

Noel Erskine*

The Church and Black People in the Caribbean

Prior to the 1830s, the early church in the Caribbean did not significantly alleviate the identity problem that threatened Black people. In fact, in many respects the church compounded the problem of identity for Black people, because it symbolized an institution in which slaves were not allowed to participate; and the Baptist, Methodist and Moravian Churches saw their task as saving the souls of Black people.

The Church of England in Jamaica excluded Blacks from its ministry because the church understood religion to be mainly an exercise of the intellect, of which they regarded Blacks to be incapable of exercising. The other churches, which regarded religion mainly as a matter of the heart, sought to make the slave "Christian." The theological concern of the missionary was to save the soul of the slave, and not to raise questions concerning the ordering of slave society. This theological concern was based on two assumptions: (1) if slaves were made Christians they would be more industrious; their new faith would lessen the possibility of their running away. Robert Peart, a Mohammedan who became a member of the Old Carmel Moravian Church in 1813, was arraigned before the magistrates to determine what effect Christianity had on Black people: "To the first question, as to the instruction

*Noel Erskine is Associate Professor of Theology and Ethics, Candler School of Theology, Emory University and Adjunct Professor of Theology at the Interdenominational Theological Center.

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received, Robert replied: 'We are told to believe in God, who sees us everywhere, and in His Son Jesus Christ, and to pray to him to take us to heaven.' 'Well what more?' 'We must not tell lies' 'What more?' 'We must not run away and rob Massa of his work'... Thereupon the judges declared themselves satisfied, and let the slaves go."¹ (2) The Christian slave would produce a more humane master. As long as the slaves worked diligently there would be no need for the master to brutalize an industrious slave.

The missionaries discovered differently on both counts. First, they came to learn that they could not make the slave Christian. Black people would not give up their drumming, their African dancing, obeah, myalism, and sexual unions, which the missionaries regarded as unstable. Second, the missionaries recognized that there was a connection between higher sugar prices and more pressure on the slaves. Slavery and Christianity were not compatible.

Hence the missionaries, particularly the Baptists in Jamaica, assumed a revolutionary attitude to the system of slavery. After the 1831 slave rebellion in Jamaica known to the planters as the Baptist War, the leading Baptist missionaries Knibb, Burchell and Phillippo went to England to persuade the British public that if Emancipation did not come from above it would come from below. And they themselves were committed to the less bloody form of revolution: that by act of Parliament rather than by act of the slaves.²

¹Walter Hark, *The Breaking of the Dawn, 1754-1904* (Kingston: The Jamaica Moravian Church, 1904), p. 28.

²Lilith M. Haynes, ed., *Fambli* (Georgetown, Guyana: CADEC, 1971), p. 27.

The British government responded by appointing two bishops in the West Indies: one to oversee Jamaica, Honduras, and the Bahamas, and the other to include Barbados, with the Windward and Leeward Islands, Trinidad and Guyana. Among the responsibilities of the bishops was that of seeing to it that the clergy had a changed attitude towards the slaves. Indifference should give way to pious concern. The bishops were also expected to help create the context in which the British Parliament could carry out its plan for the gradual abolition of slavery, without at the same time being on a collision course with the plantocracy. And, most important, the bishops were to insure that there would be no more rebellions by black people. The established church had a double task: to reconcile the planter to the decline of their authority over Black people and, at the same time, to assure the excited slaves that the slow death of slavery had begun.³

It did not work out quite the way it was planned. Emancipation came like a thief in the night, in 1834, and the end of the apprenticeship system in 1838. What of the new society that was to be formed? What plans did the abolitionists have for Black people?

Basically they wanted to see at work in a minor key the same sort of principles which they believed governed English society at home. Society to these men was a system of graduated deference from the lower order through the middle order to the upper class, the deference being strong enough to create stability and cohesion but not bordering on submissiveness which would promote stagnation and deter change. Classes they firmly believed in, with barriers high enough to preserve a

³*Ibid.*, p. 28.

