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# **ETHICS, REFORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE CARIBBEAN**

By

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In today's Caribbean, as the post-modern age of intolerant "tolerance" dawns, a Christian voice raised out of concern for knowing and doing truth, love, right and good will immediately face several pointed rebukes. In particular, such a prophetic, ethical voice will face the accusation: "How dare you impose your intolerant, hypocritical, outdated, patriarchal, unworkable 'morals' on us!"

However, at the same time, we read that "Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labour in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain" (Psalm 127:1),<sup>1</sup> and that we serve One who expects us "to act justly . . . to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8), One who therefore came in love, descending, serving, healing, liberating, dying for our sins, rising and ascending "in order to fill all things" (Eph.4:10).<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, we are challenged to seize the ethical, intellectual and cultural initiative, especially through contributing a faithfully prophetic voice to the national and regional development dialogue, so that the Caribbean will not "build in vain." To do this effectively, we must first identify, exemplify and articulate a soundly Christian ethical framework for reformation and development.

In that pursuit, it is the thesis of this preliminary contribution that our region's

<sup>1</sup> cf. Deut. 8:1 – 20 and Jer. 29:1 – 23.

<sup>2</sup> cf. Eph. 4:11 – 24, and 1:9 – 10, 17 – 23.

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true hope for sustainable national and regional development lies in the Christocentric, fullness vision-based<sup>3</sup> reformation of all facets of life and culture in the Caribbean.

### 1. Background: Ethics, Sustainability and the Caribbean's Development Dilemmas

Now, Ethics is concerned with critical reflection on the principles and practice of right conduct, for individuals, communities, institutions and nations. Consequently, it has much to say to the Caribbean region as we confront the development challenges that have dominated public policy and community life over the past generation, and which are now being intensified by environmental and sustainability constraints.

Kant's *Categorical Imperative* (CI) and its application in the Brundtland Commission's (1987) definition of sustainable development (SD) are therefore an excellent beginning point for ethical reflections on reformation and development in the Caribbean:

1. The "first formulation" of the CI reads: "I ought never to act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law." (Kant 1964). That is, if one always acts towards other persons in such a way that it would be appropriate for one's example and underlying moral principle to be acted on universally<sup>4</sup>, then one's actions would be morally sound. (That is, the CI is a way of saying that we must *consistently* respect the value, rights and dignity of persons; thus it counterbalances our natural tendency to make self-serving exceptions to moral principles.)
2. The Brundtland Commission's definition of SD applies the CI to sustainable development concerns by considering the interests of all stakeholders, including those that are as yet unborn. So, it requires that we think through whether, if a particular principle or pattern of behaviour were to become sufficiently widespread, its effect would be to help meet the needs of this current generation (especially bearing in mind equity and liberty concerns) without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, given relevant environmental factors, constraints and trends.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> cf. Mt. 7:12 and Lev.19:15-19.

<sup>5</sup> Gro Harlem Brundtland: WCED definition of Sustainable Development, 1987.

Immediately, the two principles reveal why many Caribbean development initiatives over the past generation have proved to be unsustainable: they have been ethically unsound.

For, development-oriented decisions and actions taken at individual, institutional, community and national levels have far too often been carried through without clear and consistent ethical reflection, leading to policies and actions that are insufficiently constrained by recognition of their likely impacts and consequences on other persons (especially the poor, the powerless and the voiceless) and on the environment. So, as the consequences of self-serving, shortsighted choices have played out on the ground, and as the poor examples set by top-level decision-makers have spread out across the wider society, chaos has too often followed.

To illustrate this, we may consider a fictionalized, composite case of a Caribbean housing development:

*Portview* is a satellite “bedroom community” housing estate built on former coastal wetlands next to an estuary near to *Bigtown*, a major Caribbean city:

- The development of *Portview* not only contributes to the rapid deterioration of coastal zone ecosystems (damaging the livelihood of local subsistence-level fishermen), but the area chosen is highly vulnerable to hurricane storm surges, earthquakes and tidal waves due to Kick'em Jenny Volcano off the coast of Grenada. Even more menacing is a local Soufriere, an explosive, island-arc volcano that rumbles and shakes every thirty or so years; it is only five miles inland from the housing estate — well within the range of devastating, fast-moving hot ash flows.
- Moreover, the new community greatly increases the distance of the average commute to work or school, so that it worsens *Bigtown*'s already major traffic congestion and air pollution problems. The sharp increase in long-distance road traffic on the single road to *Bigtown*, and the general rise in the number of cars on the road also contribute significantly to rising fossil fuel consumption, adding to the national foreign exchange crisis.
- *Portview* also has significant socio-cultural impacts on its parent city. First, it attracts young, upwardly mobile professionals and relatively well-off supervisory level artisans from *Bigtown*'s aging urban neighbourhoods, accelerating inner city decay and the rise of a criminalised street culture linked to political violence, protection rackets

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and the rising illicit drugs trade. Further, due to tight zoning restrictions and unsympathetic regulators, it is difficult for community-based institutions, notably churches, to become established in Portview.

