

## Calling Evangelicalism to Action

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October 31, 1998 was a red-letter day in the history of Jamaica Theological Seminary (JTS) and the Caribbean Graduate School of Theology (CGST). On that date the two institutions sponsored and hosted their first Reformation Day seminar, spearheaded by the Rev. Glenn Thompson, JTS Academic Dean. Presenters at this seminar highlighted different perspectives of the Reformation in Germany, England and the European base of the Anabaptist tradition. (Interestingly, the seminar was held in a Lutheran church sanctuary, the first of its kind in Jamaica). Rev. Thompson himself presented a paper entitled "The Evangelical Heritage of the Reformation." Three months earlier the BBC carried a report about the growing number of evangelical churches cropping up all over England, the land of Rev. Thompson's birth.

Over the past twenty years, the movement widely known as evangelicalism has assumed global proportions. But what in the world is evangelicalism? And what is the movement doing in the world? This paper focuses particularly on the second question. However, before doing so, some attention must be given to the first. By answering these questions, it becomes clear that evangelicalism is a worldwide movement within Christianity, encompassing all major denominations, which seeks to expand the Kingdom of God on earth through the aggressive promotion of its six characterizing features; if it is to remain a significant sociological force in the new millennium, it must take radical corrective measures to become more directly involved in social action.

### Evangelicalism: What Is It?

Evangelicalism is not a religion or a denomination. While it is becoming increasingly difficult to define evangelicalism (e.g., Elwell

vii-viii), McGrath (54-87) identifies six characterizing features: 1) belief in the supreme authority of Scripture; 2) the deity, humanity and salvific ministry of Jesus Christ; 3) the lordship of the Holy Spirit; 4) the need for personal conversion; 5) the priority of evangelism—individually and corporately; and 6) the importance of the local church for spiritual maturity (cf. Quebedeaux 7).

Evangelicalism is a religious movement within the ranks of Christianity, encompassing all the major denominations. There are evangelical Christians to be found in both Catholicism and Protestantism (the two major sides of the great Reformation divide), though the majority stand outside both the Catholic enclave and the traditional Protestant denominations. The roots of evangelicalism may be traced to European soil. The Evangelical Revival, which took place in the United Kingdom in the eighteenth century, is thought by some to be the fountain-head of the modern evangelical movement. "What happened then was a rediscovery of the Gospel and its power" to save sinners. "[Thus] it spread across denominations" (Marshall 11).

#### Global Perspective

But some like the late Byang Kato would trace the roots of evangelicalism even further back, to the first couple of centuries of the Christian era:

Although in modern times missionaries from Europe and North America brought the gospel to Africa, they are not the first representatives of Christianity on our continent. As a matter of fact, history shows that Christianity's ties are closer with Africa than with Europe or North America (Kato 33; Allan 54).

Kato goes on to make the amazing claim that we can, therefore, rightly call Christianity an African religion.

On the day of Pentecost, Africa was represented. Settlers of Cyrene in North Africa were there when they inaugurated the Christian church (Acts 2:10). An African from Ethiopia was one of the first converts outside native Jewish circles (Acts 8). When the first missionary conference was held, an African was there. Mentioned among the faithful disciples in Antioch was Simeon, nicknamed Niger (Acts 13:1). Niger, from which the river Niger

and the countries of Niger and Nigeria are named, means black (Kato 34).

According to Allan, at the end of the last decade nearly fifty percent of the African population had some affiliation to Christianity (54). That number has since grown. But while evangelicalism is not entirely responsible for that figure, recent reports have attributed a great deal of it to the movement.<sup>1</sup> So although Kato's claim that Africa is a Christian country may be considered exaggerated, the continent today is experiencing an unprecedented Christian presence.

When we turn our eyes to Asia, the leading evangelical witness is found in South Korea. For example, the famous "Full Gospel Central Church . . . , which claims no less than 250,000 members and Presbyterian congregations with over 50,000 in one city and 10,000 in another," are considered sure signs of revival in a country, which, in a previous century, was said to be impervious to Christian influence (Allan 94).

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One of the good things about the evangelical phenomenon in South Korea is the self-reliant basis on which it was founded. This means that the indigenous principles of self-government and self-support were quite evident from the very beginning, providing solid support for the phenomenal church growth. Another positive in South Korea is the fact that the movement is

credited with an overall beneficent influence on the society at large. Christians of evangelical persuasion can be found in all walks of life—from the sports arena to parliament. South Korean evangelicalism has certainly become a model of social involvement to Christians around the globe. The Korean paradigm seems to be

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<sup>1</sup>Of course Islam is also on the rise in many parts of Africa; for the challenge this poses, see, e.g., Glaser (77-78). For a recent but brief report of the steady growth of evangelicals globally, see Kaufman (22-23).

catching on in other Asian countries such as China, and, to a lesser extent, Japan.

