

Editorial

From the love of power to the love of the service



Love of power has been a constant in society, be it in the political, economic, cultural or religious field. In the political world, functionaries seek to perpetuate themselves in office because of their ambition of power. This pursuit of power is nothing new. It is part of a historical practice that has done much harm to humanity. The love of power has led warlords, groups or systems to subjugate people or nations at will. Of course, it is a tendency to which Christians do not escape. These are not just politicians, but religious leaders that seek power, influence or recognition. R. Padilla warns that "The temptation of using the personal power -that derives from office or spiritual gift, or knowledge, or profession, or personality, or money- to serve oneself comes wrapped in a rope of peaty, accompanied by biblical and theological justification".

Therefore, Jesus' proposal to exchange the love of power for the love of the service, which he made to his disciples, is timely and relevant for today's world. In Mark's Gospel Jesus addresses the subject after James and John asked him to sit in his kingdom one on the right and the other on the left (10:35-45). They thought that Christ would establish his messianic kingdom on earth; and for this reason they made their request. We analyze the story to understand Jesus' perspective in the use of power, in order to challenge us to transform the love of power into the love of the service.

Dangers of pursuing power for personal gain

Ambition for power does not listen to the pain of others. James and John's request was made on their way to Jerusalem. On their journey Jesus opened his heart to share with them the anguish of his soul. He told them, "The Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and hand him over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, spit on him, scourge him, and kill him. But after three days he will rise again (10:33-34 NIV). What was the reaction of John, James and colleagues? They paid no attention to Jesus' sharing about His imminent death. They were focused on their own self-interest. Their ambition for power made them deaf to the pain of their Master. Today we do not escape this trend. Leaders, in their ambition to gain or retain power, take advantage of the critical state of poverty in many communities by making promises that they do not keep, and then leave them in pain and backwardness. People become a springboard to achieve their political goals.

Ambition for power blinds the mind. Jesus told them that they did not know what they were asking. He asked them, "Can you drink the bitter drink of the cup that I drink, or go through the test of baptism with which I am to be tested?" Immediately they said they were willing. They did not understand what their question demanded and its implications. They did not grasp the cost of following Jesus to the ultimate consequences. They did not realize that leadership requires dedication, sacrifice and even death on behalf of others. The disciples were thinking only of attaining power. Jesus did not deny their request, but that they should consider the cost, and that it is up to the Father to assign them to places of privilege in His kingdom. It could be argued that seeking power in order to serve is not wrong, but it must be done in order to serve. P. Arana states: "Power can be used with sensitivity and respect for others, as an instrument for contribution, service and the achievement of shared ends, or for egomaniacal and utilitarian ends. Herein lies the ethical exercise of power". History shows that the majority seek power for power's sake.

Ambition for power breaks solidarity. The passage states that "the other ten, when they heard the conversation, were indignant against James and John". What effects did this have on the disciples? It provoked rivalry among colleagues, incited hierarchy-seeking and disrupted their interpersonal relationships. The rest of the disciples also had the same ambitions. It was a situation they had already discussed among themselves (Mk.9:33-37), and so they became angry with James and John because they had gone ahead of them. Individualism in the pursuit of self-interest damages the sense of community, and makes us strangers to each other. The ambition for power provokes rivalry and violence and tears the social fabric apart. It is solidarity as a value of the kingdom of God, not egocentric individualism, that can lead us to build a society that is just, fraternal and respectful of one another.

Jesus addresses the use of power

Exposes the use and abuse of power. In order to correct his disciples Jesus warns them against the use and abuse of power. He reminded them: "As you know, those who consider themselves rulers of nations oppress their subjects, and high officials abuse their authority" (10:42). Luke points out that these leaders not only exercise power, but that people call them "do-gooders" (Lc.22:25). Jesus disapproves of this way of using power, for it is not at the service of the people but uses coercion and violence to subjugate people. At the same time, it de-legitimizes the pretensions of those leaders who call themselves do-gooders. Christians should avoid using power for our own benefit by pretending to do good. Above all, in the face of abuse of power, whether by politicians, civil servants or religious leaders who seek their own benefit. Let us not be fooled by the propaganda of politicians who promise to serve, but whose curriculum vitae is far from a practice that evidences useful and disinterested service on behalf of the people.