- ❑ In turn, the inner city decay in Bigtown accelerates adverse economic trends rooted in ideologically driven errors in national development policy. The policies in question, which are driven by the ideological biases of several prominent Lecturers based at the National University, have failed to help the nation make the transition from a commodity-based economy, to the emerging global economy based on technologically advanced, knowledge- and innovation- based, value-added goods and services.
- ❑ As Portview, in turn begins to suffer urban decay, its own upwardly mobile residents begin to look towards newer, more upscale housing, and the cycle of urban decline begins again. However, since Portview lacks extended family networks, supportive community-based social institutions, and associated community leadership, the decay process starts earlier and is much faster than what had happened only a few years before in Bigtown.

Thus, we may see that development initiatives in the Caribbean often pose many interlocking, interacting, environmentally linked ethical and sustainability challenges. For instance, we may ask:

1. Why did development planners decide against the alternative of inner-city renewal in Bigtown?
2. Why did they then site Portview in the path of several highly destructive natural disasters?
3. Why were environmental concerns and potential societal impacts on the less well off, such as the local fishermen, apparently low on the scale of priorities?
4. Why was there no effective response to the probable impact of attracting away from Bigtown many of those people who would be likely to influence inner city communities in the interests of stability and lawful behaviour?
5. Why is it that, disproportionately, it is the poor, the powerless and the voiceless that pay the price for development policy failures?
6. How could the consistent application of ethical principles such as the CI and the Bruntland SD Principle, help us to avoid or correct such ethical lapses and policy failures?

Reflection on such ethical questions soon shows that there are many opportunities for the church to speak prophetically into the national development process, promoting godly reformation so that “the blessing given to Abraham might come to the *ethne* (nations)” (Gal.3:14). However, in the emerging cynical, post-modern, secularized, neo-pagan “new age” that now increasingly characterizes the Caribbean, it is hard for such a prophetic voice to be heard.

## 2. Diagnosis: Hypocrisy, Post-Modernity, and the need for Reformation

It has long been a favourite tactic to discredit Evangelicals and others who raise ethical concerns in the public arena by harrying them with the question of hypocrisy. The sad cases of Televangelists Swaggart and Bakker — as well as an uncomfortably large number closer to home — underscore the point that the cry “hypocrisy” is too often quite justified, discrediting the prophetic voice of the church. For, if we Christians cannot get our message to work on a sustained basis in our own lives and institutions, then why should other people bother to listen to what we say?

Consequently, a Christian voice raised in response to a moral issue linked to the region’s development challenges must be able to respond effectively to pointed rebukes, such as:

- “How dare you impose your intolerant, hypocritical, outdated, patriarchal, unworkable ‘morals’ on us!”
- “Let him who is without guilt cast the first stone.”
- “Science proves that ‘right’/‘wrong’ is relative, to individuals, situations, communities and cultures.”
- “Matters of state/national development are matters of power and economics, not morals: so, private vices can be public virtues.”
- “If you try to base government laws and policy on religious views, you are resorting to religious totalitarianism – just like the Islamists.”
- “What we need is revolution by any means necessary, not attempts to patch a failed system!”

Such rebukes draw their “shut up” rhetorical power from several main sources. First, as noted above, there is the question of hypocrisy. As Jesus put it:

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, “Let me take the speck out of your eye,” when all the time there is a plank in your

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own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. (Matt. 7:3-5 NIV)

So, if we are to seize the initiative, we must go back to Jesus' underlying point: to be a fallen human being in a fallen world is to struggle with the blinding and enslaving power of sin. Consequently, it is only as the renewing, reviving power of the gospel works out in our own lives and institutions, that we can help the wider community grope towards that urgently needed reformation which is a necessity if the Caribbean is to not "build in vain."

This need for ongoing cleansing and growth in our own lives and institutions is not only a practical necessity if we are to be leaders in the community, but it is also one of the hallmarks of true discipleship. For, as we may read in the sobering words of the Elder John, speaking to the Christian community of the late First Century:

God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If *we* claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in darkness, *we* lie and do not live by the truth. But if *we* walk in the light, as he is in the light, *we* have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies *us* from all sin. If *we* claim to be without sin, *we* deceive ourselves and the truth is not in *us*. If *we* confess *our* sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive *us* our sins and purify *us* from all unrighteousness.<sup>6</sup> (1 John 1:5-9 NIV)

Secondly, a contemporary prophetic voice in the Caribbean must also confront a major intellectual and cultural challenge. For, the global rise of atheistic/agnostic evolutionary materialism over the past three hundred years has meant that western civilization's intellectual high ground has been seized and held by men, institutions and movements that are fundamentally hostile to the gospel.