Turning to Latin America, a predominantly Roman Catholic domain, we also see a significant growth of evangelical Christianity, particularly among the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to the strong social concern exhibited by the South Koreans, however, Latin American evangelicals, according to one observer has

had the effect of insulating believers from the world, filling up their time with church activities and imposing strict social regulations upon them, so that their contribution to society was limited. [Interestingly] some South American dictators with an extremely dubious civil rights record were friendly to the growth of Pentecostalism, because it distracted the attention of the masses from the inequality in society. Not all Pentecostalism was like this, however; and other evangelical denominations have also taken seriously the need for agents of peace and justice in a hopelessly unfair society (in Latin America close to 20% of the population receive 66% of the total income) (Allan 113-114).

A relatively recent development in evangelicalism worldwide is the formation of regional bodies to consolidate and promote its concerns. In Central and South America, for example, we have the Latin American Theological Fraternity.

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<sup>2</sup>For the Pentecostal influence in Jamaica, see Austin-Broos (1997) and Smith (1993). Says Dr. Persaud, "As it looks to the twenty-first century, the church in the Caribbean cannot avoid serious wrestling with the current phenomenal growth of Evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity in Latin America and the Caribbean. It is a phenomenon that especially, though not exclusively, touches the masses of the suffering, poor, powerless, exploited, marginalized and dislocated. It is a phenomenon of liberation, of new found 'free space', new found spiritual and socio-psychic healing in the midst of fragmentation and chaos. It is a phenomenon of division, a spiritual and social separation" (Gregory 49).

Several factors, such as the need to create an authentic African theology and the desire to pool resources, led African evangelicals to organize themselves into a unified force. In Kenya and Uganda, the motivation was different. Their unity gave a sense of solidarity and security in the face of grave danger.

Out of this came in 1966 the Association of Evangelicals in Africa and Madagascar (AEAM). "Today AEAM is recognized as a major voice speaking for evangelicals throughout Africa" (Allan 67-68).

Although this is not to be seen as a panacea for evangelical ills in Africa, it may be regarded as a progressive step. The kind of evangelicalism that preceded AEAM, though lacking in organizational structure, nevertheless contributed significantly to the demise of the African slave trade, as well as giving itself "to a myriad of philanthropies" (Isichei 81). Organizations similar to AEAM are found in Oceania, North America, Europe and the Caribbean as well (Johnstone 1986, 455-86).

### Jamaican Perspective

The first strictly evangelical group to arrive in the Caribbean was the Moravians. Like the Catholics and Anglicans before them, they sought to preach the gospel to the new "native" population. They also addressed the stark social inequality with which they were confronted, particularly amongst the black population in the Diaspora.

Arguably, however, the religious phenomenon with the greatest impact on the Jamaican society, and to a lesser extent the wider Caribbean, is the Rastafarian movement. Many in recent times have sought to chart the course of this movement (e.g. Chevannes 1995; Edmonds 1996; Murrell et al. 1998). Notwithstanding the Rastafarian influence in our culture, the church continues to make its mark, though it seems to some that it is not keeping pace with other institutions of social change.

Rastafarianism is not as old as the evangelical movement in Jamaica. If it were, there is little doubt that it would certainly be in the forefront of the fight for "the African-Jamaican on his remote plantation, [helping to] destroy slavery and the West Indian sugar monopoly in England" along with the evangelicals. What is doubtful is that Rastafarians would be establishing white-black alliances based on religious convictions (Sherlock and Bennett 177).

Early evangelical Reformists working out of England for the abolition of slavery include William Wilberforce and Granville Sharp. Sharp himself was instrumental in getting a positive ruling through the courts. On July 22, 1772, the Chief Justice of England ruled:

The state of slavery is of such a mixture that it is incapable of being instructed on any reasons, moral or political . . . it is so obvious that nothing can be suffered to support it, but positive law. Whatever inconvenience, therefore, may follow from a decision . . . the black man [i.e. James Somersett, the slave represented by Sharp] must be set free (Sherlock and Bennett 179)

The decision had devastating consequences for the English slave trade. "As a result of this ruling all 10,000 of the slaves held in England . . . gained their freedom. Encouraged by this ruling, the abolitionists intensified their efforts," an antislavery society was formed by an evangelical group, the Quakers, and Wilberforce, an associate of Sharp, convinced the English parliament to abolish the slave trade. This was "the first time in their history African-Jamaicans discovered that they had allies and friends in the world of white power" (Sherlock and Bennett 179).

Other white allies were the Moravian missionaries who began working in Jamaica in the middle of the eighteenth century. But it is to two black Baptist preachers that the evangelical movement owes its indigenous character, according to Sherlock and Bennett (80-81).

Today that indigenous character is manifest in most if not all denominations, and is now partially institutionalized in the structure known as the Jamaica Association of Evangelicals. This organization came into being 100 years after a major turning point in Jamaica's history—the Morant Bay rebellion (Black 203). Unlike the Morant Bay experience, the founding of the Jamaica Association of Evangelical Churches (as it was then called) was far less auspicious. Framers of the organization trace their roots to the revival of the 1860s, which, ironically, took Jamaica by storm just around the time when the island was experiencing one of its most testing periods, the one which eventually led to the aforementioned rebellion. While the political directorate of the time was quite insensitive to the plight of the peasantry (Black 187-189), the missionaries "laboured tirelessly for fair wages, land settlement, and the establishment of villages. . . [and]

schools for the teaching of the three 'Rs'" (Gerig 2).