Power must be at the service of the common good. Jesus is categorical in demanding of his disciples that their use of power be different from the use of power in the world. He said, "But it shall not be so among you". It establishes the difference between the children of the kingdom and the practice of others in the use of power. That "it shall not be so" is the norm of the ethics of the kingdom of God. For this, he proposes the exchange of the love of power for the love of service. In his words: "Whoever wishes to become great among you will be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you will be the servant of all". It establishes the vocation of service for the common good. This is the purpose of the state. Any other purpose goes against the dignity and rights of the person. The service that Jesus proposes is not a marketing strategy, but the vocation that should characterize the children of the kingdom. Consequently, leadership in any sphere of life must be motivated by service; and the vocation of service from the demand of Jesus should be a hallmark for every Christian. The vocation of service should be the key hallmark for assessing politicians or religious leaders who seek or assume leadership.

He models the vocation of the Suffering Servant. The most beautiful thing about the story is that Jesus assumes in his life the vocation of the servant. He declares: "For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many". Being the King and Lord of lords, in His incarnation He became like His creatures, He assumed the vocation of "Servant" to serve and to lay down His life by dying on a cross for the salvation of mankind. With humbleness and humility he assumed the vocation of a servant by washing the feet of his disciples. He modeled for the world the paradigm of the Servant Leader. Jesus did not use His power to serve Himself, but rather He arranged His leadership by serving the most vulnerable, and volunteered His life for the redemption of many. What is it for us to do in the face of such a sublime example? Evaluate our motivations, review our leadership practice, take on the challenge of being servants, and assume a critical and denouncing attitude towards those leaders who call themselves benefactors of the people, but who openly or veiledly seek their own benefit.

This demand is even more urgent in contexts such as Guatemala. Especially with general elections approaching. Faced with the avalanche of propaganda from candidates and political parties, citizens are challenged to a critical analysis of the ideologies, and profiles of parties and candidates. Although the mere change of people does not guarantee changes in the country's reality, it is essential to know the profile and motivations of the candidates. In this scenario, it is not unknown that there are candidates under questioning, politicians who with religious language seek to attract the evangelical vote, and evangelical candidates participating without proper political training. It is therefore essential to analyze the profile behind discourses and propaganda. Especially in the face of an avalanche of parties. According to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, 27 parties are registered to date. It could be argued that far from reflecting a healthy political pluralism, they show a digression of interests rather than the common good of the population. The absence of unity among the political leadership and the lack of a national project are evidence of this. The quest for power for power's sake comes to the fore.

Our duty as citizens is to assume the vocation of service wherever we are, to discern the interests and motivations of the candidates behind the propaganda, to know the political proposals in depth, and to demand the search for the common

good, on behalf of justice and peace for our peoples. Undoubtedly, we need the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to understand the signs of the times, to discern from the Word the socio-political context, and to assume our leadership following the example of Jesus as the Servant Leader. At the same time, it is necessary to make paradigm shifts in the mind and heart in the understanding of leadership. Especially in the face of an avalanche of literature promoting successful leadership that is far from reflecting the paradigm of Jesus. For these reasons we at Ezra Centre strive to provide a biblical formation for Christians to become servant leaders, who at the same time become agents of change, for the spiritual and social transformation of our churches, communities and our people. Let us take up the challenge to change the love of power for the love of the service.

Dr. Israel Ortiz, Director
Centro Esdras

Programme of Childhood, Adolescence and Family



On the 12th of November, we celebrated the graduation of students who completed the Diploma in Wholistic Development of Children and Adolescents (DNA in Spanish). Eight students who completed the eight modules and the elaboration of a project with proposals as how to care wholistically for children and adolescents in their area of work and ministry, received their diplomas.

Likewise, in November, the basic course Through Play we Find Strength to Face Difficult Situations (JNF in Spanish) was given, with the participation of 17 educators, who obtained playful tools to work on the prevention of sexual violence against children and adolescents. The course was carried out in a hybrid format, during four virtual sessions and an eight-hour face-to-face session.

[Karen Sipac, Coordinator of Programme](#)



School for Parents Project

Ezra Centre's programme of Childhood, Adolescence and Family (PRONAF in Spanish), is in the process of a new project. As a result of the Diploma in Wholistic Development of Childhood and Adolescence and the courses "Good treatment in the family" and "Playing strengthens us" (Claves), which have been developed since 2014, we have concluded that the work with children and adolescents will not be complete if we do not work hand in hand with the parents. Therefore, since last year we have been working on a new project, "School for Parents". This project is especially designed for rural areas of the country and marginal areas of the capital and to be carried out through local churches. We are sure that this work can benefit the churches in accompanying parents in their work of respectful and loving upbringing according to the values of the Kingdom of God, as well as being a contribution to the prevention of violence and its consequences. Strengthening families is our goal.