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sense of order and authority but not so high as to prevent the most intelligent, industrious and ambitious from climbing them. For those who climbed the class barrier demonstrated both the 'freedom of English Society' and its recognition of talent in which the Victorians themselves believed so much.⁴

It was basically this plan which the mother country had in mind for black people. The Colonial office wanted to see mirrored in the Caribbean a rising middle class made of mulattoes and highly literate Blacks. They wanted to see Black people free, but also respectful of the plantocracy and the middle class. "In particular they wanted to see the Negro, whether he was an independent peasant or an estate worker, demonstrate qualities of thrift, industry, which would justify the granting of freedom and which would, as the population increased, feed the right kind of workers back to the estate system. What they were not concerned to see was the Negro acquire political power."⁵

The Church as Friend of Plantocracy

The church was the most appropriate institution in Jamaica which could bring together the ex-slave and ex-master. This would be especially true of the established church. As a structure it could bring together all classes of people and create a sense of community. As a moral agent it could instill in Blacks the proper regard for authority and the importance of thrift and hard work. The task of the church as moral agent was of critical importance if the economy of the Island were to be maintained. Black people had to be taught

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 29-30.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 30.

the virtues of hard work. It is perhaps at these two levels, as preserver of a harmonious community and as moral agent, that the plantocracy expected something from the church. "The planters hoped to use the Anglican Church as part of their policy of slowing down the effects of Emancipation and shoring up their own position . . . In particular, the plantocracy wanted the clergy to impress upon the Negro the virtue of doing plantation work."⁶ Slavery had made the Black people of Jamaica look upon work as an unpleasant form of obedience. With the necessity for obedience removed, and the Black family opting for freedom rather than money,⁷ planters had to rely on the church to equate plantation work with the moral imperative and, thereby, preserve a labor force for the sugar estates. The established church which received grants from the public treasury had a special responsibility to meet the requirements of the plantocracy.

Black people had their own expectations of the churches. They hoped to take emancipation beyond the legal revolution which it represented and make of it a social revolution.

As free men, the blacks expected to be treated with dignity and respect, and even with a certain formality.... Abusive language cut deeper than it might with a European worker, since it struck at one of the real symbols of the new freedom. Formal respect often meant more to the Negro than economic gain, and this was an area

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁷For Black people in Jamaica the ability to withdraw their work was one of the marks of their freedom. One estate, on discovering that Black people would work only three days per week (as that would give them enough to live on) decided that the way to attract Blacks to work more days was to increase the day's pay. With the increase in pay, however, Black people worked fewer days because they wanted only enough to live on. They preferred freedom to money. The planters called them lazy.

where the difference of cultural focus between the white and the black community led to misunderstanding.⁸

The church was able to narrow the social distance between the plantocracy and Blacks by teaching them to read and write. Literate Black people could become deacons and preachers and these talents had an impact outside the church as well.

The churches had gained singular importance after emancipation. They were regarded as an important key in which the experiment in freedom was to be understood. With confidence placed in them by planters and Black people alike, there is a sense in which they and not the Blacks were the greatest beneficiaries of emancipation.

The churches regarded it as their duty to create one society out of the various antagonistic social classes. The Anglican Church, which was favored by the establishment, saw its task as a slow process of civilizing Black people. The Anglican Church adopted a cautious approach to giving any responsibility to Black people. In his book, *The Church in the West Indies*, A. Caldecott calls attention to this:

...any special caution is based upon known weaknesses of ability in the lower race, and consequent necessity for the longer proof of sincerity on the part of each individual before he is entrusted with great responsibility. Just as the mixed race has an advantage in its unexplained immunity from several serious forms of disease and can apply commonsense to recognise that they do not shine in endurance of purpose but are prone to lives of ease and luxury.⁹

⁸Philip D. Curtin, *Two Jamaicas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), p. 113.

⁹A. Caldecott, *The Church in the West Indies* (London: Frank Cass & Co., reprinted Totown, N.J., 1970), p. 35.