Partly out of this social concern and the great spiritual hunger felt at the time, the Moravians in the extreme west of the island were the first to experience the new wave of the Spirit. The rest of the island was soon to come under the new spiritual awakening (Gerig 3).

Very early in its history the JAE expressed a deep burden for the social milieu in which it was nurtured. Cited for special mention at the time were "the loose family patterns, coupled with a high percentage of illegitimacy, the growing situation of West Kingston and the high rate of illiteracy . . ." to mention only

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a few. "These ills," declared Gerig "require the individual and united strength and efforts of the church . . . [which] should aim toward a programme for the total man" (Gerig 7). Despite its unabashed interest in the proclamation of the gospel, the JAE is still today interested in these ideals. This is not to say that the movement has been entirely consistent with its own aspirations and goals. Therefore, certain criticisms leveled at the group by its friends ought to be taken seriously (Williams 136-40; Smith 1984). But what may be a redeeming factor here is that there are a few internal voices that are committed to the Socratic dictum that the unexamined life is not worth living.

But to return to the social conditions that the JAE faced in the decade in which it was formed, three challenges were highlighted: dysfunctionality in family life, the attendant problems of inner-city life and illiteracy among a disproportionate margin of the adult population. In many respects the standard of living in Jamaica has risen much higher since the decade of independence. However, this is by no means the total picture. In other areas, and perhaps in some of the areas mentioned above, things have deteriorated. For example, in the year prior to Gerig's speech to the evangelical clergy gathered in Mandeville, the nation recorded just over one hundred cases of homicide. Today, there is a 900% increase. By comparison, New York City, for instance, experienced a 100% decrease from the previous year. This only serves to bring into sharp focus the viciousness of the times

and the mammoth challenge facing the church and the wider community. "The sad thing is that we have now become so immune to the daily occurrences that shock and disgust are seldom expressed until it either affects one's household or is experienced by someone with whom we are closely associated" (Edwards 6).

In connection with the high level of crime and violence is the widening gap between the poor and the well to do, not to mention the growing number of the unemployed. When seen against the backdrop of global economic trends, the immediate future for Jamaica, though not hopeless, appears quite bleak.

According to the latest report of the United Nations Development Programme, the global picture of consumption expenditures reveals stark inequities between developed and developing nations. This results in scores of countries in the latter category finding themselves experiencing acute economic decline. Since Jamaica gained independence in 1962, many of these Two-Thirds World countries have little or

no access to safe water and are living below the poverty level. One billion are without adequate shelter; 841 billion are malnourished; 880 million are without access to health care; 2.6 billion have no access to basic sanitation; two billion are deprived of electricity; and 104 million are illiterate (Boyne 8).

These are indeed staggering figures. Jamaica is part of this developing world, which is increasingly marginalized economically.

While our political directorate appears preoccupied with economic growth (sometimes to the detriment of the development of human capital), according to Boyne, "\$8 billion is spent on cosmetics in the United States alone . . . \$11 billion [is] spent on ice cream in Europe . . . with an additional \$12 billion on perfumes and \$17 billion on pet foods." In Japan \$35 billion is spent on business entertainment, \$50 billion on cigarettes, \$400 billion on narcotic drugs and "most vulgar and gruesome of all, \$780 billion on military spending In this post Cold War world." This is to be compared, respectively, with only \$156 billion spent on education, \$9 billion on basic sanitation, \$12 billion for reproductive health and \$3 billion on basic health, globally (Boyne 8).



This is the global context in which conditions in Jamaica are to be assessed. This is the climate in which the church in Jamaica finds itself.

Ironically, some of these countries that are responsible for the kind of consumption patterns which result in the aforementioned inequities are rated highly by Transparency International, "a global watchdog on how nationals conduct business." The organization, according to *The Business Observer*, 23 September 1998 (p. 20b), attempts to measure the degree of corruption perceived especially amongst business people and the general public. Its most recent Corruption Perception Index (CPI), it places countries like the U.S.A. (18<sup>th</sup> place), Japan (25<sup>th</sup>) and many other countries of Western Europe above Jamaica (49<sup>th</sup>) and other nations of the developing world. When the CPI report is compared with the Human Development Report of the United Nations, is it fair to see a correlation between the level of poverty/wealth on the one hand, and corruption, on the other? There is definitely no necessary connection between the two factors. However, it would be interesting to have some study done to determine how one impacts the other in the region in general and Jamaica in particular.

But to go to the "objective" analysis of the level of corruption in Jamaica, such an "allegation" cannot be successfully deflected. Who can deny, for instance, that the collapse of some of our financial institutions is due in no small measure to corrupt business practices—the kind which, sad to say, not even the church (evangelical and otherwise) is immune to?

One of the most vocal journalists on the issue of corruption in Jamaica is none other than veteran *Gleaner* columnist Morris Cargill, who is no friend of politician, priest or pastor. Written off as frivolous by some and irreverent by others, even Cargill's critics concede the incisiveness and good sense of many of his pieces (see, e.g., Cargill 203, 303) and his view that the real national hero of Jamaica is Anancy.