The whole project has been conceived to be accomplished in three years, in the current year the main goals are: To approach the leadership of a group of churches representative of the different regions of the country and the creation of a manual for facilitators. For this reason, a beautiful team of professionals committed to children and adolescents has been formed, who long to see new generations growing up healthy and strong in an integral way. The team is already in the phase of defining the methodological work and the contents of the manual. The first meeting was held at the end of last year, and the second meeting was held on Wednesday 18th of January 2023.

Theological Studies

In 2022, we successfully taught the diploma courses "Pedagogy of Jesus" with students from the Church of God of the Full Gospel from all over Guatemala, other students from the country and from Honduras. In the diploma course Mission in the way of Jesus, in each of the 8 modules we went deeper into the being and doing of Jesus in his Kingdom of life. A total of 18 people successfully completed the diploma courses. We are praying and promoting for 2023 to have new students.

Jeison Rodríguez, Coordinator of Diplomas



Programme of Wholistic Health



Foto arriba: Robert Reich y Silvia López del centro junto con estudiantes del curso en SETECA disfrutando de una refacción saludable después de la última clase.

On the 3rd of December the course "Integral Care of the Church Leader" was completed, facilitated by Robert Reich, the coordinator of the centre's wholistic health programme. The course was attended by 28 participants from 6 countries in a hybrid format (some participating in person at SETECA's facilities and most of them virtually). It was indeed a very nice experience where at the end of the course 100% of the participants responded that they would recommend the course to others. Many commented that it was the first time they had studied the theology of the body and the implications of being created as integral beings. In their homework and sharing time they committed themselves to better stewardship of their bodies, emotions, relationships and spiritual growth.

In November, Israel Ortiz and Robert Reich had the privilege of conducting workshops on the topic of "Preventive Health from a Biblical Perspective" with 40 religious leaders from the villages around Cobán, Alta Verapaz. As a result of these workshops the leaders expressed a need to train themselves and their congregations in health issues. They also affirmed the opportunity to consider biblical positions that affirm the importance of good stewardship of the body and love for one's neighbor.

Robert Reich, Coordinator of Programme

Programme of Creation Care

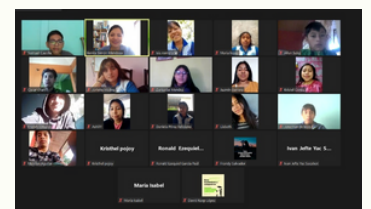
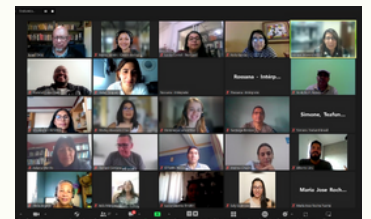
In the month of October we had the closing of the consciousness-raising and training process with our dear sisters and brothers of Tearfund, seven sessions that were developed monthly based on the material "Hope for all creation". These sessions were attended by Tearfund staff members, partner organizations and friends. There is much gratitude to God for the joy of these shared spaces and a common sense of the urgent need to model responsible stewardship of God's creation as part of the Mission.

In the month of November we had the privilege of sharing the module "Implementation of the programme of analysis, reflection and proposed solutions to national problems that affect their community," as part of a diploma course that Compassion through the programme called "Leadership School for Youth of the West" (ELIJO - in Spanish) develops with young people and adolescents.

Thanks to this programme we have witnessed and been part of the process of integral accompaniment and formation of this beautiful group represented by different communities in Huehuetenango, Sololá, Quiché, Quetzaltenango and Suchitepéquez. Despite the virtuality and distance, there was good receptivity from the group and we pray for these young people, that there will be seeds dispersed in them that will germinate into agents of transformation, that they will be seekers of justice and dignity in their communities.



In December, as part of the closing of the activities of the creation care programme, we had a get-together with part of the team of volunteers and friends, with whom we are being trained in this journey of caring for creation and with whom we seek to contribute from the different spaces that they have as professionals.