For instance, recently retired Episcopalian Bishop John Shelby Spong,<sup>7</sup> who is now quite fashionable in some regional circles because his books provide persuasive (though fundamentally debatable and often simply specious<sup>8</sup>) anti-Bible arguments, is a self-confessed atheist.<sup>9</sup> So, while wearing a Bishop's robes, he loudly advocates for the "reformation" of

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<sup>6</sup> Emphases added, to highlight the specifically Christian context of the message.

<sup>7</sup> cf. Martin Henry: "Bishop John Spong as an atheist," *The Gleaner*, 31 Jan. 2002, p. A4.

<sup>8</sup> cf. <http://www.leaderu.com/orgs/probe/docs/bib-docu.html>,

<http://jesus.com.au/library/jesus/seminar/index.html>, and

<http://www.leaderu.com/menus/apologetics.html>.

<sup>9</sup> cf. <http://www.dioceseofnewark.org/jsspong/reform.html> and <http://www.starcourse.org/spong/>.

## Christianity along atheistic lines, and publicly derides the church's historic understanding and declaration

[that there is One True Living God who has spoken through Prophets, Scriptures, and Who] "in these last days . . . has spoken to us by his Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. (Who) (a)fter he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven." (Heb.1:1-3 NIV)

In short, Spong boldly repudiates the Historic Christian Faith and instead believes, in the name of "Science," that humankind is the accidental byproduct of a purposeless, fundamentally random process of evolution, from hydrogen to humans, and possibly beyond. Similarly, assuming the same Evolutionary Materialism (the *philosophical* basis for modern Atheism), Matthew Dingwall feels free to publicly rebuke Rev. Clinton Chisholm for responding to the Bishop's heresy:

We both know that what we call "God" is man-made; the reverend gentleman is just having difficulty accepting the fact. There was history before his God came and there will be plenty of it after man sees the light and discards his God. . . .

(Chisholm) states that the Christian God created man with free will and in exercising this free will he sinned. I don't see how he could make such a statement. How can we be free to make choices, and at the same time be punished for making the one that seems the better of the two? What kind of freedom is that? It seems that the original purpose of the Christian God was for mankind to remain forever ignorant, serving him blindly . . . Man may have been created with free will, but he certainly did not have freedom to use that will.<sup>10</sup>

As Mr Dingwall so plainly indicates, in light of an atheistic worldview, "moral values" are at best seen as relative to individuals, communities and cultures; they lack any rationally or morally compelling universal scope. Consequently, contemporary society, since it is dominated by such materialistic thinking, struggles to find a way to consistently justify moral restraints in the face of the ever-present nihilistic/Machiavellian challenge that what counts is not so-called "morals" (much less stewardship of our work under God) but rather power to do as one pleases.

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<sup>10</sup> "Disputing Rev Chisholm's views," *The Daily Observer* (Kingston, Jamaica), 6 Feb. 2002, p. 9.



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Going further, and as Mr Dingwall also clearly illustrates, relativists and secularists often deride the concept of a Creator-Redeemer God who speaks in the pages of the Bible as a dangerous myth used to support the power agendas of certain “backward” religious interest groups. Thus, biblical virtues and associated moral claims - which are explicitly rooted in the Lordship and Holiness of our Creator, and are claimed to be “for your own good” (Deut.10:13) - are viewed with suspicion. For, in relativist eyes, they appear to be simply ideological tools used to advance the imposition of a hypocritical and potentially tyrannical “fundamentalism” that exploits the ignorance and emotions of the poorly educated<sup>11</sup>.

Instead, relativists and secularists typically contend that all moral rules or principles are necessarily only relative to times and communities, and so have at best utilitarian, pragmatic or self-uplifting value. They should therefore “evolve” to meet changing circumstances – especially in regard to the “need” for freedom of artistic and sexual expression and for the “liberation” of certain oppressed groups that have long suffered “patriarchal domination,” especially black people, racial minorities, women, gays and lesbians.

The basis of such relativistic morality, however, is fundamentally flawed. For, as the CI and the Bruntland SD principles remind us, sustainable civilisation is based on respect for other persons, thus restraint of our natural appetites and tendencies. Or, rephrasing in terms of respect for rights, ***your right requires my duty***, whether to life, liberty, reputation, property, or to an environment that can sustainably support your needs, or whatever. As philosopher Arthur Holmes aptly summarizes:

If we admit that we all equally have the right to be treated as persons, then it follows that we have the duty to respect one another accordingly. Rights bring correlative duties: my rights . . . imply that you ought to respect these rights. Of course, not all duties arise in response to human rights. Some issue from special relationships, like contracts and the special rights they involve; and some duties come from loving and caring for another person rather than from that person’s rights. (Holmes 1984, 81)

So, when many relativists attack any asserted truth or moral claim that does not suit their fancy as “backward” or as an “imposition” — echoing what the late Yale University Law Professor Arthur Leff called the “grand ‘Sez who?’”(Johnson 1995, 147-49) — they instantly fall into confusion and inconsistency: not only (1) saying that truth and right are relative to

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<sup>11</sup> cf. Lecturer’s letter to UCCF student leadership, Feb. 1997. Available on request.

individuals and cultures, but also (2) expecting others to accept as *binding* the maxim that they *should not* "impose their views on others."

Given the direct link between duties and rights, does not the CI warn us that such an inconsistency undercuts the moral foundation of all of our cherished rights and freedoms? Does not the Bruntland SD principle add to this, that the resulting inconsistent, self-serving behaviour is liable to undercut our capacity to appropriately respond to sustainability challenges?

Often, however, the intellectual power of the underlying Naturalistic worldview makes many relativists and secularists more than willing to live with the logical and moral inconsistencies and destructive consequences of their core beliefs. So, if we are to unleash the full force of the church's prophetic voice in the Caribbean, we must also respond to the intellectual challenge posed by the underlying philosophical Naturalism.

For, while such Naturalism claims for itself the prestige and authority of "Science," in fact the underlying scientific and philosophical case is open to serious challenge. Thus, as C. S. Lewis and many others have pointed out, we may highlight the implications of materialists' tendency to reduce all phenomena to the outworking of chance events and purposeless laws of nature acting on matter and energy across time. But, this "explanation" must therefore include our minds as well, and so we find a characteristic reduction of reasoning to the status of illusion: whether through Freud's id-ego-superego conflicts, or Marx's class conditioning, or B. F. Skinner's operant conditioning, or Ayer's logical positivism, or Crick's reduction of personhood to nerve cell activity and associated molecular biology.

Now, as a rule, such materialists use these implications to attack those with whom they differ, but it is clear that the logical knife cuts both ways. In short, we may legitimately ask: "Sigmund, what about the impact of *your* potty training on your views on morality?" Or, "Karl, aren't *your* theories on society simply the untrustworthy product of your Bourgeois morality and class conditioning?" Or, "But, Burrhus, aren't *you* just another puzzled rat in the cosmic maze?" Or even, "Alfred, can *you* show us that the verification principle you use to dismiss the term 'God' as meaningless is itself empirically falsifiable, thus meaningful, as it would beg the question to be proved if it were to be assumed 'true by definition'?"

Philip Johnson's rebuke to the Nobel Prize winning Biochemist Sir Francis Crick brings out the underlying self-referential inconsistency with great force. For, to be consistent, Crick should be willing to preface each of his writings: "I, Francis Crick, my opinions and my science, and even the thoughts expressed in this book, consist of nothing more than the behaviour of a vast

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assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules" (Johnson 1995, 63-64). Johnson then aptly comments that "(t)he plausibility of materialistic determinism requires that an implicit exception be made for the theorist."

Arguably, then, Evolutionary Materialism is a philosophical position that easily falls into self-referential inconsistencies. So, whatever a Dingwall or a Spong, or even a Crick may think or say, the resulting logical confusion shreds Naturalism's bold assertion that it is scientifically established "knowledge." Further, its specifically scientific claims are also open to serious challenge, and so, for instance, the Discovery Institute posts in its Web Site<sup>12</sup>:

Materialistic thinking dominated Western culture during the 20th century in large part because of the authority of science. The Center for the Renewal of Science and Culture seeks, therefore, to challenge materialism on specifically scientific grounds. Yet Center Fellows do more than critique theories that have materialistic implications. They have also pioneered alternative scientific theories and research methods that recognize the reality of design and the need for intelligent agency to explain it. This new research program — called "design theory" — is based upon recent developments in the information sciences and many new evidences of design. Design theory promises to revitalize many long-stagnant disciplines by recognizing mind, as well as matter, as a causal influence in the world. It also promises, by implication, to promote a more holistic view of reality and humanity, thus helping to reverse some of materialism's destructive cultural consequences.

Going yet further, as Francis Schaeffer often warned, "ideas have consequences." So, there is an even more pressing concern. For, "every man does what is right in his own eyes" — as, for example, we saw Mr Dingwall advocating above — is the classic recipe for social chaos and anarchy. Such chaos opens the gate for tyrants to gain power by promising to restore or maintain order and prosperity. However, tyrannical "cures" are almost always worse than the disease.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, we come to the Caribbean's stark choice: repentance, mutual reconciliation and reformation under God; or, ever-increasing social chaos and violence as men dismiss and forget God's rightful place in their lives and communities, leading to bloody revolution and/or tyranny. For, as hard experience has repeatedly shown, godliness is the only proven way for nations

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.discovery.org/crsc/index.php3>, cf. Johnson's *Darwin on Trial and Reason in the Balance* and J. P. Moreland's *Christianity and the Nature of Science*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> cf. Judges 21:25 and 1 Sam. 8:1-22.

to sustainably enjoy both liberty and order<sup>14</sup>. Therefore, we must now turn to how we may spark sound renewal and reformation in the Caribbean, towards truly sustainable development.

### 1. Paul's Mars Hill Strategy: Prophetic Intellectual Leadership

Clearly, intellectual leadership is a decisive factor (for good or ill) in the present crisis, and must therefore be a key to the sound and sustainable reformation of the Caribbean. This is not new; the need for prophetic intellectual leadership was also a central issue faced by Paul, most notably on his visit to Athens. Therefore, his example provides quite relevant insights that we may use to guide our own initiatives.

The Apostle had come to Athens five hundred years after its glory days — the days of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Pericles, to take a brief respite from his stressful Macedonian adventures. For, in Macedonia, he had been harassed and harried from one town to the next, and was finally driven out, taking refuge in Athens.

However, he found the all-pervasive idolatry too disturbing to keep silent. (Acts 17:16.) So as a lion, with terrible resolve, turns and vexes those who have unwisely persisted in harrying him, Paul — in the city of Socrates — went to the Agora (the marketplace), and started to dialogue with passersby; as that stone-dresser turned philosopher was wont to do. Soon, a group of pagan Philosophers paused, argued with him, conferred among themselves, and, parodying the fate of Socrates, took the Apostle to a meeting of the Areopagus (Mars Hill) Council.

There, the Athenian leaders got more than they bargained for. For, Paul made straight for the rotten intellectual foundation of Pagan thought and culture. Pointing to its beautiful temples and monuments, he picked the altar that exposed the critical instability: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. That is, on the most important possible point of knowledge, the Athenians — the fountainhead and proud guardians of the Western intellectual, artistic and democratic traditions — were forced to admit their ignorance, in a public monument!

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. <http://capo.org/premise/96/aug/p960810.html>, <http://www.visi.com/~homelands/vindiciae/vindiciae.html>, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1581dutch.html>, and <http://www.natreformassn.org/lexrex/index.html>.

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Paul then pointedly stated the decisive prophetic issue: "Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to *proclaim* to you." That is, the true key to the field of Knowledge is Revelation (rather than merely human speculation, argument or experiment<sup>15</sup>), starting from our God-given intuition that an orderly universe without and a rational mind and ever-probing conscience within jointly testify to a rational, orderly, moral Creator.<sup>16</sup>

Of course, and as Dingwall, Spong, Freud, Marx, Skinner, Ayer, Crick and many others illustrate today, we may suppress or becloud such intuitions; but plainly to our intellectual, moral, and social peril; with damaging environmental and sustainability implications. However, since God knows perfectly, he can communicate additional significant — though obviously not exhaustive — truth to guide us in the face of such intellectual dilemmas, moral conundrums, and sustainability challenges. Hence, the prophetic force of Paul's key word: "proclaim."

The substance of Paul's prophetic proclamation to the Athenians (and thus to Western Culture and the wider world) is therefore pregnant with beneficial implications for community order, national life, blessing and truly sustainable development:

- The Creator-Redeemer God does not live in temples we can make with our hands. Nor does he depend on our religious leaders and institutions, rituals, gifts or offerings. Instead, it is he who made us and gave us everything we have. We are therefore his stewards in — and of — his world, for "in Him we live and move and have our being."
- From one man, God created the nations, setting their times & seasons (*kairous*), and their places, "so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him." That is, the diverse fraternity of nations (*ethnoi*, people groups) was created to foster opportunities to demonstrate godly, harmonious social order — not least, by restraining the possibilities for the rise of a corrupt, globally dominant regime.<sup>17</sup>
- "In the past, God overlooked (our) ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day in which he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead":

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<sup>15</sup> cf. J. P. Moreland *Christianity and the Nature of Science* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> cf. Romans 1:18 – 32

<sup>17</sup> cf. Gen. 11:1 – 9.

- The time for ignorant pursuit of false loyalties and foolish agendas is over; God has intervened globally, decisively and publicly<sup>18</sup> by Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection: "he has made this same Jesus . . . both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36).
- God therefore commands that we repent, undergoing a comprehensive change of heart and mind driven by recognition of the truth and godly sorrow over sin, leading to a transformed way of life (1 Cor. 6:9-11). In particular, we are to receive as Lord and Saviour him who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6).<sup>19</sup>
- This command to repent is universal, but does not demand blind obedience: God offers public proof to us by raising Jesus from the dead. In evidence of this, we have over five hundred eyewitnesses, most of whom were still alive when the record was made (1 Cor. 15:1-8), and the continued manifestation of resurrection power — in manifold ways — in the church to this day (Eph. 1:17-23).
- Flowing from this, human culture is not autonomous or absolute: there is a set day for judgement of the world, a comprehensive audit carried out with perfect justice. Thus, communities and their citizens are servants of God, accountable before their Creator for truth, right, justice and the proper stewardship of resources in their care, starting with their land. This opens the door for prophetic commentary on public morality, policy and issues linked to development and sustainability.<sup>20</sup>
- Moreover, since we are created from one ancestor, there can be no justification for nationally-, or racially-, or class-, or otherwise-motivated oppression, aggression, exploitation or prejudice. Community extends to the fraternity of all peoples, and so God refuses to answer the foolish question: "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Paul's audience, however, mostly reacted with an ill-advised, illogical sneer: in effect, never mind the evidence and our acknowledged ignorance on the subject — God can't be like that!

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<sup>18</sup> cf. Acts 26:24 – 26.

<sup>19</sup> cf. Acts 4:12.

<sup>20</sup> cf. Rom. 1:18 – 32 & 13:1 – 10.

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However, some were willing to listen further, and a few openly turned to Christ. Scanty immediate results. But the truth had been proclaimed and backed up with adequate evidence. And, Paul, too, had made a decisive turn, seizing the intellectual and cultural initiative.

From Athens, the Apostle would go on to Corinth and Ephesus, building bases from which the Christian Faith would ultimately triumph in Greek culture. Intellectually, he would go on to expand his Mars Hill thesis, through penning the Epistle to the Romans, which articulated in greater detail the case that would at length prevail over classical paganism.

So, two thousand years later, we know who had the better case that fateful day. For, Paganism's hollow intellectual and moral core now stood exposed for those with eyes to observe, and ears to listen. The future therefore belonged to the Apostle, not to the Philosophers and Politicians. Thus, from small beginnings, the churches planted in Athens and other Greek cities grew strong and prevailed.

### **2. Seizing the Cultural Initiative: Towards Reformation and Development in the Caribbean**

In our time, like Athens in the First Century of the Christian Era, the Caribbean is at a *kairos*. For, as the 1990's dawned, Marxism was consigned to the ash-heap of history, discrediting socialist politics and economics, and leaving an intellectual vacuum in its wake — in the face of mounting evidence that the development policies and initiatives of the past fifty years are inadequate to overcome the region's many interacting environmental and sustainability challenges.

The resulting dilemmas have been summed up in the colourful words of Caribbean History Professor and Cricket Researcher Dr. Hilary Beckles (1996, 74-77):

There is no political movement that connects its manifesto to the idealism of the historic struggle for social change with justice. As a consequence, the region's 'labour parties' have become anti-labour, and workers everywhere are running for shelter and leadership within the walls of a revivalist evangelical christianity (*sic*) that now commands the communities' largest social gatherings.

The death of social idealism, and the triumph, for example, of 'born-again religious escapism,' signal the abandonment of the youth to apolitical social engagements, and the defeat of the nationalist, regionalist projects to which cricket has been hinged since the 1950s. Within this context of failure, cricket is asked to carry the cross of a crucified political agenda whose leaders have lost all popular emotional appeal.

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... And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for *the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills everything in every way.* (Eph. 1: 9-10, 22-23)

[Therefore, Christ] gave ... apostles ... prophets ... evangelists ... pastors and teachers to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ... *attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ.* ...

[As that happens, we will no longer be vulnerable to] every wind of teaching and ... the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ. (Eph. 4:11 - 15)

[Each of us must reckon that] it is by grace [we] have been saved, through faith . . . not by works, so that no-one can boast: For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Eph 2:8-10)<sup>21</sup>

In sum, everything was created by Christ, and for Christ. He is the Centre who holds all things together, sustaining them in an orderly whole: Cosmos. In loving response to our sin and its resulting chaos and devastating crises, he came: descending, dying for our sin, rising and ascending "in order to fill all things" (Eph. 4:10).