James Beard, a class leader in the Wesleyan Church, asked the magistrate if he could swear by the Bible that God had made Black people apprentices. When the magistrate replied in the affirmative, Beard retorted, "Then God has done us injustice." This method of apprenticeship, which was condemned by Beard as unjust, characterized the Anglican approach to dealing with Black people. ". . . the Anglican Church adopted a prolonged policy of apprenticeship allowing Negroes and coloureds to rise to the humbler positions of lay readers, catechists and, of course, school masters but giving these positions the social consequence of a church either established or when disestablished, connected to the highest ranks of the colonial administration by a hardly concealed preference."¹⁰

Slavery had created the problem of identity and emancipation had not solved it. In an attempt to maintain the support of the plantocracy and at the same time gain support among Blacks, the Anglican Church after its disestablishment in Jamaica in 1870, asserted the spiritual equality of Black people with White people, yet affirmed their cultural inequality with White people.¹¹

Black people tried education as a means of spanning the cultural distance between Africa and Europe. Many churches in the Caribbean united on the issue of education. The founding of church schools was one way in which the church could bring her influence to bear upon the lives of Black people.

Perhaps in no area has the influence of the church in the Caribbean been more positively felt than in the field of education....It is evident that several clergymen tutored the sons of their wealthy parishioners and some con-

¹⁰Haynes, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 36.

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ducted schools, most of which tended to collapse when the incumbent left the colony or died. It was not until the early nineteenth century that the conducting of Sunday School classes for children as well as adults provided on a significant scale some formal instruction to the poor. This was followed by the opening of day schools. The monotorial or pupil teacher system was, in the Caribbean as in Europe, widely used as a means of combatting the problem of a dearth of teachers. Even before the Negro Education Act placed certain sums of money at the disposal of religious denominations in their capacity as managers of schools, the several Christian denominations in the Caribbean had become involved in the teaching of the three R's and in Christian ethics.¹²

The problem, as black people soon discovered, was that the church schools were making no specific effect to bridge the social and the cultural inequality between the Black and the plantocracy. The content and the purpose of the education was geared to keeping black people subordinate and inferior to the ruling class. The ruling class "demanded and obtained the undertaking that the school would not be used to affect adversely the supply of manual labour on the plantation, nor to encourage the coloured people to wish to rise too quickly up the social ladder . . . In the Caribbean there was a growing disenchantment among the poor with the end result of schooling."¹³ The ruling class was of the conviction that the right kind of education would produce the right kind of society. Education became the guarantee that the society would not change,

¹²David I. Mitchell, ed., *With Eyes Wide Open* (Barbados: CADEC, 1973), pp. 142-143.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 143.

that Blacks would remain at the bottom of the social and economic ladder. This awareness that education did not fulfill the expectations of emancipation explains the later disaffection for education. In *The Church in the West Indies*, the Reverend A. Caldecott calls attention to Black people's disappointment with the education that was offered.

At the outset there was a glow of enthusiasm on the part of the enfranchised labouring class. But it died down to a depressing extent In Jamaica the people had very largely scattered from the estate barracks to cabins on squattings. But deeper down than this lay the disappointment of some foolish but very natural expectations on the part of the simple Negroes. They had been inclined to suppose that ability to read and write would lead to immunity from agriculture labour, and even, as Mr. Hodder puts it, they had 'hoped to find great material benefits from painting billhooks and multiplying fabulous sums of money!' Thus it was that in 1866, of the 286 schools in Jamaica only one was returned as in the first class, and 190 were 'failures'.¹⁴

The schools had failed because Blacks recognized that the education offered was intended to produce a certain kind of person, a person reconciled to the plantation system and this system was rejected by Blacks in the Caribbean. In the mind of the planter, they merely existed as a means of keeping the estate rolling. The task of the church was to see that this end was realized. The planters maintained, "If religion would only protect agriculture and

¹⁴A. Caldecott, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

education not unfit the peasantry for labour, no more estates would be thrown up on this island."¹⁵

The challenge confronting Black people was how their new won freedom could become the means whereby they could regain their human dignity.

The Church as Friend of Black People

The church was more successful in its attempt to provide villages for the new Black family after emancipation. Although the church had failed in its attempt to provide "social space" for Blacks through education, it had a better record in providing physical space for them to rear their families, to bury their dead, and grow their crops.

The importance of the church's participation in providing space for the Black family is apparent when it is recalled that land ownership had a religious significance for Africans. The spirits of the departed members of the tribe or family have a crucial role in the shaping of the destiny of the community, and they are regarded as owners of the family plot. Although the people have left this temporal world their spirits are the real owners of the family land. The living land owners are only tenants who occupy the land as a sort of trusteeship granted by the dead. So it was a crucial decision for the Black family to leave the family plot, as this meant leaving the family burial ground. To leave meant to desert the departed family.¹⁶ It was to cut off one's self from one's history. "Not to have space is not to be. Thus in all realms of life striving for space is an ontological necessity Without space there is neither presence nor a present. And, conversely, the loss of space includes

¹⁵Philip Curtin, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

¹⁶Howard Stroger, *Coromantine Obeah and Myalism* (unpublished undergraduate honors thesis, Rutgers University, 1966), p. 29.

the loss of temporal presence, the loss of the present, the loss of being."¹⁷

With emancipation, Black people in the Caribbean had to give up their cottages, their family plots, and seek a new space to be. Many of the ex-slave owners were willing to sell their lands to Black people, but most of them wanted to sell large units, while the people wanted merely enough space to live, to bury their dead, and to grow their crops. Here the missionary churches were helpful in providing the organization and expertise in securing large tracts of land and subdividing for the benefit of the family.¹⁸

The church was appropriately situated to offer this service, since the Black family had accorded to the missionaries an important role in the abolition of slavery. Because of this, in the first years after slavery the churches were crowded with the new Black people. The churches seemed to have been quite unprepared for this, as they had no programs for social reorganization. Apparently they expected the social situation to remain the same, with the people basically adopting the life style which belonged to the order of slavery, the only change being that they were free laborers rather than slaves.

The church, however, was forced by Blacks to wrestle with its role in helping them to find space to live. The world which they occupied during slavery had to be demolished. It was a world which was handed to them by the master, a world in which they were not free to be human. In the new world they sought to create, "to be free was to be human, and to be human was to be free." The new task confronting the church was not to arbitrate between master and slave, but between free people. Thus the church was forced to come to grips with her social responsibilities. The missionaries,

¹⁷Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1951), pp. 194-195.

¹⁸Philip Curtin, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

having led Black people into the promised land of freedom, had to wrestle with the implications of the freedom of faith for other freedoms.

The different dissenting sects took different positions. The Wesleyan Methodists, who were forbidden by their standing orders to meddle in social or political questions, generally urged submissiveness and moderation on their congregations. If they intervened at all in wage disputes, they tried to do so at the consent of both parties. Somehow, helping the Negroes to buy land was not considered intervention. Therefore even the Methodists occasionally bought a moderately large run of land for resale to their people.¹⁹

This custom of buying land and subdividing it was also followed by the Scottish missionaries. It was one way to prevent Blacks from leaving the sugar estate and the church for the woods or hills.²⁰

The Baptists of Jamaica sought to help the Black family to discover not only physical space but also "social space," insisting that the rights of Black people should be respected. They counseled the family to work for a fair day's pay and they also acquired large plots of lands which were subdivided for families.²¹

During the first five years after emancipation some 150-200 villages were formed, totaling about 100,000 acres. The church was also instrumental in helping over 3,000 families who belonged to the Western Baptist Union in securing \$96,000 during the first

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 115.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 115.

²¹William Lou Mathison, *British Slave Emancipation* (Octagon Books, Inc., 1967), p. 64.

three and a half years after slavery, to be used for buying family plots and on building their own homes.²²

Black people responded to the churches' participation in helping to create a space for them by joining the churches. The movement from nobody to somebody was linked to the church. One inquirer for church membership is reported to have said, "Massa, me go up and down the country, and people take me for nobody . . . Please do baptise me; I wish to die a Christian sinner, and not a heathen sinner."²³ This dependence on the church to provide the context in which one could become more fully human was not merely an individual expectation. At a service attended by over one thousand persons,

the minister endeavoured to impress upon the multitude the words: 'If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.' When allusion was made in the service to the advantages of mental and religious improvement which the Negro now possesses, the minister was agreeably interrupted by a buzz as if the whole multitude were moved with one consent to express the feelings bursting from an overflowing heart. 'yes, Massa, thank God; we do thank the Lord for it; bless the Lord.'²⁴

Church membership increased greatly among Blacks in Jamaica. Membership in the Methodist churches doubled between 1831 and 1841. Baptists grew from 10,000 to 34,000 during the same period.²⁵ With this success in membership and in the large attendance at worship services, it is understandable that church

²²*Ibid.*, p. 69.

²³J. H. Bucher, *The Moravians in Jamaica* (London: Brown & Co., 1854), p. 119.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 124.

²⁵Philip Curtin, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

leaders assumed Black religion to be obliterated. They regarded the influx into their churches as a sign that Christianity had at long last won the day, the era of Christian freedom had come, and the long night of African religion and unchristian practices was ended. "The revelries attending births and deaths have given place to the decencies and proprieties of Christian life, declared one church leader. "Licentiousness and discord have been displaced by the sanctity of matrimony, and the harmony and comforts of the domestic circle. Revolting and degrading superstition has vanished before the light and influence of truth as 'mists before the rising sun."²⁶

During the first decade after emancipation, something of a spiritual transformation occurred, or so the missionary church believed. The missionaries reported "that cunning, craft, and suspicion—those dark passions and savage dispositions before described as characteristic of the Negro . . . are now giving place to a noble, manly, and independent, yet patient and submissive spirit."²⁷

Apparently many of the missionary churches had viewed Blacks as a slate from which they could wipe the last vestiges of African religions. Black people's attendance at the missionary churches meant that this had in fact happened. Had they looked closely at what was happening in the Baptist Churches in Jamaica, they would have noted that the people had not relinquished Black religion, but were, in fact allowing Christianity to co-exist with African religious beliefs. Black people were placed between two religious worlds: Christianity as it was represented by the missionaries, and Black religion as it was adapted to the Black situation. The problem for Black people was not merely a matter of choosing

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 162.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 163.

between these two faiths. In Christianity they were confronted with a religion in which they would not be assimilated and in Black religion they were confronted with religious beliefs they would not abandon even if they did choose Christianity. The missionaries mistook church attendance to mean assimilation, and they failed to recognize that the people could not abandon Black religion.

The Baptist Church in Jamaica, during the first decade after emancipation, illustrates a context in which Black people could deal with these two religious worlds. The Baptists had a system which particularly appealed to the family, called the ticket-and-leader system. It was the practice of dividing the congregation into classes with each class representing a regional area. For every class there was a leader and every member had a ticket which showed membership. The ticket-and-leader system appealed to the Black family because the leader of the class was a member of the family, and had the power to call class meetings, to visit the class members, to reprimand, and to preach. The ticket system also appealed to the Black family because the ticket became a charm which each member carried for protection from evil spirits. The ticket was a symbol which represented the Spirit of the master's God.²⁸

In addition to providing a context in which people could deal with both Christian religion and Black religious practices, the Baptists further won the admiration of the people in that they called on the plantocracy to mete out social justice. "So long as they [the Baptists] continued to believe that compromise with the planters was only a 'false and heartless truce, which is called peace by the slaveholding spirit, but fundamentally is outrageous war

²⁸The ticket-and-leader system is still practiced in many churches. The class leaders still have the same authority, but the tickets have ceased to be regarded as charms which are able to drive away evil spirits.