The corrupt side of the Jamaican ethos, then, is, one might say, fitly symbolized by the spider proverbially known as Anancy.

In most of the Anancy stories, in Jamaica as well as in Africa (especially Ghana), the spider is at the mercy of other animals that are its physical superior. However, it uses its subtle intelligence to outwit them and hence survive. Culturally, Anancy

typifies a trickster and a con artist who survives by unscrupulous means (Murrell et al. 1998, 112).

Says Geoff Brown, who is equally as convinced as Cargill, that Anancy is *the* "silent hero" of national life:

Everyone knows it; few proclaim it. That is in itself the very nature of Anancyism. For Anancy must never manifest itself in its appearance what it is, in fact, carrying out in its behaviour. What you see is what you get. The tricks of deception which lead the victim into self-defeating traps constitute the essence of the Anancy syndrome (Murrell et al. 1998, 112).

Is it any wonder that *The Business Observer* headline screams "Jamaica Fails Corruption Measurement Index"? (Brandon 3b).

The island was given a 3.8 ranking on the CPI. On a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 represents maximum corruption and 10 the least amount, Jamaica falls "well below the 5.5 points which the [Berlin based] agency says is the level at which there are serious concerns about the corruption level in the country" (Brandon 3b).

What is curious is that Jamaica is the only Caribbean country included in the survey. The survey was conducted by interviewing not only those in business but members of "John Public" as well. Former Police Commissioner Trevor MacMillan actively participated in the study as the local representative. MacMillan is quoted as saying "I think it [i.e. Jamaica's CPI] reflects what most people in Jamaica believe. . . . The fact is there is a major corruption problem in Jamaica." What of the First World countries, especially those in the top ten? MacMillan expresses the opinion that these nations receive high ranking on account of their stringent laws and effective law enforcement agencies working in close conjunction with an efficient judiciary systems (Brandon 3b). It is true that in the Jamaican context all these areas of national life are somewhat problematic. But is there any guarantee that improvements in the judiciary system and constabulary enforcement will drastically lower the incidence of corruption in Jamaica?

### Evangelicalism: What Is It Doing?

The Church for one does not think so, since there is indeed a spiritual dimension of life to consider. But all this raises the intriguing question concerning the church's role in culture and society—in a word, nation building. What exactly is the church doing? Is it really relevant to the culture? Is the church a part of the problem of social decay?

#### General Church Involvement in Nation Building

According to the National Democratic Movement (NDM) president, Mr. Bruce Golding, as reported in Kingston's *Daily Observer* (September 12, 1998), the church definitely is not doing enough to aid the society. To him, the church remains "blind, deaf and mute when poor people in Jamaica are brutalized, their rights trampled and justice to which they are entitled denied."

In substantial agreement with Mr. Golding is Mr. Robert Dalley, a St. James resident, who blasts the church for fundamentally failing the country over the past twenty years, by being too preoccupied with collection money on weekends. Why did the church remain silent in the wake of the "brutal and vicious" launch of the security forces against Tivoli Gardens in May of 1997? Some of our church leaders in Jamaica today, Dalley charges, "are only concerned with feathering their own nests, some are political wimps and lackeys . . . and some gigantic hypocrites who are primarily concerned about driving expensive cars and owning palatial buildings on top of the hill" (*The Daily Observer*, Kingston, Jamaica, September 12, 1998).

Is such a broadside against the church warranted? Is it true that the majority (so Dalley) of church leaders fit the above description? While I would not be surprised that a few church leaders actually belong to such a stereotype, I think it grossly unfair of both Golding and Dalley to paint with such a large brush. With regard to some of the issues raised by Mr. Golding, issues of social involvement, I think that clerics of all denominational stripes will agree that the church can do more. However, the church's failure or success in these matters should not be judged merely by individual expectations. The church today still struggles with its own identity and mission. It does in fact have its particular *modus operandi* to which, in varying degrees, it is committed—though not all church leaders grasp the Dominical mandate in the same way.

Niebuhr, for example, delineates five attitudes in respect of Christ and culture. First, there are those who see Christ and the church completely opposed to culture and society. Then there are those who see Christ as one who accommodates himself to culture. Others see Christ only in terms of one who is way above culture, with little or no interest in the human condition. Next, there are those who posit a Christ and culture paradox, which yields much results to the latter. And, finally, others view Christ and his body, the church, as agents of societal change (Niebuhr *passim*).

### Evangelical Involvement in Nation Building

Where does evangelicalism fall on this spectrum? In answering this question, it is important to see how evangelicals themselves understand the church's mandate. One group underscores the need to proclaim the gospel as top priority. For example "one of the declared objectives of the JAE is to promote evangelism . . ." (Hall 1981).<sup>3</sup> Another group of evangelicals believes that the proclamation of the gospel should not be the sole task of the people of God. One of the chief proponents of this position is British theologian, John Stott.

For Stott evangelism *and* social responsibility are grounded in the very character of God because the Gcd of biblical revelation is concerned for the total well being of all humanity. The second ground for keeping evangelism and social together is the teaching and ministry of Jesus (Luke 4:16-21). Jesus' ministry, as the Gospels testify, certainly did include social action and community service.