In saving us, he therefore calls and equips us to do "good works . . . prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:10). As we walk in this call to service, the church, which is the body of Christ, matures and fills all things with his glory and grace. Thus, in the fulness of time, God will "bring all things together under one head, even Christ" (Eph.1:10).

In this light, the way forward to truly sustainable development is first to repent: the chaos and frustration we face in the Caribbean — despite our often ostentatious and pervasive, but so often hypocritical "Christian" religiosity — flow from our sinful neglect or even rejection of Christ, the source of wholesome, sustainable order and blessing (Gal. 3:14) for "all things." Christ therefore commands us to repent, be renewed in our own lives and institutions under the loving discipline of the Word and the Spirit, then to go out into our communities under His mandate: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising . . . and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt 28:19-20).

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<sup>21</sup> Emphases mine.



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So, the first steps Christians need to take along the road to reformation and truly sustainable development in the Caribbean are those of repentance and inner transformation through the renewal of our minds, leading to revival as God graciously pours out His Spirit in "times of refreshing"(Acts 3:19)<sup>22</sup>.

As we take these first steps, we will then be equipped to lead the wider community along the road to reformation and truly sustainable development, through the example of biblically sound discipleship, godly service and high-integrity, Christ-focused leadership in families, communities and institutions. Thus, we will fulfil our role as the body of Christ, "the fulness of him who fills everything in every way" (Eph.1:23) by walking in those good works that "God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:10).

The universal scope of our mandate therefore clearly requires that we must engage the social, cultural, economic, sustainability and environmental issues that now confront our region as it gropes blindly in a *kairos*, hoping to find a path towards truly sustainable development.

##### **5. Implementing the Mars Hill Strategy: The Road to Reformation and Sustainable Development in the Caribbean**

The final step in this paper's argument is to synthesize the Mars Hill Initiative and the Christocentric Fulness Vision, to point towards an integrated strategy for transformational leadership through effective reformation and sustainable development initiatives in the Caribbean.

The *kairos* concept is central to that synthesis. For, as Paul put it in Acts 17, God created the nations, and so controls our places and times (*kairos*), that we are forced to grope (however blindly and ignorantly) for him in the midst of crises. Then, as Paul's presence in Athens exemplifies, God sends his spokesmen into such places at such times with the call to repentance, renewal and reformation, opening the door "so that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles (*ethne*) through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Holy Spirit" (Gal 3:14). Therefore, "(Jesus) . . . gave" leaders to the church, "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up . . . attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-13).

So, God is now sending the gospel of blessing to the nations of the Caribbean in our time of *kairos*, thus calling out, creating, building and

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<sup>22</sup> cf. Acts 3:17 – 26 and Gal 3:14, 26 – 4:7.

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equipping his body, the church, “the fulness of him who fills everything in every way” as the means of blessing for our region.

Thus, he is sending us out as his disciples, into — and beyond — the local community as “God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Consequently, as we live, love, evangelize, disciple, serve, and provide high integrity leadership, Christ’s reforming and transforming redemptive fulness will naturally, often invisibly and imperceptibly, spread through “all things” across the Caribbean Basin and beyond. This promotes truly sustainable development.

Sadly, however, this description highlights some of the most challenging areas of the church’s ministry in the Caribbean: discipleship, Christian service and effective leadership in the wider community. For instance, thinking back to my student days, I remember all too vividly the shock of seeing how unprepared the bright young people from our churches across the whole region were for living, studying, serving and providing high integrity leadership on campus, much less in the wider community and workplace beyond it.

These challenges, in turn, require that we break out of our tendency to look at issues and challenges in isolation, failing to pull together a coherent, comprehensive framework for understanding, living and serving God in the world. This is a major reason why we so often end up unbalanced, inconsistent and ineffective in our thinking, living, work and leadership.

Instead, let us renew, reform and integrate the Caribbean church’s ministry towards its proper goal: discipling — and thus blessing — the nations across and beyond our region, therefore growing in Christ’s grace, richness and fulness.

- First, let us renew our own thinking, theologising and teachings in light of Christ’s fulness: Christ is the source, sustainer and destiny of “all things,” including our individuality, family life, community, nationhood, environment, and development efforts. Our choice as a region is therefore to be filled with Christ’s redemptive and renewing grace and glory; or else to be broken by our foolish, unsustainable rebellion against the very foundation of existence — our Creator, Loving Redeemer and Sustainer. Wisdom therefore clearly instructs us to rebuild our lives, families, institutions, communities and nations on God’s Rock that stands the storms of life.

