacting". It is the psycho-physiological (mind-body) arousal that can fatigue body systems to the point of malfunction and disease. The following diagram illustrates:

Stress as a Physiological Response

Stressor_____ Stress Response
  Stimulus          (Response)

Stressor------------ Stress Response ---------- Target organ
       Signs/Symptoms

Stimulus _____ Physiological _____ Pathological
        effect
     Mechanism of mediation

## MAINTAINING INTEGRITY AND SERVICE IN A STRESSFUL SOCIETY

Given the backdrop of the problems that are embedded in the very social fabric of the Jamaican society, how does one aspire to maintain integrity and offer impeccable and selfless service against insurmountable odds and in the face of severe stressors? 'Service' and 'Integrity', I suggest, are inextricably linked and ought to be integral components of the fabric of Jamaican life. They embody not only the practice of moral standards but the continual reshaping of the human potential to pursue excellence.

The Optimist International slogan, which contains the key elements of Friendship, Sociability. Loyalty and Receptivity, is to be seen as a towering watchdog that functions as a monitoring mechanism to guard against the excesses of a tyrannical society and to counter prevailing antisocial and countercultural attitudes. I challenge you, therefore, as a service oriented organization to picture yourself as a moral scientist in the 'laboratory' of Jamaican life. The tools at our disposal in this difficult laboratory experiment are our service and your integrity. We must ask ourselves how effective and how proactive we will be in the success of this laboratory experiment. Will we be conservative and not challenge the status quo of protectionist individualism? Will we not fight and lobby against the might of the political garrisons, the excess of corruption, injustice,

economic poverty and misery, moral degradation and the failure of societal and religious values? Each of us must ask: Am I a protagonist for change to uphold standards of decency? Am I a crusader against violence against children and old people and women? If we cultivate the following 'values and attitudes' our task may very well be made easier:

1. Loyalty-To maintain integrity in service is to uphold the standards of personal excellence. Mirroring excellence is to model the motto 'Sociability by corporate responsibility to others in selfless service'. I borrow from the words of one of America's greatest presidents, John F. Kennedy: 'Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country'.

2. Friendship- To maintain integrity in service is to be a purveyor of peace in a troubled world. What are the inherent risks as I seek to pursue and uphold justice and economic viability for all, without counting the cost? Am I willing to bridge the cultural and economic divide by modeling friendship to those in affluent Norbrook and to those folks in the urbanized ghetto? Is not the Jamaican motto Out of many one people?

3. Sociability -The pursuit of integrity in service will be a powerful commentary in the protection and the embracing of the human potential of not only children but of all Jamaicans. Integrity in service is obliged to seek out the manifestation of truth and the pursuit of justice for the stability and emotional fulfillment of all citizens.

4. Receptivity-To maintain integrity in service is to pursue a personal and persistent relationship with the one who can make this possible -Jesus Christ. The story of Mary and Martha in the gospel of Luke, signals a look at the appropriate stress management techniques adopted by our Lord. Herbert Benson (1996) *Remembered Wellness* captures the powerful healing and powerful force of individual belief systems to promote treatment and curative effects. Benson (1996) further describes the combination of physiological powers of the relaxation response and the construct of remembered wellness as "faith factor". Accordingly, I feel that the exercise of a strong belief in God may serve as a source of strength and healing as an aid to selfless service. Empirically worship services have been shown to possess some therapeutic effects, as participants are given the chance to listen to music, to be distracted from psychosocial stressors, to socialize with others, to perform rituals, and to reflect and pray. In further highlighting the importance of the Optimist International slogan of 'Receptivity', I wish, in conclusion, to further indicate three salient points in line with my thinking.

1. The embracing of a strong belief in God is to engage in a partnership with God of which the end product is increase effective leadership in maintaining service and integrity. May I suggest that leadership without the knowledge which comes from seeking God's wisdom defeats the purpose of the philosophy and mission of your organization? It is servanthood in action that is selfless and self sacrificing. Am I willing to meet the needs of my fellow citizens for the greater utilitarian good of Jamaican society?

2. To maintain integrity in service is a willingness and determination to be an enduring beacon of light in adherence to a strong personal and professional code of conduct. The concept of the building of character and moral conduct is embodied in how my beliefs about service are strongly represented in the matrix of moral conviction and practice of a higher ethical code in my responsibility to society.

3. Finally, an integrity that is grounded in a powerful drive of conviction to seek justice and equality for all is rooted in the manifestation of effective leadership. Jamaica is looking for men and women from Optimist International who exercise and model sociopolitical and moral leadership.

## References

Antonovsky, A. 1988. *Unraveling the mystery of health: how people manage stress and stay well.* San Francisco. Jossey Bass.

Camus, Albert. 1979. *The essential writings.* New York: Harper & Rowe.

Cooper, C.L. & Dowe, Philip. 2004. *Stress: a brief history:* Malden: Blackwood Publications.

Giradano, D.A., Everly, G.S., & Duseki, D.E. 1997. *Controlling anger and tension: A wholistic approach.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Linden, W. 2005. *Stress management: from basic science to better practice.* Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications.