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**The History and
Imperatives of
Caribbean
Theology: A
Review in Light of
the 50th
Anniversary of
Trinidad &
Tobago and
Jamaica**

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*Slavery was finally abolished as a result of the courageous resistance of our ancestors to an evil system, but the proclamation of Emancipation was neither authored nor delivered by any leader of their choice. Today we the elected representatives of the people have framed this proclamation ourselves. It commemorates the triumph of the indomitable will of our forebears and commits us for all times to ensure that their rich legacy is never squandered by this or any future generations.*¹²²

The foregoing proclamation was made by PJ Patterson Prime Minister of Jamaica on July 29, 1997 at a Joint Sitting of the Houses of Parliament. At that sitting of the

Jamaican Parliament final approval was given which was “the final

¹²² P J Patterson, “An Address by Rt Hon P J Patterson QC MP to the Joint Sitting of Parliament, July 1997, 1. Patterson as Prime Minister of Jamaica has been recognized as an outstanding figure in CARICOM and remains one of the most regarded trans-Caribbean figures. While he is speaking here for Jamaica, what he says would also be significant in relation to the rest of the Caribbean.

seal of approval to restore the celebration of Emancipation Day to its place of pre-eminence on the national calendar as the most important anniversary.”¹²³ As Patterson said in making the declaration, “the freedom of each human being is the precursor without which no nation, whatever its constitutional guise, can enjoy sovereign independence in its truest sense.” This proclamation is one in the complex of four events that took place over a five year period. Three of them took place in Jamaica and one in the Eastern Caribbean. It is being contended that these events taken together have been catalytic symbols in the flowering of a sense of self among the Caribbean people. It is being further contended that Caribbean Theology must take account of these events as the end of a long gestation period. This period includes the existence of Caribbean Theology in an antecedent form in which the foremothers and forefathers, as the exercise of their humanity and in response to their faith, resisted their enslavement and colonization. It also includes the period of struggle for self-hood which resulted in the birth of the political and trades union movement leading to political independence. The period of ferment in which for the first time the Caribbean began to take theological responsibility for itself was a part of the gestation. The proclamation by Patterson and the complex of events of which it was a part, are a signal of the need for articulation of and commitment to the project of settling legacy issues in seeking to build a just and responsible society in the Caribbean. This calls for a covenant making before God and all the people that is the fitting response to these catalytic and symbolic events.

¹²³ Ibid.

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The four events referred to above include the following: the first is the restoration of Emancipation Day as a premier event on the Jamaican calendar. The second is the building of Emancipation Park in Kingston Jamaica complete with the commissioning the Emancipation Sculpture. The third is the installation of Black Caribs (Kalinago) Paramount Chief, Joseph Chetoyer as National Hero for St Vincent and the Grenadines. The fourth was the hosting of the World Junior games in which Usain Bolt as a young fifteen year old broke the world junior record for 200 meters.

The charge of random subjectivism in selecting these events is not easily gainsaid. However, these events tell a story which connects the past of the Caribbean with its most optimistic future. Other events may be similar but these have the mark of deliberateness by the State in the case of the St Vincent and Jamaica. They are also in tribute to the comparative maturation of systems that are homegrown. In the case of Usain Bolt for example, his success is a tribute to human genius and talent. However especially because in track and field in particular and international sports in general, the received wisdom was that in order to succeed at the highest levels, the training of athletes and sportsmen and women needed to make use of the facilities and expertise in Europe and North America, his success internationally calls attention to local coaching and training systems within the Caribbean. The exporting of athletes abroad to facilitate their best development had been the practice followed for generations. However what the era of Usain Bolt and others has come to symbolize in the way it evolved was a reliance on local coaching expertise and systems within the Caribbean. Bolt is not only homegrown but the expertise that has kept him performing at the highest levels at the top of his game is local and indigenous. Usain Bolt international achievements with multiple world records

were not isolated and idiosyncratic. There were many more Jamaican and Caribbean athletes, both men and women mining gold in international competition.¹²⁴ In a majority of instances the local athletic coaching expertise made the difference. It meant therefore that Caribbean can reasonably conclude that it not only had talents but systems that are on par internationally.¹²⁵

This chapter will seek to justify the choice of these events as catalytic and symbolic events that signal the Caribbean people coming to terms with themselves and therefore also signal the need for a covenant making with the people before God. An overview will be given of the ways in which the spirit of resistance and the struggle for freedom constituted an antecedent form of Caribbean Theology. This will be followed by a summary of the development of Caribbean Theology summarizing the central contributions of some of its leading exponents. The imperatives and the matters arising for the historical project of the building of a just and responsible society in the Caribbean will close the chapter.

1. Emancipation Day and Emancipation Park

When Jamaica gained political Independence in 1962, the two great high points of Jamaica's history, Emancipation (1838) and

¹²⁴ In 2008 in the Olympics Games in Beijing Jamaica won six gold medals, this was followed by a similar feat in Berlin, the World Championships of Athletics in 2009.

¹²⁵ The record medal hauls by Jamaica in sprint events in the Olympic games in Beijing and in the World Championships in Berlin demonstrated that local indigenous systems of preparing athletes deserves the trust and confidence of the Caribbean people.

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Independence were celebrated as one on the first Monday of August each year. As noted by Patterson, over time, because of the absence of specific focus on liberation from enslavement, the enormity of the contribution of the freedom fighters has been steadily eroded by apathy and indifference. He observed, that “no worthy national spirit can be built on the basis where those who fought to win our most prized possession, Freedom, are numbered among those ‘who have no memorial and who perished as though they had not been.’”¹²⁶ The erosion of the national spirit through apathy and indifference has produced a society in which there is a social hierarchy of colour and class, there is inequality, poverty and self-mutilating violence and there is an over-valuation and a dependence on the goods, services, systems and paradigms from elsewhere. In this context the restoration of Emancipation Day celebration is to be taken together with the Recommendations of the Nettleford Committee on National Symbols and Observances,¹²⁷ both of which were followed in July 2002 by the Opening of Emancipation Park. Together a counter-point is being made about the quality of what it is to be Jamaican given the rich legacy and the resource it offers to build a truly just society.

¹²⁷ The Report on National Symbol and National Observances was the work of a committee set up by the Parliament in 1996 chaired by Professor Rex Nettleford. The broad based consultations which were carried out by the Committee were in response to the observation made in Parliament by Patterson, the year before, in which he said: “the price we pay for social alienation especially of our young men, for turning our backs upon our culture and for not harnessing the talents of our people is not just poverty and crime, serious as they are.”

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The Nettleford Report which launched the process of which the restoration of Emancipation Day celebration and the opening of Emancipation Park (with the Emancipation Statue) are the fulcrum drew upon legacy of this struggle for self-hood. It drew upon the words of National Hero Norman Washington Manley in 1938 where he said:

All efforts will be wasted unless the masses are steadily taken along a path in which they feel more and more, that this place is their home that is their destiny. They will then do more for it, more work, more effort, more thinking, more sacrifice, more discipline, more honesty, than by any measure you can bring to this Country.¹²⁸

The Report also drew upon the words of Marcus Garvey spoken in 1937 in Menelik Hall in Nova Scotia, "to emancipate themselves from mental slavery which was the legacy of earlier centuries of dehumanization and indecent acts against the human spirit."¹²⁹ Garvey went on to assure his listeners that they alone had to preside over their liberation in a spirit of self-reliance, self-respect and pride. Four decades later Robert Nesta (Bob) Marley echoed these words in his *Redemption Song*, "Emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds."¹³⁰

¹²⁸ PJ Patterson, "Statement to Parliament, Report on National Symbols and National Observances" October 15, (1996) 2

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

One of the key recommendations made by the Report was to change the meaning given to the “Black” in the Jamaican flag. The Jamaican Flag has the colours black, green and gold. Hitherto “black” symbolized hardships. There was no intention to change the Flag only to change what was connoted by the colour “black”. The Report says:

The symbolism of the colour black, however, remains contentious. Its signification of hardships overcome and to be overcome, is said to be disagreeable, contemptuous of black people (who constitute the majority of the Jamaican population), denigratory of things African and perpetuates the use of the term “black” as signifier of all things negative—as in Black Friday, blackmail and the Oxford Dictionary meaning given as “deadly, sinister, wicked, hateful...threatening” and “implying disgraceful.”¹³¹

The Report recommended that ‘black’ be taken as the signifier of “resilience” and “strength”.¹³²

Emancipation Park

Emancipation Park is located on seven acres in the heart of Kingston’s business district in New Kingston. It is a garden which can facilitate outdoor events. At the entrance to the park are giant sculptures of two unmistakably African figures. The bronze monument depicts an eleven-foot-tall black male figure accompanied by a black female figure, ten feet tall. Both are

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

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portrayed naked and the figures are thigh-deep in a pool of water, arms by their sides with faces uplifted to the sky. The base of the monument is inscribed with the words "None but ourselves can free our minds."

As noted in chapter two, the public responses were largely negative and filled with passion against the monument. This was rich with irony. The controversy surrounded the appropriateness or inappropriateness of nude black figures depicting emancipation. The passion against the nude African male and female was not unrelated to the self-contempt and self-rejection that are characteristic of attitude of the majority black population. What was missed was the opportunity to have a straightforward discussion of the race factor. Missed also was the irony of a white/light skinned woman sculpting black bodies or even the irony of a wealthy white Jamaican representing emancipation from slavery for majority black population. Laura Facey-Cooper is not the first from her social group to have played this role. Before her Edna Manley (also white and of European extract and spouse of National Hero Norman Washington Manley) sculpted "*Negro Aroused*" which was controversial in its time.¹³³ The role of the arts in highlighting the contradictoriness of the Jamaican situation has been refreshing. The poets and artists frequently have been the prophets highlighting the contradictions, heightening the consciousness and expanding the imagination.

¹³³ Edna Manley, a white Jamaican, was wife of the late National Hero Norman Manley.

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Despite the musings however, the welcome and use of the Park by members of the public including all social classes have been overwhelming. The significance and importance of Emancipation celebration/Park have been the deliberateness on the part of the State to come to terms with the need to memorialize the struggles of the Jamaican people and to regard the celebration of those struggles as a resource for the progress of the nation. It is a fact that there was some resistance from fundamentalist groups that found the nudity of the sculptures offensive. However, it is also the case that it is within the Christian churches that the annual emancipation celebration has taken deepest roots. Emancipation Park in its brief history has been a meeting place for all social classes within Jamaica. It is therefore inclusive of all the social classes and in that way participates in the reality that it symbolizes. Emancipation and the ongoing struggle for self-liberation are rightly seen as the doings of God which are marvelous in our eyes. The fact that this series of events beginning in 1997 and climaxing in 2002 were the initiative of the State qua the State is a fitting reversal of what began in 1762. In 1762 in response to the Tacky rebellion, the Jamaican State made irregular and illegal, African cultural and religious retentions, including drumming, dancing and religious and quasi-religious activities. This action to memorialize the resistance and mainstream the African majority is the necessary counter-point and response. It is being suggested therefore that the complex of events could serve the purpose as a kind of covenant renewal of a people that under God have come to terms with their past and have pledged a way forward in partnership for the pursuit of a just and responsible society.

2. The Installation of Joseph Chatoyer as National Hero

St Vincent and the Grenadines was the last Country in the English speaking Caribbean to be colonized. It was eventually conquered by the British in 1763 and the conquest was completed in 1795 after the death of Joseph Chatoyer, Paramount Chief of the Kaligo (Carib) people that lived on the island chain of St Vincent and the Grenadines. Jamaica was the first to be colonized in 1655; 140 years, later St Vincent and the Grenadines became the last Caribbean island to be colonized. St Vincent gained independence in 1979 and installed Joseph Chatoyer as National Hero in 2002. Adrian Fraser whose work has been devoted to giving justification for the choice of Joseph Chatoyer as National Hero observes that a National Hero is a national role model and a national symbol. "The declaration of National Hero (s) is part of the process of reconstructing our history and defining our identity."¹³⁴ He sees the need to replace British symbols and hero (s) with symbols and heroes of their own. He argues that "the symbols with which we identified were British. Independence therefore, demanded that we create our own hero (s), persons who can act as national role models and inspire our people by their feats and by what motivated them and by the conditions under which they did what they did."¹³⁵ In recommending Chatoyer, Fraser comments as follows:

Chatoyer's significance to the history of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines lies in the fact that he

¹³⁴ Adrian Fraser, *Chatoyer (Chatawae) National Hero of St Vincent and the Grenadines*, Galaxy Print, St Vincent, (2002) 9

¹³⁵ 9

can be considered the father of Independence. He struggled to prevent European penetration and to maintain the sovereignty of this country and later on to recover its independence. He died in this struggle. Therein lies his claim to fame. But it was even more than that because he was one of this country's outstanding leaders and possessed the will, determination and strength that this country needs in its fight even against different enemies and obstacles. Chatoyer was human and would have had his shortcomings, but he stands tall and strong and is a fitting symbol of this country's struggles and strength. As we look for role models Chatoyer has much to offer. He lived in different times long ago but we are connected with the past and today is shaped by what went on before.¹³⁶

The Kalinago people in St Vincent of which Chatoyer was Paramount Chief are not distinguished by anything that is known about their religion. Like the Maroons that resisted British colonization and enslavement in Jamaica, the promptings for their resistance lie in the human spirit. The stock from which the people of the Caribbean are drawn is the stuff of resistance. It is resistance born of the human spirit. The fight by the Kalinago and the Maroons against their oppression demonstrates Taylor's observation that oppression and enslavement cannot be sweetened to become

¹³⁶ 29, 30

acceptable to the human spirit.¹³⁷ Therefore the installation of Chatoyer as National Hero in St Vincent and the Grenadines, the restoration of Emancipation Day as a national holiday and the opening of Emancipation Park in Jamaica are in celebration of the triumph of the human spirit in the Caribbean.

3. The Hosting of the World Junior Games and the Uncovering of Usain Bolt

The inclusion of the 2002 World Junior games hosted in Kingston Jamaica in a discussion of Caribbean catalytic and symbolic events in Caribbean selfhood requires justification. At the 2002 World Junior Games Usain Bolt, then fifteen year old won the two hundred metres race in a sub-twenty second time of 19.93. He became the first junior and the youngest athlete to run the two hundred metres race below twenty seconds. Jamaica and the Caribbean have played hosts to other more significant international sporting events prior and subsequent to this one. Usain Bolt has participated both in Olympics and World Championship of Athletic events and has become the world record holder for both one hundred and two hundred meters races. The significance of the 2002 World Junior games lies only in the context of the events surrounding it. It is in that context symbolic of the possibilities of human flourishing in the Caribbean region. It is also symbolic of the fact that the greatest resource of the Caribbean is the Caribbean people. It is also worth noting that Bolt, as is the case for many other outstanding

¹³⁷ Burchell Taylor, "Voice from the Voiceless," in Howard Gregory, ed., *Caribbean Theology* (Kingston: Canoe, 1995), 17-22.

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international athletes and sportsmen and women from the Caribbean, came to prominence from a rural district in Jamaica. The district of Sherwood Content is one in which private homes do not have potable water from public water supply. Indeed it has been the case that the majority of those that have distinguished themselves internationally as athletes and sportsmen and women from the Caribbean have risen to prominence from homes in marginalized communities. Despite all that is wrong in the region, despite its deficits and difficulties its people continue to play roles as over-achievers on the international stage. It is the people often from the most spoken against and neglected places that have made the region proudest. This also is a tribute to the human spirit and to the Caribbean as a place for human flourishing.

Resistance as the antecedent to Caribbean Theology

This long gestation that has resulted in an emerging Caribbean self-consciousness, with deliberate steps being taken towards building on the rich legacy of Jamaican and Caribbean history has not taken place in a vacuum. In the first place the impetus has come from the resistance to their enslavement by the foremothers and forefathers of the Caribbean. The impetus has also come from those who understood their oppression as being against the human spirit and the will of God. There was very early among the enslaved a consciousness that the God of the Bible was the God of righteousness and justice. Sam Sharpe declared that "no one can serve two masters." From among the cane fields, in the sugar plantation and the class meetings and prayer meetings as well as the ecstatic dances of Myal, the theology began to be done. This was

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Caribbean Theology in its antecedent form. The resistance against enslavement was a primary expression of this theological faith.

- (i) *Resistance has been historically a protest of the humanity of Afro-Caribbean people against the imposition of dehumanizing circumstances as well as the categorization of being sub-human.*

The protest and rebellion against their enslavement which begun with the Maroons and continued with the Tacky rebellion of 1761 in Jamaica was resistance, but resistance was not restricted to physical violence alone. The preservation of Obeah and Myal which were African religious/cultural retention, was a form of resistance. The English were surprised to discover the brevity of the time it took for Cudjoe to organize a rebellion. They were surprised that Africans overcame the linguistic and cultural barriers that were the result of different tribes and ethnicities being brought together on individual plantations, sufficient to mount a joint rebellion. What brought these Africans together was the protest of their common humanity against inhumane and dehumanizing conditions. Human beings anywhere would reject such conditions and therefore the rejection of these conditions is an affirmation of their humanity.

The retention of their African cultural items, forms and values in the face of both legislative and conventional attempts to delegitimize and render as inferior things African is also an affirmation of their humanity in the midst of diversity. The role played by the African cultural retention, religion, dance, drumming, and communication with spirits

in spurring and underpinning the struggle of the enslaved African to gain freedom makes the case for multi-cultural and multi-textual approach and rejects the notion of the inherent superiority of the cultures of the North Atlantic.

The role of folk culture in providing a form of resistance in the situation of domination is well documented. 'Brother Anancy'¹³⁸ in the Caribbean fits well into what James Scott whose work is cited by Gerald West calls the "hidden transcript."¹³⁹ The following summary provided by West is helpful:

The 'Public transcript,' where it is not positively misleading, is unlikely to tell the whole story about power relations. It is frequently in the interest of both parties to tacitly conspire in misrepresentation. So social analysis which focuses on the public transcript, as most social analysis does, is focusing on the formal relations between the powerful and the weak, but it is not attempting to read, interpret, and understand the often fugitive political conduct of subordinate groups. A focus on the hidden transcript, where it is accessible in the

¹³⁸ Brother Anancy is a mythical folk character who by cunning and wit escape punishment and overcomes challenges, by outwitting self-evidently more capable and well-positioned opponent to his advantage and their chagrin.

¹³⁹ West, in Rowland, 135.

rumours, gossip, folktales, songs, gestures, jokes and theatre of the poor and marginalized, or the more public infrapolitics of popular culture, reveals forms of resistance and defiance.¹⁴⁰

Chattel slavery and its companion mythology inculcated notions of the African as sub-human and African culture as superstitious and necessarily inferior. They were the twin assaults on the sense of self of the Afro-Caribbean people. What is undeniable is that within Caribbean culture the African cultural retention refused to be delegitimized or to disappear. Cultural icons, like Marcus Garvey, and Bob Marley as well as the Mighty Sparrow and David Rudder raised the African sense of self by lyrical genius and artistic prowess. Movements like Etu, Kumina, Burru, Gombay, Jonkunnu, Myal, Pocomania, Revivalism, Vodoo, Rastafarianism and Pentecostalism preserved indigenous culture and in that respect resisted the complete domination of one people by another. In particular the idea of communication with spirits which Pentecostalism has made to become communication with the Holy Spirit is an important African cultural retention. The ecstatic dance of Myal which has been taken up by Pentecostalism, trance or being slain in the Spirit was a part of the coping skills of a people that faced overwhelming odds and oppressive, ruthless and arrogant power.

¹⁴⁰ West 135.

The suggestion that Pentecostalism has been a force of resistance is disputed. In general the view of the theology of much of the religious presence in the Caribbean is that it is a 'Coco Cola Theology,' the bottling is done in the region but the formula and ingredients are imported. However, the point that is being made refers to the contribution of Pentecostalism sociologically. Pentecostalism in the Caribbean is to be distinguished from the neo-Pentecostalism or the Charismatic movement. The neo-Pentecostal movement has Roman Catholic beginnings and is more or less a middle class phenomenon. Pentecostalism in the region is a grass roots movement and shares many of the features of Myalism and Revivalism which were its historical antecedents. The idea of trance and visions and communication with the spirit, employing spiritual languages, predated Pentecostalism in its present vintage. It is also the case that the religious movement among the rural peasantry as well as the urban poor has provided the frame of community network to facilitate small and micro business activities. It has done so without setting out to do so. Seventh Day Adventism which in its cultural ethos is more North American has also served to deepen the small business network among the rural and urban poor.

The theological significance of all of this is twofold: First it makes a statement about the residual humanity or the image of God in all peoples. Traditional theology has taken a largely speculative approach the question of what is the image of God in persons. It has defined rationality or the capacity for worship variously as the essence of the image of God in persons. However, Caribbean Theology has been

challenged to come to a determination of what the image of God in man might mean. The insight from its own history requires an understanding of the image of God in man to mean, the rejection by all persons of “un-freedom” and inequality. The human spirit, true to its nature, left to itself, thrives on freedom and will not accept “un-freedom.” Human beings everywhere and in every race and ethnicity will reject the notion of their inequality and the curtailment of their freedom. This is innate and it is indomitable. The African was brought to Caribbean stripped of his/her dignity, his/her family and his/her power. He/she was oppressed by overwhelming force and there was universal approval for the power used against him/her in the way that it was and still he/she resisted. Every organ of the state was at the disposal of those who enslaved him/her; military, law and financial resources. He/she was stripped of every option and every instrument of power. But still he/she resisted. He/she ran away when there was nowhere to run to; he/she built his/her house in the wilderness. Animals may be chained and domesticated and may be socialized over generations to become a domestic animal. It can be defanged and tamed. The human spirit cannot be tamed. Humans will never accept “un-freedom” and inequality, because a person is made in the image and likeness of God. Freedom is therefore the essence of the human spirit.

The idea first enunciated by Garvey, echoing Haile Selassie I, and sang by Marley, “emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds,” is a function of faith in our full humanity. It is not self liberation as a form of works righteousness; it is the rough equivalent of

“rise take up your bed and walk.” Or “go your way and sin no more lest a worst thing come upon you.”¹⁴¹ It means that enslavement is incompatible with his/her humanity and therefore the self-affirmation is the rejection of enslavement and exclusion as a function of the image of God in persons. The second point is that every culture preserves the option of the knowledge of the will of God. This is a rejection or at least an abridgement of the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity. It also rejects the notion of double predestination and generational curse. The curse of Ham that sections theology have utilized to condemn the African people to a life of servitude is challenged by the history of Caribbean. Long before the missionaries came to the understanding and with the understanding that slavery was an offence to the will of God, the non-religious Maroons resisted it. The alliance between rebellion and religion was first forged with Obeah and Myal in the Tacky rebellion that resisted slavery. It was the African cultural retention that first succored and supported the enslaved. It is conceded that the Gospel and the Christian Scriptures are a more formidable ally in the struggle for liberation. However, the point being made is that the African cultural retention in the Caribbean and African culture in general are no less reliable than the culture from anywhere else as a source of natural revelation. What is being rejected is this notion of Europe as universal savior:

¹⁴¹ John 5.8,14 Mark 2.5, 8-12.

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1. From Greenland's icy mountains,
From India's coral strand,
Where Afric's sunny fountains
Roll down their golden sand;
From many an ancient river,
From many a palmy plain,
They call us to deliver
Their land from error's chain.

2. What though the spicy breezes
Blow soft o'er Ceylon's isle,
Though ev'ry prospect pleases,
And only man is vile;
In vain with lavish kindness
The gifts of God are strown;
The heathen in his blindness
Bows down to wood and stone.¹⁴²

The historical record indicates that it is those who had the Gospel who created chattel slavery and imposed it on unsuspecting peoples of Africa, and in the name of God and Christ plundered the Caribbean. This is not to say that the Gospel is not needed in every culture and every place. It merely forms the basis for the rejection of the marriage between Gospel and western domination over other cultures. It insists that evangelism requires incarnation and evangelization requires fraternization. The important point is that the proclamation of the Gospel and obedience and faith in response to the Gospel must not be made to mean to become Western. To be made a disciple is not the same as to become North American or European. The affirmation of the culture of the region,

¹⁴² Reginald Herber, 1819, music by Lowell Mason.

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especially and including African cultural retention, is absolutely compatible with obedience and faith. It is also worth noting that the Caribbean culture that was spawned in resistance has through reggae music given to the world a language of resistance against domination and injustice. The message of the Gospel using the potent vehicle of protest that reggae music has become can have enormous impact in conditions of poverty and oppression. Not only ought the Caribbean person true to himself/herself and his/her cultural heritage to be the outcome of the Gospel proclamation, but the legacy and culture of the Caribbean are an important world resource for the message of the Gospel.

- (ii) *Resistance has also been the result of an understanding of divine righteousness and in fulfillment of the sense of covenant obligations in the face of oppression, marginalization and disfranchisement.*

Norman K Gottwald asserts that Early Israel was an anti-imperial community. He insists "that the anti-imperial origin of Israel is the single most important factor in the astonishing survival of the Jews under centuries of foreign domination, social isolation, and religious persecution."¹⁴³ Gottwald makes his assertions in a recent work edited by Richard A Horsely *In the Shadow of Empire: reclaiming the Bible as a history of faithful resistance*. This work confirms the view of Caribbean Theology that the Bible is a book of resistance best understood from the underside of history. The resistance ethos which has defined the

¹⁴³ Norman K. Gottwald, "Early Israel as an Anti-Imperial Community," in Richard A. Horsely, ed., *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as a History of Faithful Resistance*, Westminster John Knox Press, London, (2008), 22.

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Caribbean is a reader response. Sharpe, Bogle and Gordon led resistance movements that were founded on their understanding of the Bible. Both Gottwald and Horsely recognize the pervasiveness and importance of the resistance motif in the Bible as a whole. Gottwald traces it in the history of Israel and makes the following observation:

These glaring parallels in the effects of ancient and modern political economies on subject peoples help to explain why Bible readers in third world countries and among the working class in the West are often much quicker to grasp the stark realities of biblical economics than those of us in the more protected economic environments where inequities and hardships are masked and often denied. This also helps to explain why relatively uneducated third-world peasants and workers can grasp the claims and economic justice as advanced in Latin American, South African, and related liberation theologies. In stark contrast, these liberating theologies, palpable to the poor, continue to baffle a large number of first-world intellectuals who live in denial about the economic and social suffering imposed by the wielders of wealth and power in today's world.¹⁴⁴

Gottwald concludes that the Exodus was a metaphor for Israel's anti-imperial origin, that the structure of Israelite society was anti-hierarchical, communitarian and therefore anti-imperial and finally that the cult of Yahweh was anti-imperial.¹⁴⁵ Horsely concentrates on Jesus and his

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 11,12

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.,15-23.

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mission and asserts that the Gospels do not present Jesus as a politically neutral figure but rather that “opposition to and by Roman imperial rule was evident in the narratives of his birth as well as his death; in his exorcisms as well as his proclamation of the Kingdom of God; in his mission in Galilee as well as in his confrontation with the Jerusalem rulers.”¹⁴⁶ It is reasonable to assert therefore that Jesus’ ministry in the Gospel narratives was positioned over against if not directly in response to Roman imperialism.

Caribbean Theology which has had a promising beginning with a legacy of the pressure from below in which the under-class resisted their domination by oppressive systems (slavery and colonization) and marginalization (landlessness, unemployment and limited access to justice). In the last two decades or so Caribbean Theology has sputtered. This has been due to factors both within and outside of the church. The internal factors have to do with the dominance of the evangelical/fundamentalist view that “the church should steer clear of politics, people’s cry and that Religion and politics do not mix.”¹⁴⁷

The Church historically has grappled with the question of the nature of its political involvement in the Caribbean. In instances in the past the approach attempted by the Church has been determined by the agenda of the dominant interest by which it is sponsored. Robert Cuthbert who has done a Socio-historical analysis of the Caribbean Conferences of Churches divides the religious presence in the region historically into four groups.

¹⁴⁶ Horsely “Jesus and Empire”, in *In the Shadow of Empire* , 83.

¹⁴⁷ John Stott, *New Issues Facing Christians Today* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1999) ,14. Stott is merely indicating that this is a dominant view not that this is his own view.

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The first group comprised those churches which were the official religion of the state. In Spanish and French colonies, it was the Roman Catholic Church. In British colonies it was the Anglican Church while the Reformed tradition prevailed in Dutch colonies. So that for instance in 1685 in the Code of Noir, the French King ruled that "all public observances of religion other than Catholic, Apostolic and Roman shall be forbidden" and "all slaves in our islands shall be baptized and instructed in the Catholic religion".¹⁴⁸ In the mid-seventeenth century in Barbados however, the interpretation was among Anglicans was that English law did not allow a slave (sic) to be made a Christian.¹⁴⁹ The primary constituents of these state churches were therefore the planters.

The second group developed from the work of nonconformist sects which included Quakers, Moravians, Methodists, Baptists Presbyterians and Congregationalists. These sects came to the Caribbean with a focus on the enslaved rather than the planters. In order to reach the enslaved some of these groups became chaplains to the plantations and thereby represented the establishment. As Cuthbert has pointed out that the staff turn-over among these missionaries was high because many succumbed to tropical diseases. It is to these nonconformists that credit has been given for the abolitionist movement in England. The enslaved members of this section of the church were among those who planned uprisings and rebellion in the prayer and class meetings.

¹⁴⁸ Robert W. M. Cuthbert, *Ecumenism and Development: A Socio-historical Analysis of the Caribbean Conference of Churches* (Bridgetown, n. P., 1986), 16

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

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The third group comprises sects of largely North American origin. These include, Pentecostals, Christian (Plymouth) Brethren, Church of the Open Bible, Church of God, Seventh Day Adventists, Church of the Nazarene and Church of Christ. These groups are boundary keepers, pre-occupied with matters related to Christian identity. They emphasize the Christian fundamentals including Biblical inerrancy, bodily resurrection and conscious suffering of non-believers in Hell. The presence of this group of churches in the Caribbean has been a twentieth century phenomenon. It has however become the largest group in terms of number of churches, and total number of congregants.

The fourth group includes a wide body of religious activity known as folk religion. It is among this group that important features of African survivals which gave the people at the base of the society in the Caribbean a sense of identity have been preserved. African linguistic forms, folk myths, music, dances, some culinary habits, drumming, manipulation of spirits kinship pattern and saving arrangements vital to the self-worth and self-identity of the masses have survived among the people and in some instances have been syncretized with European traditions. These folk religious groups were never part of the official, established or missionary sects. These groups include, Pocomania, Revivalists and Convince in Jamaica, Shouters and Spiritual Baptists in Trinidad, Jordanites in Guyana and Independent Baptists in other islands. Rastafarianism which has drawn upon elements of these groups would fall in this category. In the post 1970s period in starting in Jamaica and extending to the rest of the Caribbean elements of folk religion and the African cultural retention have permeated to varying the degree all religious activities in the Christian community.

What is being referred to as Caribbean Theology as a self-conscious movement refers to the deliberate attempt to engage with the Caribbean context in the light of the word of God and the praxis of the creation of a just and responsible society in the Caribbean. The degree to which the

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process of indigenization, which is both the training of indigenous religious leadership for all three church and missionary groups identified above and indigenization of their liturgy are to be attributed to this process of the creation of a Caribbean Theology. On the other hand this has to be counter-posed against the background of the expansion of the evangelical/Pentecostal/fundamentalist influence among the churches in the region. What is being insisted upon is that though substantial parts of the membership of the churches in the Caribbean are led by nationals, and though preaching and testifying and thinking about God have been taking place among them, that that does not necessarily constitute a theology that is Caribbean or a Caribbean Theology. We make this assertion because the preaching and testifying and thinking about God do not take into account the matters that are part of the lived experience within the Caribbean context. Further it is being suggested that the growth in the influence of these evangelical/fundamentalists/Pentecostal groups has had a stultifying effect upon Caribbean Theology. This has resulted in effective retreat into the private world of the Church and disengagement from the ongoing struggle for selfhood and the building of a just and responsible society in the Caribbean. This has been especially over the last three decades since the 1980s.

John Stott believes that the Lausanne Covenant, which was drafted in part to resolve the tension within the evangelical movement concerning social action, does so by requiring socio-political involvement. According to Stott, it is the word 'political' which causes red warning lights to flash in the minds of many evangelical. Stott attributes the anti-political involvement among North American originated fundamentalist evangelicals to five things which I am summarizing into three. The first two suggested by Stott which I am suggesting should be taken together are, the fight against theological liberalism, and their reaction to the so-called 'social gospel'. In this regard, evangelicalism was rejecting Walter Rauschenbusch's focus which it regarded as suggesting that human action will usher in the transformation of the world. It understood the

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transformation of the world as one and the same as the Kingdom of God. Evangelicalism suggested that that is what Rauschenbusch meant when he said that the "Kingdom of God is humanity organized according to the will of God." And that the "Kingdom of God is the Christian transfiguration of the social order."¹⁵⁰

The third and fourth reasons that Stott offers also deserve to be taken together. He suggests that the antipathy of evangelicalism towards political involvement grew out of a post World War II pessimism about human depravity and therefore what it was possible to achieve in human society. He also suggests that the antipathy arose out of and as a result of the popularization of J N Darby (Scofield Bible) pre-millennial scheme. Darby suggested that "adopting political programs (sic) is 'like cleaning the staterooms on the Titanic after it has hit the iceberg... It is far more important simply to preach the Gospel and to rescue souls for the next life.'"¹⁵¹ The fifth reason offered by Stott is what I might call the "middle-classization" or embougeoisment of the gospel and of the church. This has been confirmed by surveys that demonstrate that the majority population of evangelicalism in its places of origin are conservatives who place a high value on individual salvation and are anxious to maintain the status quo. It is Jon Sobrino's indictment of theology which abandons the recourse to the locus of realization of faith of a poor people as truncated theology. He says: "if theology does not also, and principally, have recourse to the realization of the faith of a poor people, it will be a truncated theology.

¹⁵⁰ Stott, op. Cit., 8-11 cites Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), 141-5.

¹⁵¹ George Marsden, "An Overview," in Michael Cromartie (ed), *No Longer Exiles: Ethics and Public Policy* (Washington: Center, 1993), 14.

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Ever and again it will become abtractivist and elitist, thus depriving itself of an irreplaceable font of theological cognition."¹⁵²

Other reasons that have been advanced include suggestions that the church lacks a developed political sensibility of its own and therefore has merely advanced other people's moral and political idealism, a "tag along with a religious gloss." It has been suggested further that the Church's political contribution has been amateurish, as it lacks the necessary expertise to participate. Also the Church's political expectations are naïve, because of an inadequate view of human fallibility and sinfulness.¹⁵³

History of Caribbean Theology

The watershed event for Caribbean Theology was the 1971 in Chaguaramas Trinidad. The conference was an Ecumenical Consultation for Development. It was presided over by the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Kingston, Samuel Carter and included some twenty five church gatherings from sixteen regional territories. The stated objectives were: 1) to witness to the will and the determination of the churches to carry their share of responsibility in the process of human fulfillment, and social and economic development. 2) To study under the direction of experts in various fields (theology, sociology, anthropology, economics, and politics) the problems and possibilities of development of one Caribbean people. 3) To define ways of expressing Caribbean participation in and commitment to the development of the Caribbean in terms of

¹⁵² Jon Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation: Towards Political Holiness*, Trans. Robert R. Barr (Mayknoll, New York: Obris Books, 1988), 75.

¹⁵³ Stott, op. cit., 16.

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human freedom and justice. 4) To plan strategies of ecumenical action for these ends in co-operation with national programmes, international agencies and institutions.

In addition to the Ecumenical Consultation at Chaguaramas two other developments played decisive roles in the self-conscious movement towards a Caribbean Theology. Credit needs to be given to the spawning of the United Theological College of the University of the West Indies in 1967. UTCWI was a self-conscious Caribbean Ecumenical Caribbean Theological institution. Edmund Davis does a reflection on eighty years of Theological Education in the region, but in so doing affords not even a footnote on the other colleges that already existed in 1967, Jamaica Theological Seminary (1960-) and Jamaica Bible College (1935) somewhat earlier. He contends that "the myth of the superiority of western civilization seems to have been thoroughly internalized by many educated blacks" "During this period (1838-1903), Afro-Jamaicans were regarded as subjects of the British empire to be civilized according to the new secular notion of positivism and social Darwinism. Their struggle for social justice, for better land utilization policy, for political representation and ethno-cultural identity reflects an emerging nationalism in an imperialist setting."¹⁵⁴ Davis is correct in pointing out the paradigmatic and innovative character the particular ecumenical arrangements which spawned UTC in which participating communions jointly finance and manage the institution. Neither

¹⁵⁴ Edmund Davies, *Theological Education in a Multi-Ethnic Society: the United Theological College of the West Indies and its Four Antecedent Institutions (1841-1966)* (Amsterdam: Boekencentrum, 1999), 39.

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JTS nor JBC have taken a self-consciously and deliberately ecumenical or regional approach to the management and financing of their institutions.¹⁵⁵ Both JTS and JBC are regional in an opportunistic rather than institutional manner. It is tribute to the record of UTC that all its presidents have contributed to the development of Caribbean Theologians and some have come to be identified as significant Caribbean Theologians.

The other antecedent development which has been critical to the watershed in the development of Caribbean Theology has been the Caribbean Conference of Churches and in particular the Caribbean Contact Newspaper. The CCC precipitated the Consultation in Chaguaramas and the Caribbean Contact newspaper facilitated an intellectual hegemony of regional thinkers including theologians while it lasted.

Idris Hamid emerged as the early evangelist of Caribbean Theology after the Chaguaramas Consultation. His work, *In Search of New Perspectives* concluded that the history of the Christian Faith as it came to the Caribbean was distorted and a truncated one.¹⁵⁶ He accused this theology which has come to us as creating a false dichotomy between body and spirit, giving priority to the soul over

¹⁵⁵ Both Jamaica Theological Seminary (JTS) and Jamaica Bible College (JBC) have interpreted their mandates in terms of preserving the evangelical tradition and in that respect have not yet taken theological responsibility for the Caribbean region, except to train evangelical thinkers in the region.

¹⁵⁶ Idris Hamid, *In Search of New Perspectives* (Bridgetown: Caribbean Ecumenical Consultation for Development), 6.

the physical needs, promoting an individualistic gospel that set man apart from his brother and giving a false eschatology and a false hope—an opiate. He argued that these interpretations and emphases were handy tools of domination and colonialism. The interests of colonial masters are favoured by the truncated and distorted Christian Faith: they did not want us to see spiritual freedom as relating to political and other freedoms. To care for the body as they cared for the soul would have involved a change in policies and led to poor economics. The individualism and sectarianism were spiritual counterparts of the colonial policy to divide and rule: The stress on the future hope was geared to detract from any attempt to change the present condition or correct present injustices.

Hamid therefore called for a new theological orientation. This new theological orientation is to look at our historical experiences and the future to which God has called us. God is calling us to take responsibility for our future. “Our past is a defuturised past.” Hopelessness reigned. Hamid says,

Not only were we robbed of our future, we were robbed of our past. It is scarred and denigrated. Our rich cultural heritages were labeled as uncivilized. In our schools we were further inflicted with a denigration of our past. In our religious training, one is hard put to find any attempt to see God operating our former cultures and in our Caribbean history.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷Ibid., 7.

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Hamid argues that we have experienced God as an outsider. "He is not a God in our history and of our destiny. In fact He has not been the God for us, but the God against us."¹⁵⁸

He also argues that the accent on the new theology will be on the humanity of man. He cites the humanness of the Deuteronomic laws, which is too often overlooked, the prophetic cry for justice and the coming of God in human form. He says that all these are abundant evidence of the God's thrust for the humanization of man and his communities. This humanism should become incarnate in the total life of the Caribbean.¹⁵⁹

Hamid argues that this new theology must make a sense of community its pillar. "This means that structures of society which put brother against brother, which see the neighbor as the competitor and a rival instead of a brother and a partner, which strive on competition instead of co-operation must be rejected."¹⁶⁰ He also argues that a fresh understanding of the Incarnation would be a breakdown of the dividing wall between the material and spiritual, the profane and the sacred, the body and the spirit. "When God became fully man in Jesus, He made sacred every area of our existence."¹⁶¹ In that respect Hamid also warned against moralism

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 8.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 10.

and docetism.¹⁶² The Chaguaramas Consultation had taken place against the background of the Black Power protests that took place in the 1960s in the USA. In Trinidad and Tobago one such protest had poured black paint on the figure of Jesus on the crucifix. According to Hamid, the pouring of black paint on the figure of Jesus was rage against a symbol of the institution of the church in which colonialism still reigned. It was also at the same time a deep, despairing and symbolic cry for a Jesus who would identify with and deliver the underprivileged.¹⁶³

Horace Russell one of the earliest graduates from Oxford University to enter the Christian ministry in the Caribbean and a historian returned to the Caribbean in the 1950s to pastor and to teach. He is acknowledged as influential over many who have become Caribbean Theologians. As one of the early Presidents of UTCWI he wrote the important essay, "The Emergence of the 'Christian Black' Concept: the Making of a Stereotype".¹⁶⁴ In that essay Russell traced developments from March 4th 1823 when William Wilberforce, the celebrated parliamentarian, introduced a petition from the Quakers requesting the complete abolition of slavery on humanitarian grounds. The developments upon which he reflected climaxed with the period of 1940 when political ferment and labour unrest gave

¹⁶² *Caribbean Contact*, "Voices from the Past," April 1982.

¹⁶³ Hamid, *op. cit.*, 12.

¹⁶⁴ Horace Russell, "Emergence of the 'Christian Black' Concept: The Making of a Stereotype," *Caribbean Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. 2 No 1 (April 1979).

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birth to the political and trade union movements in the region and eventually to adult suffrage. The former signaled the beginning of the end of the world of slavery and the security and protection enjoyed by the planters. The latter gave effect to the attempts to create a new man (Caribbean person). Hyacinth Booth who describes Russell as a bridge between our theological past and our theological present, questions what she sees as the unfortunate neglect of the struggles of black women by his choice of reference to Caribbean Man, and ask what about Woman? She contends that “in the discussion on Caribbean Man, the emphasis was on ‘man’ as male. In the discussion, there was the suggestion that because of her sexuality black women did not experience to the same extent the negative evaluation meted out to black men.” She protested, “I am not sure that I understand the point that was being made here.”¹⁶⁵

Russell in that essay, relied on the work of Frantz Fanon (a Martiniquian was a Christian black) *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon says:

But if we want humanity to advance further, if we want to bring it up to a different level than that which Europe has shown it, then we must invent and we must make discoveries ... for Europe, for ourselves, and for humanity. We must turn over a new leaf, we

¹⁶⁵ Hyacinth Booth, “Russell in Theological Education at the United Theological College of the West Indies, March 2010, 7.

must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man.¹⁶⁶

Russell pointed out that no one in the Caribbean wanted a revolution from below. It was the hard fact of the imminence of insurrection or revolution that dictated the pace of emancipation. Therefore abolitionists and churchmen sought to replace the planters view of the African with the more romantic symbol baptized with Christian meaning.¹⁶⁷

The planters' view of the African was 'Quashie'. Orlando Patterson describes 'Quashie as the stereotypical African, as characterized by *evasiveness, laziness, caprice, childishness* or childlikeness and *lack of judgment*.¹⁶⁸ Russell argues that there is a masculine quality to Patterson's stereotype. He says that despite her ill-treatment and degradation black women retained what the man could not retain—'some of her social status.' "The black woman was the 'womb' and as such was mother and the harbinger of the future."¹⁶⁹ There was a scarcity of woman in Jamaican slave society. There were few white women and only one in every six imports from Africa was female. The woman was exploited by white men, headmen and Africans.

¹⁶⁶ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Grove Press, 1965), 255.

¹⁶⁷ Russell, op. cit., 4.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 4, 5 citing Orlando Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery*.

¹⁶⁹ Russell, op. cit., 5.

She was the master's object of pleasure, seldom his companion. On the other hand according to Russell the literature describes her as possessing magical powers which made her irresistible to men and powers she obtained from the Obeah man. This was not entirely the same for coloured women. "She was feared given the norms of the plantocracy i.e. by birth she belonged to it, her colour identified her with the slave population, a fact reinforced by law and prejudice. The coloured woman was at one and the same time a symbol of freedom and of betrayal.

The idea of a new man is the notion of the rejection of this rivalry between man and woman and between shades of oppression. It is also to reject the idea of the black man of the fallen noble savage. Most fundamentally he must reject the idea of his new humanity as imitation of Europe. Fanon has put it this way:

Humanity is waiting for something other from us than such an imitation, which would almost be an obscene caricature. If we want to turn Africa into a New Europe or America into a new Europe then let us leave the destiny of our countries to Europeans. They will know how to do it better than the most gifted of us.¹⁷⁰

Both notions of Caribbean Theology promoted by Hamid and Russell have proven to be influential. William Watty and Ashley Smith in their contribution to Caribbean Theology have continued

¹⁷⁰ Russell, *op. cit.*, 5; Fanon, 2 *op. cit.*, 55.

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the focus of criticism on received theology and on the challenge of Caribbean identity. Watty focuses on the opportunity that the Caribbean presents as a brand new civilization to the theological project. Smith focuses somewhat more on the Church taking root in Caribbean soil and defining Caribbean identity. Smith has been critical of what he calls the 'embougeoisment' of Christianity. He argues that the world of the today's exponent of biblical Christian truth is vastly different from the world of the biblical writers. According to Smith, almost invariably the exponent of theological truth represents the elite of both society and the church. He suggests that the interpreter is often upper-middle class, and has been socialized in the Anglo-Saxon cultural milieu of Western Europe and North America.¹⁷¹ Smith does not make the call but implies that a new hermeneutic is required.

The works that followed for the remainder of the decade of the nineteen seventies and eighties have concentrated on criticism of received theology and reinforcing the need for a Caribbean Theology without necessarily doing Caribbean Theology.

At the start of the decade of the nineteen eighties an important lecture was delivered by Burchell Taylor. It bore the title for the UTC Founders' Day Lecture, "The Babylonish Captivity of the Church." The significance of the lecture was the completeness of the analysis, though it continued in the vein of critique of

¹⁷¹ Ashley Smith, "Sin and Salvation: A Contemporary View from a Corner of the 'South'", *Caribbean Journal of Religious Studies*, vol. 17 No. 2 (1996), 22.

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received/missionary theology of the church, and the introduction of the metaphor of “Babylon” and therefore the notion of “exile” in Caribbean Theology.

Taylor defined “Church as the Collective Christian Presence variously expressed in, and identified with, ecumenical collocations, doctrinal and confessional alignments, denominational and other institutional bodies and structure, and hierarchical or leading figures.”¹⁷² He acknowledged his indebtedness to Martin Luther who used the full title, “the Babylonish Captivity of the Church” who used it in dealing with what he considered to be the corruption of the sacramental practice of the Church.¹⁷³ Babylon is used by Taylor to paint a picture of “domination, stupefaction and seduction by the allurements of a way of life and the power and influence of organized society: Babylon is a moral, political and cultural reality as such it is corrupting, domineering and enticing.”¹⁷⁴ It is therefore the tendencies that Taylor seeks to invoke in using the adjective Babylonish. He emphasizes the fact that the captivity is not by compulsion but by accommodation and complicity. He argues that the captivity of the church is an ideological captivity and captivity by imitation. He says that even where “there are points of tension between the Church and the various expressions of the

¹⁷² Burchell Taylor, “The Babylonish Captivity of the Church,” *Caribbean Journal of Religious Studies*, vol. 4 No 1 (April 1982), 2.

¹⁷³ *op. cit.*, 4.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

establishment, there is no real attempt at captivity by compulsion or persecution.” At any rate Taylor does not believe that enforced captivity that is confined to physical conditions and allied factors can break the spirit, win commitment or distort the mission.¹⁷⁵ Taylor argues, ironically, that, it is the absence of the any tension between the Church and the *status quo* in the region, the almost totally peaceful co-existence the Church enjoys that is a clear sign of the Babylonish captivity of the Church.¹⁷⁶ He argues that it is the Church that has allowed itself to voluntarily stray into captivity. It has done so by yielding to the temptation to conform. The fact that the Church must exist and operate in a society whose values do not naturally coincide with those of the Church puts a pressure on the Church to conform. The Church’s tendency to sacralize good order, harmony and stability and their underpinnings at the expense at which they have been achieved has only strengthened the tendency to compromise.¹⁷⁷

In his analysis, Taylor has not located the issues and challenges of Caribbean Theology in terms of blaming the past and critiquing received theology. An element of that is inevitable and justifiable. Rather he has placed the issue in terms of what the Church is and how it operates, whatever its antecedents. Taylor’s contribution, therefore as a Caribbean Theologian has been significant in at least

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 10.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 12.

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three ways: The first is that he has contributed the key metaphor of the Exile and made use of the biblical notions of Babylon. This is significant to Caribbean Theology. It also represents one of the ways in which Rastafarianism which was the first to give prominence to the notion of Babylon as the resonant cultural symbol, anticipated Caribbean Theology. Taylor has two major works that furthers the exegesis on the Babylon motif. The first work is *the Church Taking Sides* deals with the letters to the seven churches in Asia in the book of Revelation. The second is *Saying No to Babylon* which is on the book of Daniel.

The second is that Taylor has been paradigm setting in terms of being communal and pastoral in his theologizing. He has located his role in the community as the pastor of Bethel Baptist Church from 1970. In the more than forty years of pastoral ministry, Bethel has functioned as a basic ecclesial community. In his own words, Taylor describes Bethel as “a ministry in the making.” He says, “there is an open-endedness, provisionality and interim sense about all that has been accomplished, despite appearances to the contrary.”¹⁷⁸ He says further,

This is accounted for by an abiding sense of the limitless possibilities of any ministry that has been entrusted by God in Christ and sustained by the Holy Spirit. There is a dynamism that goes hand in hand with both the concept and reality of ministry that

¹⁷⁸ Burchell Taylor, “A Ministry in the Making,” in Edna Walker, ed., *The Bethel Story: 1954-2004* (Kingston: BBC, 2004), 48.

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visions of the 'not yet' that has always extends and modifies the 'already.'¹⁷⁹

Indeed both published works of Taylor referred to above came out of his weekly bible studies with the Bethel congregation. The patterns of ministry that have been developed by the Church during the last forty years have been paradigmatic. These have included interventions that are aimed at complementing and supplementing what is available to the needy through the provisions by the State. There have also been those ministries which are innovations that are aimed at approximating the ideals with a commitment to holism. The Church is located in the heart of the city busiest commercial area and faces all the challenge of urban ministries. It has developed holistic healing centres with medical clinics, pharmacies, counseling centres. In addition there have been centres for adult literacy programme, a programme targeting street boys. And beyond what is done at the physical location of the church, there have initiatives aimed at community development and empowerment in inner city communities in the city. The Bethel Steel Orchestra and Emancipation Lecture Series betray its Caribbean cultural self-consciousness.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 49.

¹⁸⁰ My own pastoral experience in inner Kingston (1977-97) and Portmore (1999-2009) has been greatly influenced by the Bethel paradigm. I sought in those places to at one and the same time approximate the ideal with various innovations with ministries to minorities, the disabled and the aged and drop-outs of the educational system, and to advocate for those who have been left out and left behind.

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The Bethel paradigm has been quite influential on in bench marking and stimulating other programmes of ministries among churches in various Christian denominations. Programmes of ministry emerged as were required by the needs of the community in order to place the gospel at the cross roads of human experience. Chaplaincy programmes and programmes for inmates, ex-offenders as well as members of the uniformed services have been developed. Churches have also assumed roles in naming, confronting and pastoring the powers. These ministries and programmes are the praxis, the reflection upon which have informed the hermeneutics. Taylor's praxis located Caribbean Theology within the Church as a servant community and gave it its mantra as responding to the lived experience of the people.

Thirdly, Taylor's contribution has been deliberately exegetical. Theology is to be grounded in exegesis. The contribution of Taylor who has been the most prodigious and prolific of Caribbean Theologian in the last two decades has been by way of doing the biblical work. The void left by the absence of colloquium consultations, seminars and festschrifts, has been filled with sermons, papers and basic ecclesial reflection upon the text in the light of engagement with the lived experience of the people.

Caribbean Theology in Retreat

Despite all of this in the last two decades Caribbean Theology has been virtually in retreat. It has been idiosyncratic, sporadic and inward looking. Williams suggests that the decade of the 1980's has been dubbed, "The Lost Decade." He attributes this to the radical swing of the pendulum which brought a "time not for

disengagement but for dialogue.”¹⁸¹ This has been tragic because the paucity of output and engagement has coincided with a deepening of the distortion of identity, seen among other things in the expansion of incidents of self-mutilating and irrational violence. The region has also become a place of idolaters with gods of gold, graveyards of craving and a factory of idols.

The history of Israel described in the Old Testament Scriptures provides abundant parallels to the history of the Caribbean. The three watershed events the Exodus, the Wilderness and the Exile provide metaphors which are useful prisms through which to reflect upon the lived experience of the Caribbean. Each of these metaphors has resonance with the lived experience of the Caribbean. The Exodus is paralleled to Emancipation which is a watershed event in the Caribbean. Emancipation was the goal post toward which the African majority struggled and strained every tissue and every nerve. According to Kortright Davis in *Emancipation Still Coming* it remains a matter arising. And according to Garvey and Marley it is the overarching imperative for the full freedom of Caribbean people. They must “emancipate themselves from mental slavery because not but themselves can free their minds.” In this respect the metaphor of the Exodus is overarching in respect of Caribbean Theology as a historical reference which defines the character of Caribbean people by their history of resistance and the struggle to be faithful to the heritage bequeathed by their forefathers and foremothers to complete their emancipation.

¹⁸¹ Lewin Williams, “Editorial”, *Caribbean Journal of Religious Studies*, vol. 20 No. 2 September (1999), 2.

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I have insisted throughout this paper that the metaphor which best describes the lived experience of the Caribbean is that of the Exile. The people of the Caribbean are a people in exile making their exile into their homeland. The domination and seduction of Babylon in relation to ancient Israel have been the lot and reality of the Caribbean not merely during slavery and colonization but also and conceivably more so during self-government, political independence, neo-liberalism and globalization. Put differently, throughout the history of the region, the influence, rather, the interference and interests of the metropole have been determinative. From Crown Colony to multi-laterals and transnational corporations, the free market doctrine and the ethos of globalization have distorted and destroyed what is in the interest of the Caribbean. The Caribbean Theology project is in response to the challenge to name and unmask, to confront and vanquish the powers, by the finger of God. The theology must “pastor the powers”¹⁸² and in Taylor’s words by *Saying No To Babylon*.

Between the Exodus and the Exile and after the Exile in the OT history of Israel, Israel crossed the wilderness. It is in the wilderness wanderings that the challenge of completing the process of their emancipation and the prospect of building a just and responsible society became most apparent. The wilderness is valuable as a prism and metaphor of the lived experience of the Caribbean not as a place but as a mindset.

¹⁸² Burchell Taylor “Horace Russell, Pastor Chaplain and Public Theologian,” (2010) 5 draws upon Duncan Forrester, *Truthful Action: Explorations in Practical Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2000), p.84.