The third biblical argument for the partnership of evangelism and social action concerns the communication of the gospel. How is it to be made known? To begin with, it must be verbalized . . . at the same time, the personal Word of God 'became flesh,' . . . If God's Word became visible, our words must too. We cannot announce God's care with credibility unless we also exhibit it in action. So we

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<sup>3</sup>Observe the sensitivity of the fledgling JAE in this regard: "It is not the intention [of the JAE] to take over the work of evangelism from the church . . . Rather, this organization should assist in the promotion of evangelism in whatever way possible" (Gerig, 7).

cannot stand aloof from those to whom we speak the gospel, or ignore their situation, their context. We have to enter into their social reality and share their sufferings and their struggles (Stott 334 – 349).

As was hinted before, in its embryonic stage the JAE would not have endorsed Stott's position, which has subsequently been adopted by the majority of evangelicals worldwide. However, later

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developments revealed a shift in policy.<sup>4</sup> For example, when Pastor Henry White became president of the JAE, he not only affirmed the organization's commitment to evangelism as a matter of primary importance, but, according to Kingston's *Daily Gleaner* of October 11, 1980, also announced the establishment of a Relief and Development Commission "to deal with community aid projects . . ." One year later, the Jamaican public was again informed by the *Daily Gleaner* that the organization had been effective in its objectives of rendering "special services" by way of help to certain flood victims "and relief aid to

earthquake victims in Guatemala, as well as [a] gift of \$10,000 to the Ministry of Health to help remove the mentally ill from the streets." Evangelicals, like many Christians everywhere, tend to be reticent about broadcasting their community involvement. Golding and company have missed this. A survey of the church's involvement in the life of the community reveals that not all Christians are so "heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good." Already we have pointed

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<sup>4</sup>It would seem that earlier JAE members were heavily influenced by McGavran, who once wrote: "The church does not need to trouble itself about agricultural production . . . and the like. . . . These are done by the state better than the churches. . . . All [they] need to do is to use the structure . . . inherited . . . to multiply Christians" (1962, 111).

out ways in which this kind of involvement has taken shape and a brief review at this juncture is in order.

Whereas not much can be said about the social involvement of Jamaican and American evangelicalism at the turn of the century, in the United Kingdom the momentum of community involvement on the part of people like Wilberforce was still strong. Not that it was most needed there. On the contrary, conditions in America in particular (especially the tension between whites and blacks in the South) and to a lesser extent in Jamaica definitely warranted the philanthropic efforts of all interests. But such organized effort was lacking at the time. In the UK, though, voices of evangelical persuasion could be heard. With the full realization that "the church . . . assisted the privileged classes to keep labour in chains," these voices aggressively addressed societal ills such as "bad housing, inadequate wages and commercial bargaining as frequently as personal sins." (Bebbington 175). Their talk was ably backed up by the Salvation Army, "the extensive institutional philanthropy of the Church of Scotland . . . organized and staffed largely by evangelicals" and scores of others (Bebbington 176). Regrettably, due to the advent of the First World War and its aftermath, coupled with the attendant apocalypticism among a number of evangelicals at the time, social concern on the part of those associated with the church waned significantly.

Meanwhile in Jamaica a severe economic crisis waged. There was rapid decline in exports and a serious rise in the unemployment rate. The resulting conditions included widespread poverty and malnutrition, inadequate housing, poor educational opportunities nation-wide and occasional rioting (Panton 15). There was no organized response from the church to address these conditions.

But amidst the mayhem of the period there was one evangelical clergyman who was to emerge with flying colours. Father Hugh Sherlock, who eventually penned the words of the Jamaican National Anthem, was that man. While not forty years old, Father Sherlock established one of the most effective inner-city institutions, the now famous Boys' Town. Observing the plight of the underprivileged youths, Father Sherlock requested time from the Methodist church to address their needs. Boys' Town was first located in a churchyard in Jonestown but later removed to Central Road, which was subsequently renamed Collie Smith Drive, in Trenchtown. The late Collie Smith, who represented Jamaica and the West Indies at cricket, was

undoubtedly the brightest star to have been associated with the institution. Boys' Town was more than a school. It also became a major sports club participating in various Corporate Area competitions, especially cricket and football. For many years Father Sherlock himself represented Boys' Town at cricket, and the present national football coach, Carl Brown, at football. Brown, like Collie Smith and a host of others, went on to represent his country in the field of his endeavour.

For his contribution to football, Brown, who attends an evangelical church, was honoured by his country with the Order of Distinction. Later he became the first recipient of the Father Hugh Sherlock Award for Excellence. A greater honour was given to Father Sherlock earlier for his major contribution to nation building. As we said before, the institution was more than a school. Boys' Town's uniqueness was also reflected in its curriculum. In the sixties, for instance, the students not only did the traditional three R's, but also participated in boxing, camping, basketball, and home economics! Both school and club were privileged to have been associated with names like Archie Moore (boxing), the late Frank Worrell (cricket) and Lindsay Delephena (football), who all helped with the school's sports programme over an extended period of time.