- We must then, as those charged to disciple the nations, seize the initiative in the wider community. Surely, Caribbean history is proof enough of what happens when we don't. Paul shows us the way: under Christ, he fused the best in Jewish, Greek and Roman heritage, laying the foundation for the modern world. And he did it in the midst of an era of wrenching change as the multi-cultural, oppressive Roman Empire emerged from the ashes of a Roman Republic ruined by the envy and selfish ambition of its own leading citizens.<sup>23</sup>
- In particular, we must take the high ground in the battle of ideas and ideals. For, in spiritual warfare, we are to "demolish [deceptive] arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and . . . take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). Let us therefore take the Christian case boldly to the campus, the school, the media, the Internet, business, institutions, the man in the street and people in their homes.
- Further, these initial steps demand that we must work out a detailed, credible, Christ-centred vision for the sustainable development of the Caribbean in the face of its many spiritual, socio-cultural, economic and bio-physical environmental constraints and challenges. This will require a major process of research, demonstration initiatives and consultation across the Church and wider region, perhaps initiated through a CONECAR, so that we can think through, and practically work out godly strategies for Caribbean reformation and truly sustainable development.
- We must also convincingly demonstrate that our vision works. Pilot projects in discipleship, family renewal, education, media, arts, community, issues groups, environment restoration, sustainable development initiatives, etc. should be very helpful for this. In particular, we need to develop training ministries that prepare disciples for Christ-centred life, work, service and leadership in the community. To that end, we should help our people consolidate their commitment to Christ and his mission, undergo preparation to live, serve and lead in families, small groups, institutions and the wider community, and go out to serve in love, truth, power and integrity as they discover and live out their specific calling, gifting and anointing from God. Then, through the influence of powerful exemplars, reformation will spread through our region, and beyond it as we fulfil our Great Commission.

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<sup>23</sup> cf. James 3:13 - 4:2, 5:1-6.

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- In undertaking such initiatives in the community, especially since there is now a widespread perception that Bible-believing Christians are opponents of liberty, we must stress and exemplify the sterling historic and contemporary contributions of the Judaeo-Christian tradition to the emergence and strengthening of liberty and justice under the rule of law in the community of free peoples in the world.
- Finally, we must take advantage of the emerging, global information age. For example, Internet-oriented curriculum development and presentation software packages can help us to develop and deliver "any-distance" Theological Education, support for discipleship training, and "second chance" initiatives for those who lack the spiritual, academic and technical education base needed for the days ahead.

As we do these things, the opportunity for renewal and reformation — thus truly sustainable development — will come to our nations, in God's timing.

### CONCLUSIONS

Twenty three hundred years ago, Aristotle observed that *strategy is the science of opportunity* (*The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1.6.4.). Historians also say that those who refuse to learn from history are condemned to repeat it.

Therefore, in an age of resurgent Islamism, let us consider the sobering historical parallel of 628 AD, when the Christian Byzantine Empire defeated the Zoroastrian Persians, but was exhausted. Within a decade, Islamic armies swept out of Arabia in a "holy war" invasion that created the Arab Islamic heartland, especially in Egypt, Palestine, Syria and North Africa. So, for nearly a thousand years, the church was largely confined to a backward, hemmed-in Europe that reacted to the successful Islamic Jihad by repeatedly launching cruel military Crusades "blessed" by the church's leaders. (No wonder so many hearts are now shut to the gospel in "the 10/40 Window.")

Similarly, the current wave of post-Cold War exhaustion, spiritual emptiness and decadence, confronted by militantly resurgent Islamism are signs of a critical turning point in history. So, if we are to "[make] the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:16) in our time, we must now resolutely work towards a breakthrough to godly renewal and reformation in — and beyond — the Caribbean.

I therefore challenge the Caribbean church, as a vital regional institution, to found, adequately staff and abundantly endow a regional *Institute for Discipleship, Reformation and Development*.

Preferably, such an initiative should be affiliated with CETA and JTS/CGST along with churches and other partners in the wider community, and should be tasked to undertake original research, consultancies, pioneering/demonstration projects and programmes, education, training, public outreach and apologetics initiatives as discussed above.<sup>24</sup>

Its Mission Statement should therefore task it to undertake bold, ambitious, far-reaching, pioneering initiatives in collaboration with the church and other community partners across the region, towards integrated, holistic Christ-centred renewal, reformation, sustainable development and transformation in and of the Caribbean, and flowing out from our region to the wider world of our time.

As Mordecai once challenged a Queen: "who knows but that you have come to . . . position for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14)? Our conclusion is therefore quite simple: *why not now, why not here, why not us?*

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<sup>24</sup> cf. Section 5.