against God and human happiness,' they enjoyed special position among the Negroes."²⁹

The Baptists tolerated the growth of Black religious practices. They gave practical advice to the family on the question of wages, and pleaded with the plantocracy for social justice. They were also, along with other churches, instrumental in procuring lands and setting up villages. "In Jamaica the Baptists attempted to organise a party to express the interest of the villagers in the Assembly known as the Anti-State Church Convention, and if it had secured victory at the polls in 1844, it would have amounted to a political revolution."³⁰

It was not an accident then that Black people thronged to the Baptist Church. That church, after emancipation, sought to create physical and social space for Black people to be.

The other missionary churches were disturbed by the phenomenal growth the Baptist churches experienced and by their making room for the people to practice Black religion.

Other churches were disturbed by the quick Baptist growth and infiltration of African religious practices. Their protests brought on a prolonged controversy beginning in the thirties and reaching a crisis in 1841 when three Baptist ministers abolished the ticket-and-leader system for their own congregations and withdrew from the Jamaica Baptist Association.³¹

The Presbyterian and Congregational missions charged the Baptists with tolerating Black religion. They claimed that the

²⁹Curtin, *Two Jamaicas*, p. 164.

³⁰Haynes (ed), *Fambli*, p. 37.

³¹Curtin, *Two Jamaicas*, p. 164.

Baptists had given too much power to the class leaders who required of their members special dreams and seizures by "the spirit" as a qualification for baptism and had made baptism by immersion into a superstitious rite. The official Baptists had become more like the native Baptist church before emancipation.³² In 1843, the Jamaican Baptists severed their connection with the Baptist Missionary Society in London, and became a Jamaican church. At the same time, they founded Calabar College for the training of native ministers.

The membership of the Methodist church began to complain that there were not enough Black preachers in the Methodist church. This discontent occasioned a split in the church led by Edward Jordan. "The movement paralleled the later Baptist attempt to form a separate church for Black Jamaicans."³³

These divisions in Baptist and Methodist churches indicate that Blackness had become an important point of departure for the people's understanding of their world. They had not surrendered their Blackness, nor had they abandoned African religious beliefs.

The Church as Bearer of Identity

We have noted the church's response to the Black presence in the nineteenth century; we must now focus specifically on its response to this presence in the twentieth century. It is not possible to give here an exhaustive account of the church's responsibility to Black Jamaica, but an accurate indication can be given of the church's interpretation of ministry to Black Jamaica in the twentieth century.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 165.

³³Samuel and Edith Hurwitz, *Jamaica, A Historical Portrait* (London: Pall Mall Press), p. 130. I attended Calabar College from 1960-1964. N.L.E.

In 1941 the Jamaica Council of Churches was formed; it included "representatives of ten branches of the Christian Church, Anglican, Baptist, Presbyterian, Congregational, Methodist, Moravian, Disciples of Christ, Church of God, Salvation Army and the Society of Friends."³⁴ In 1950 the council published *Christ for Jamaica*, in which the church's mission in modern Jamaica was reflected upon by Jamaican theologians. Rev. John Paxon, in the preface points out that in the first decades of the twentieth century the churches in Jamaica were aware of the intense desire for a new humanity in the "new Jamaica." The problem confronting the church was not the failure to recognize the identity problem, but to identify the method by which the new humanity in Jamaica could be achieved. One thing is clear, says the editor, namely, the answer to the problem of humanity is summed up in the words "Christ for Jamaica."

Although Mr. Paxon did not explain how Jesus Christ would be the answer to the problem of identity in Jamaica, a number of the denominations through their spokespersons sought to make the connection between the "new Jamaica" and Jesus Christ.