Father Sherlock died in 1997. But before his passing he was able to participate in the 55<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Thanksgiving ceremony held at the school on November 19, 1995. In his speech on that occasion Father Sherlock noted with pride that, despite set backs, the institution that was on his mind when he penned the words *Strengthen Us the Weak to Cherish*, is still continuing, according to Kingston's *Sunday Observer* (10 December 1995, p. 3), "to build the mind, body and spirit [of the] underprivileged to gain an opportunity to become good citizens."

Father Sherlock was neither the first cleric who saw the potential of education as a means to address some of the challenges in society. Some important forerunners include the Rev. Enos Nuttall, who was

the mentor and spiritual father of Percival William Gibson, the founder of Kingston College in 1925, as well as the man who allowed Black men to be ordained as priests of the Church of England in Jamaica. He introduced young Gibson to the world of books, and awakened his thirst for intellectual pursuits" (Johnson 1-2).

When Nuttall arrived in Jamaica in the middle of the nineteenth century, he was a Methodist minister like Father Sherlock. But after three years working with the Methodists he switched to Anglicanism where he was to have his greatest influence. Between 1866 and 1895, the man who was once a main attraction at evangelical meetings in his native England, was instrumental in the following:

- reorganizing the Mico Training School, “permitting more effective training and opening registration to all denominations” and all races;
- the recruitment of black men to the Anglican Clergy;
- the merging of “Wolmer’s with the Kingston Grammar School, to form Wolmer’s Boys’ School as a secondary institution for day students;
- the co-founding of the first degree granting institution in the West Indies (which only lasted for a year);
- the establishment of the Jamaica Church Theological College, “a divinity school for the training of Anglican Clergy” and
- the establishment of Shortwood Teachers College, Kingston Technical and Jamaica College in the Corporate Area, and Cornwall College in Montego Bay.

Nuttall also became the Chairman of the Jamaica Schools Commission, “a forerunner of the Department of Education . . . the principal force in establishing education of all types across the island.” Indeed it was Nuttall’s efforts that helped significantly to place Jamaica’s educational system on a firm footing for the twentieth century (Johnson 7-9; Osbourne 199-276). Can the church do the same for the next millennium?<sup>5</sup>

So perhaps the single most important contribution of the Jamaican church to society—quite apart from being the conscience of the nation—is in the area of education. The number of clergymen following in the noble tradition of bishop Nuttall is great. Many have worked hard in and for our nation’s schools, particularly at the secondary level. It is safe to say that some of the best high schools in

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<sup>5</sup>Considering especially that we need to “develop positive work and service attitudes with a serious commitment to discipline and excellence for students, teachers, and at the work place” as the century draws to a close (Sangster 114).



the island are connected to churches. Apart from those already mentioned, others that readily come to mind (the list is by no means exhaustive) are St. George's College, Mt. Alvernia, Immaculate Conception, Holy Childhood and Campion (Roman Catholic), Kingston College and Westwood (Anglican), Meadowbrook (Methodist), Calabar (Baptist), Ardenne (Church of God) and Merle Grove (Associated Gospel Assemblies).

Although the latter two schools are evangelical, secondary education

has not been the strong point of the movement. Traditionally, this has been the forte of the older and more established churches. Over the last twenty years or so, the evangelicals have concentrated their efforts in the setting up of a plethora of basic and preparatory schools islandwide. Three of these, Vaz, Covenant Christian Community Academy and Mavisville,<sup>6</sup> located in the capital, have done quite well in recent times.

But while evangelicals have sought to create a niche for themselves in the area of the nation's educational system, they have for the better part of this century neglected their own intellectual needs in terms of making serious provision for an educated clergy. In fact some prided themselves in not having been to "college but to Calvary."

The need to provide leaders who could impart intellectual rigour to the movement did not go unnoticed by all. In the forties at least two Bible schools were started: the nondenominational Jamaica Bible College in Mandeville and Bethel Bible College associated with the New Testament Church of God. Both institutions offered certificates

*So perhaps the single most important contribution of the Jamaican church to society – quite apart from being the conscience of the nation – is in the area of education.*

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<sup>6</sup>Sponsored by "Missa Wildish Maranatha" (Hyatt 21), now celebrating 70 years of witness. Maranatha is the original home of the Christian Ambassadors, whose chief burden is to reach male athletes and men in general for the Kingdom (Diedrick 5; cf. Vassell 1997).

and diplomas, but it was not until 1960 that the first degree granting evangelical institution was established.

At first it would appear that the Jamaica Theological Seminary (JTS) came into being to meet the needs of its own sponsoring body, the Missionary Church Association. However, it was not long before the vision was broadened to embrace the wider church community.<sup>7</sup> Unlike the United Theological College, which was organized two years later with close affiliation to the University of the West Indies, JTS did not receive local academic recognition until recent times, when the University Council of Jamaica accredited its main degree programmes, the B.A. in Theology and B.A. in General Studies. In its effort to review

*While the evangelical social engagement is growing in the broad area of education, evangelicalism's concern for social justice and the poor has not kept pace.*

the curriculum to make it more relevant to the challenges faced in the society, the school now offers courses in guidance and counselling, and conflict resolution. In addition, courses like sociology, philosophy and conversational Spanish are now seen to be a necessary adjunct to theological studies, if the human condition is to be understood and addressed effectively by JTS graduates.

While the evangelical social engagement is growing in the broad area of education, evangelicalism's concern for social justice and the poor has not kept pace. This tendency appears to be a blot against the movement in several parts of the globe. For example, it is alleged that evangelicals in South Africa aided and abetted the now defunct apartheid system. Allan, who denies the charge, gives the following account of the origin of the system:

The Church [during the Anglo-Boer War] became one way in which the community strengthened its sense of identity. It did so by taking and misapplying some of the ideas of

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<sup>7</sup>For a history of the school, see Ringenberg (1993); for its relationship to the United Theological College, see "William Watty-the man and his views" (Jennings 9-10).

Kuyperian neo-Calvinism. Abraham Kuyper was a brilliant evangelical scholar, founder of the Free University of Amsterdam and for five years prime minister of Holland. He had coined the slogan 'In isolation lies our strength' in order to draw together the sympathizers of genuine Calvinism in Holland, and build them into a force capable of influencing the rest of the nation. But soon the slogan was picked up and used in South Africa—with reference to keeping the Boer nation pure from contamination by other races. Only in that way, it was claimed, was survival possible.

This was a tragic misuse of Kuyper, who actually opposed racial segregation (Allan 65-66).

Evangelicals became divided over the issue. There was one group of white "right-wingers" who supported the status quo, ostensibly out of fear of communism; a radical group of blacks who opposed the system; and a larger group in the middle "which steadily [became] more and more vocal in opposing injustice and inequity" (Allan 65-66).

Part of this middle group included the "concerned evangelicals" who issued a document in 1986 condemning the brand of evangelicalism stemming from the North Atlantic, which seemed oblivious to people's pain and suffering (Isichie 312).

Have Caribbean evangelicals sought to distance themselves from this unchristian attitude toward the disenfranchised? The answer is not an unequivocal yes/no. Happily a few of them are quite outspoken on matters related to justice, and a still smaller number are actively engaged in the fight for the under-class. In an essay entitled, "The Caribbean's Response to the Great Commission," Church historian, Las Newman, delineates three models of Christian involvement pertinent to this survey.

The first one Newman calls the ethnic model "whereby missionary endeavours were focussed upon people groups of particular ethnicities" (19). Several missionaries from the Caribbean went to sub-Saharan Africa under this model.

The second model, which emerged in the post World War II era, concentrated its efforts on the youth of the region as potential church leaders (Newman 23-24). According to Newman, the Inter-School/Intersarsity, Youth for Christ and Bible school movements all fall under this umbrella.

Newman writes:

A third model of Caribbean mission . . . is the contemporary model of a mission to the new to the urban poor. . .

Within the first three decades of post-Independence the Caribbean church, in response to the new social and economic order; has been engaged in developing new models of ministry to the poor. Despite structural adjustment programmes (or indeed because of them) a new class of the poor has emerged. This class is semi-educated, young and urban (26).

The established churches have given the most telling response under the third model. The Catholics boast the Mustard Seed Community (Father Gregory Rakinson), the St. Patrick's Development Foundation (Monsignor Richard Albert) and the Brothers of the Poor, founded by Jesuit Priest, Father Richard Holung. Since independence "the Anglican Parish Church of St. Andrew has been engaged in mission work among some 30,000 residents on the fringes of the urban core of the city" (Newman 27). Further,

The United Church of Jamaica and Grand Cayman has several major social projects within its churches . . . one of the largest [of which] is the Mel Nathan Institute . . . located in Hannah Town, a depressed community of about 20,000 people in the inner city of Western Kingston" (Newman 27).

Newman demonstrates that the Baptists have been active, also.

The Jamaica Baptist Union supports an important project of the Bethel Baptist church in Half Way Tree . . . Established in 1970 as a counselling service of the church, the increased demand for the services offered led to the development of a three-pronged ministry involving Counselling Services, Medical/Pharmaceutical Services and Community Outreach to nearby Ambrook Lane where social and basic health education . . . are conducted. . .

The healing Ministry (sic) was developed by Jamaican Psychologist Dr. Anthony Allen, and developed over the years under the pastoral leadership of Rev. Burchell Taylor. Some 5,000 persons a year make use of its services (Newman 28).

While it is true to say that individual evangelicals here and there have participated in these ventures, the newer churches for the most part seem conspicuous by their absence.<sup>8</sup> But things are changing. Congregations such as the Holiness Christian Church,<sup>9</sup> Galilee Gospel Hall and Church on the Rock in Kingston, Redemption Chapel in Montego Bay and Glengoffe New Testament Church of God in St. Catherine are reaching out to their constituents through clinics and other community-based projects. Since the beginning of the decade, according to Kingston's *Daily Gleaner* (20 November 1991, 17), the JAE itself "has expressed concern at the rapid escalation in the cost of living, resulting in severe hardship to the poor, fixed income groups, and pensioners." The decision was taken "to encourage the expansion of social services being offered by member churches and, in particular, those in nutrition, health and education. The association [also] decided to take steps with immediate effect to establish grocery outlets with a view to providing basic food items at more affordable prices."