Benita Simón, Coordinator of Programme

Participation in the ELIJO program co-sponsored by Compassion Guatemala

With the idea of contributing to the formation of adolescents and young people as potential leaders, Compassion supports the ELIJO program that the Association of Associated Churches of the West promotes for young people aged 14 to 17. Centro Esdras was invited to teach the modules "Implementation of the program of analysis, reflection and proposed solutions to national problems affecting their community"; "Mission in the manner of Jesus" and "opportunities for youth in communities" from November 2022 to March 2023.



We thank God for giving us the opportunity to contribute to this program, and for the openness of the young people to study the Word. Despite their young age, they grasped profound truths about the kingdom of God. We share some phrases that capture what they have learnt during the week. They affirmed: "That the kingdom of God is not only in heaven, it is also on earth... It has two dimensions, the present and the future... Because of this the church must deal with everything that happens in the world, outside its boundaries; "Well, we have to be good leaders, and like Jesus we have to learn to serve people and not to be served, because that is what it means to be a good leader. And not to think we are so much more than someone else"; "The church is not just four walls, it's us"; "For it invites us to be part of the new creation and the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of God starts from creation, in the bible it is not a place if it does not refer to God's action and it is in everything"; "The kingdom of God is Jesus' proposal to the whole world"; and challenges us to "Be agents of change"; and that "The coming of Jesus will bring a government of peace and justice" to the earth. We look to these new generations with hope.

Pray that the Holy Spirit will cause the Word sown in the lives of these young people to flourish, and that they will take up the challenge to serve in the name of Christ on behalf of their communities.

Seminar Workshop "Leading in times of change"



On 22 of October 2022 the "Centre of Investigation Núñez & Taylor" of the Central American Seminary (SETECA), in cooperation with "Visión para vivir" (VPV) and "Ezra Centre", coordinated the seminar-workshop "Leading in times of change". The participants were Dr. Jorge Ponce, director of Visión para Vivir (VPV), who shared on the topic of resilience from the local church; and our director Dr. Israel Ortiz, who gave the conference "Rethinking the church as a kingdom community".

It was a space for participants to reflect on the identity and public role of the church in the world. They were challenged to be open to change to be a church that assumes its public role as salt and light of the world, in order to contribute to the spiritual and social transformation of the church and the country: To be a therapeutic community, to be an agent of reconciliation of the gospel, to be a diaconal community and to be a prophetic voice according to the values of the kingdom of God.



End of the year party

On the 10th of December we had the opportunity to gather the Ezra Centre Team, Board of Directors, friends, prayer group and teachers to thank God together for the blessings received during 2022 and hoping that we can continue learning to be and do the life of the Kingdom of God, through what we are and what we teach.

Gratitude:

- Heartfelt thanks to our colleagues at Tearfund, Latin Link Switzerland, Latin Link England, Resonate Global Mission, United World Mission, Cornerstone Trust, Serge; to Union Church and Iglesia Korean Presbyterian Church of Guatemala; and to our dear local and overseas donors for their support of the ministry in 2022. May the Lord in His goodness continue to shower His blessings on all in 2023.
- For the end of the year fellowship celebration with the Ezra Centre family.
- For the culmination of the different diploma courses and programmes developed during 2022.
- For the Lord's faithful provision to cover salaries and Christmas bonuses for the month of December 2022.
- We thank the Lord for the key support of the Ezra Centre Intercession Group, the Prayer Group of Headington Baptist Church of Oxford, the Horizon Education Network Prayer Team. The Lord has answered their prayers on behalf of the ministry.

We thank you dear brothers and sisters inside and outside Guatemala for your spiritual accompaniment and support in the journey of the ministry

Please, PRAY about the following:

- May the Lord's grace be poured out especially on the development of Centro Esdras' 2023 operational plan, the different projects, the working teams and the Board of Directors.
- May the Lord in his goodness allow the recruitment of new teachers to strengthen the Centre's staff and to attend the courses of the different programmes.
- For the "School for Parents" project team and the steps to follow.
- For the planning and development of the last module of the ELIJO program with Compassion Guatemala.
- For the monitoring of the facilitator team to the participants of the ELIJO program who have to elaborate their projects for their graduation in the second half of March.
- For the diploma courses to be held this year. That we can have a good number of students.
- Tearfund's institutional consultancy will be held at Ezra Centre from 27 February to 3 March 2023.
- For the restart of the drafting of the research project report.
- Pray for the workshops on "Spiritual Care of the Leader" that Ezra Centre will provide for World Vision Guatemala faith managers in the first quarter of the year. Robert Reich and Dámaris López will teach this workshop.

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