Speaking for the Baptists of Jamaica, the Reverend E. A. Brown said that the Baptists saw their task in the creation of a new Jamaica as that of bringing the truths of Scripture to bear upon the issues and destiny of the people of Jamaica. The truths of Scripture show that human beings who were created in the image of God have defaced God's image through sin, but Jesus Christ opens up a new possibility for humankind to have fellowship with God as Black Jamaica recaptures its destiny. Christ enables Jamaica to fulfill its destiny as he removes sin. Sin, for E.A. Brown, seems to

³⁴John Paxon, "The Jamaica Christian Council," in J.A. Crabb, ed., *Christ for Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica: The Pioneer Press, 1950, p. 9.

be whatever separates Jamaica from fulfilling its destiny.

Brown regards it as significant that the first Baptist preacher to Black Jamaica was a Black person. As he sees it, the Baptists provided the first Black prophets to Jamaica, who proclaimed "the gospel to the poor, healed the broken hearted, preached deliverance to the captives, the recovery of sight to the blind, liberty to them that were bruised. . . ."35 The model of ministry in Jamaica for the Baptists seems to be the Black prophets who will proclaim "the centrality of the cross, the converted church, the priesthood of all believers, the baptism of believers by immersion, leading as they do to the inevitable demand for a social order where every man shall be treated as a child of God . . ."36

Speaking for the Methodist church in Jamaica, the Rev. Walter Richards calls attention to the place of experience in the life of the individual. "The Methodist Church owes its origin to an experience and probably because of that places great importance on a living experience of God's presence in the life of the believer." The main teaching is that the Christian can know that "his sins are forgiven through repentance and by faith in Jesus Christ and that he is a child of God."³⁷

The Church of England in Jamaica was by this time called "The Jamaica Church." Speaking for "The Jamaica Church" was the Rev. W.J. Clarke. The crucial witness of the church in Jamaica is to announce that God does not merely exist, but that God has made himself known to people. The hope of Jamaica is in Christ and "to say that Christ saves is to say that God saves. Our certain knowledge is that God, by his mighty act, has visited the world and by his life, suffering, death, resurrection, and all that followed these

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 18.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 19.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 8-10.

events, has opened a way out of our human tragedy . . ."38

In *Christ For Jamaica*—each denomination attempts to demonstrate that Jesus Christ is the answer to the problem of identity in Jamaica. The churches, though still largely influenced by European ideals of salvation, do suggest in their talk about Black humanity the need for a new social order. The church's call for Black prophets in Jamaica, is an attempt to wrestle with the theological significance of Blackness for the nation. Black Jamaicans continue to experience the pull towards Africa and Europe.

In his contribution to *Christ For Jamaica*, entitled "Worship and Fellowship in the Church," the Reverend Herbert Cook supports the need for the churches to speak with specificity to the identity problem of Black people: (a) if the church takes Black people seriously, its ministry must meet the needs of its neighborhood; (b) the church's interpretation of the gospel must address Black people in a way that allows them to understand the gospel as relevant to their present situation. Out of the history of the people, the religious genius of the people and their categories and symbols must emerge. As the church listens to the people, the church discovers "again and again that genius speaks in the songs they made; in ringing declarations of faith, in thunderous commands, or in the clear longing for deliverance murmuring with all the gentleness of a cradle song:

'Swing low, Sweet Chariot,
Coming for to carry me home.'³⁹

As the church reflects on the Black experience, Cook says, it discovers in the people's songs and poetry their sense of the presence of God. The church encounters the Black experience in "the big wheel moved by Faith."

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 53.

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 55.

I know moon rise, I know star rise
I lay this body down
I walk in moon light,
I walk in star light
To lay this body, here, down—⁴⁰

Moon rise and star rise are theological symbols pointing to the time of rest that belongs to the people of God. The challenge that confronted the church in the first decades of the twentieth century was to give the church back to the people and thereby establish a church of the people. S.E. Carter, Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Church in Jamaica, supports the need for the church to become an incarnation of a people's quest for identity. Theology, he says, should not be divorced from Black peoples' quest for identity.⁴¹