In the previous decade, medical teams were organized to work in the rural areas at the invitation of JAE. During one two-week stint, according to Kingston's *Daily Gleaner* (April 5, 1986) "one team treated 3,307 persons [including] 1,384 medical cases, 265 surgical cases, 1,081 dental cases and 572 optical cases in St. Ann." A similar mission of mercy was carried out in St. Elizabeth later in the year. While this effort is commendable, what is needed to cement the JAE's (and its member churches') commitment to social action is a more sustainable involvement in meeting the needs of the marginalized in our society. Evangelicals are deeply involved in models one and two above. More consideration needs to be given to model three.

But what about politics? Wouldn't it be more effective for evangelicals to become politically engaged in order to ensure a greater

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<sup>8</sup>Notable exception of course is the Salvation Army, one of whose officers, Major Raphael Mason, is the immediate past president of the JAE.

<sup>9</sup>Whose Pastor is an active member of Citizens Action for Free and Fair Elections (CAFFE).

impact on society? This question is all a part of the new reflection on the sociopolitical climate in the region. Some Christians, **pespecially evangelicals, are quite negative toward such a suggestion.**

But how can the church forget the role played by people like Wilberforce, William Knibb, Sam Sharpe, George William Gordon, Paul Bogle, Haille Sellasie, and more recently Jimmy Carter, Deacon Ronnie Thwaites, Jessie Jackson and the Rev. Herro Blair? Are all these men mistaken to have tried to influence the political process or to have embarked upon a political career?

A 1996 survey of the Jamaican clergy, carried out by the Rev. Orville Plummer, revealed the following:

The findings surrounding whether or not members of the clergy should seek political office makes interesting reading. Only a paltry 20% of them indicated that the Bible is not against members of the clergy becoming politicians. 100% agreed that there is need for more Christian politicians; 85% believed that more Christians should get involved in party politics; 75% believed that more Christian involvement in party politics will improve our political situation and 80% that more Christian involvement in party politics will not hinder the spread of the gospel. Yet only a minimal 20% of the respondents believed that members of the clergy should seek political office (28-29).

The survey did not indicate what percentage of the clergy interviewed was evangelical. But when it comes to Jamaican politics the actual partisan engagement on the part of evangelical/non-evangelical clergy basically remains the same—quite negligible, though their ideological postures may differ quite sharply.

Interestingly, a few evangelicals did form The Christian United Party (CUP) in the early nineties but like most third parties on the Jamaican political landscape it withered and died in the harsh and arid climate. But before its demise, CUP, along with The Republican Party “became increasingly vocal through speaking engagements and newspaper advertisements” (Panton 147). One can only imagine what

kind of impact a Christian party would have had on society, if CUP had fulfilled its potential.<sup>10</sup>

If evangelicals are still ambivalent about politics they seem to have changed their attitude towards sports. Over the last four years or so Jamaica has experienced its first taste of having Christians at the helm of a national sporting endeavour in the persons of Brazilian Rene Simoes, technical director, and national coach, Carl Brown. Another evangelical who has gained prominence is Test umpire and former FIFA referee, Steve Bucknor, who hails from Montego Bay. Other sports luminaries include Ian Bishop and Ridley Jacobs. Christians in the entertainment field include Judy Mowatt, Carlene Davis, Papa San, Lieutenant Stichie and Junior Tucker to name a few, adding to what McGrath calls "The Evangelical Attraction."

### **Evangelicalism: What Should It Do?**

But McGrath is well aware of the weaknesses of evangelicalism, such as its leadership crisis, guilt-oriented ministry and dogmatism. He also recognizes the crisis of leadership surrounding what he calls "The Curse of the Evangelical Personality Cult," and the tendency of preacher and counselor alike to manipulate people through guilt (McGrath 150). Guilt trips, dogmatism and poor leadership are not just weaknesses characterizing evangelicals in other latitudes. To a lesser or greater extent these are also areas of serious concern in the Caribbean community as well.

In spite of this, the greatest weakness of Caribbean evangelicalism, and of evangelicalism as a worldwide movement, is its perceived lack of social concern. While there are those, like McGrath himself, who are still optimistic that the movement can make it into

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<sup>10</sup>For useful discussions on the Christian and civil responsibility, see Vassell (1982), HoSang (1981), Davis (1988), Murrell (1987) and Campbell (1998); and Dawes (1996). No attempt has been made in the survey to catalogue the involvement of evangelicals in fields like the print and electronic media (Dawes; Henry; Turner), law, business, medicine, the environment and the all-important area of the family, (White; Davidson; Dundas) *inter alia*. In this regard we anticipate Las Newman's analysis, "SCFSU'S Contribution to National Development," in Wade (forthcoming).

the next millennium as a spiritual and sociological force to be reckoned with, this can only be achieved if radical corrective measures are put in place and an openness to *change* exhibited. Evangelicalism must take an aggressive, activist stance in the face of the unrelenting deterioration of the social, political and economic situation in Jamaica and the Caribbean. Amidst all this, however, "the Christian eschatological hope cannot be ignored, because, rightly understood, it provides the necessary balance between an overly optimistic social involvement on the one hand, and apathy toward glaring human need, on the other" (Palmer 107).



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