In 1973 an epoch-making book, *Troubling of the Waters*, was published by the Caribbean Conference of Churches. It called upon the churches to take the history, geography, and culture of the people seriously, as the church engaged the new humanity in the Caribbean. Horace Russell, writing from Jamaica, says that the church must concern itself with: (a) God, (b) humanity, (c) cosmos. Russell thinks the church in the Caribbean has attempted to deal with God and humanity, but it has ignored the *world* of the people. Theology must take geography and history seriously:

What is strange is that this positive approach to the nature of the World (Cosmos) it would appear is biblical. The biblical writers observe that there was the *hill*

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁴¹Idris Hamid, ed., *Troubling of the Waters* (Trinidad: Rahaman Printery, Ltd., 1973), p. 4.

of Zion, the city of Jerusalem, the river Jordan, the land of Palestine. In the New Testament it would appear that emphasis upon a *hill* outside the Jerusalem city wall, a *stone* sealing the tomb and a *garden* of the resurrection was deliberate. There is little doubt that the world (Cosmos) in the sense being used here, God's creation—finds its way positively into the theology of the biblical writers.⁴²

Theology must not ignore the world in which people struggle for meaning. Theology in the Caribbean must be approached *via* sociology and history rather than philosophy. As the church in the Caribbean wrestles with the issues of race, laziness, authority, the “cunning” Black person, the church will come to understand through the sociological and historical method that these characteristics were indispensable tools for the survival of Black people. “Similarly, the Calypso mentality—an attitude of total enjoyment and abandonment to life and the expectation that all needs will be freely granted—in many cases releases mental stress and strain where life is unbearable.”⁴³ As the church takes the modern Black seriously, it will see in his attitude of “laziness” the judgment of God on the image of human beings as producer, production agent, and salesperson.

Dr. Watty, a Methodist minister who contributes to *Troubling of the Waters* from the United Theological Colleges of the West Indies, pleads for theology to be given back to the people, as the church's talk about God arises out of the indigenous community. “It is the beginning of the end of the colonialism when the colonists ask whether “So is necessarily so . . . A dog wags his tail

⁴²Horace Russell, “The Challenge of Theological Reflection in the Caribbean Today,” in *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 30.

when I throw him his bone, build him his kennel, or pat his head for the stick he has retrieved. It takes a man to tell his would-be benefactor to go to hell with bone and kennel and stick."⁴⁴ Some people argue, Watty continues, that theology in the Caribbean need not be "decolonized" because theology is timeless and not historical. According to Watty, the eternal dimension of theology does not negate its historical incarnation. Theology, which is talk about God and people, should not be an import; it must arise from the native soil as talk about God is rooted in talk about people. "Pure theology, therefore, is an ideal which does not exist. There are inevitably historical, sociological and cultural conditions which not only mediate but decisively affect how some speak and what others hear and understand about God." The incarnation once and for all proved that "christology is meaningless theologically until it is meaningful historically."⁴⁵

As the church in the Caribbean decolonizes theology, it must be willing to put aside a timeless, universal metaphysical theology and become existential as it seeks to relate to the living history of Blackness. This is consistent with the biblical revelation, which took on historical particularity in the exodus and in the incarnation. "Theology reflects not only what men hold to be true, but even more the situation out of which they speak."⁴⁶

The church in the Caribbean during last quarter of the twentieth century shows evidence of a willingness to change so that the humanity of Black people will be redeemed. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the church in Jamaica was mainly divorced from the cultural forms and patterns of the people it represented. It was a church for the people and not of the people.

⁴⁴William Watty, "The De-Colonization of Theology," in *ibid.*, p. 52.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 55.

Because of its withdrawal from the people it became a meaningless sect on the periphery of society and could do little for the people. The problem was that the church in the eighteenth and nineteenth, and to some extent in the twentieth centuries, was concerned with maintaining its European identity. Thereby, it could not meaningfully minister to people of a Black identity. The church in its attempt to preserve its identity accentuated the identity problem of Black people. Perhaps it is as the church is willing to lose itself, it may find itself, and become the agent of salvation for Black people.