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THE IMPACT OF EUROPEAN DENOMINATIONAL PLURALITY ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE CARIBBEAN

By

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INTRODUCTION

It may sound incongruent but it is true; although Christian faith lays great stress on the value of unity, there seldom is perfect harmony among its adherents. As Kevin Giles (1995, 198-99) has pointed out, disputes, divisions and schisms have been part and parcel of the Christian story. This applies to every epoch of the church's history including the often idealized Apostolic period and the era of the Constantinian arrangement when church and state shared a symbiotic relationship that laid stress on the interdependence of the spiritual and temporal domains. Indeed, it will be recalled that it was during the latter period that the rift between the Western and Eastern branches of the Church occurred due to irreconcilable differences on the Filioque issue.

But although discord among Christians is as old as Christianity itself, the implications of this reality for the institutional integrity of the church would not be fully grasped until the sixteenth century. Until then the church was very successful in neutralizing dissent and silencing objections. In fact, an event as significant as the East - West split was expected to be overcome

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(Gonzalez 1984, 1:33-361). But as it turned out, the church's success in withstanding attacks generated an over-confidence which gave rise to an intransigence which in the end led to its disintegration. For as is well known, it was precisely the church's unyielding stance vis-à-vis the call for internal reform that provided the impetus for the sixteenth century Reformation which laid the basis for the subsequent atomization of Western Christendom. Although it would be anachronistic to speak of a full-fledged denominationalism in the Reformation era (Giles 1995, 200), it can be argued that the ecclesiastical break-up which occurred then was the immediate precursor of the modern day denominational phenomenon.

Given Europe's hegemonic position on the world scene and her insatiable appetite for colonial expansion from the sixteenth century onward, it was inevitable that the religious shake up that took place there would make its way sooner or later to the rest of the world. The vast networks of colonies that the European powers developed throughout the world provided ready-made channels for the exportation, propagation, and implantation of the various versions of Christianity that emerged there. With the passage of time, these expressions of the Christian faith became entrenched in their new environments. This was to be expected. As Latourette (1970, 428) observes, in these new frontiers, "Europe's political and ecclesiastical subjects accepted passively the forms in which the faith had been given them." Although, in recent times, with the end of colonialism and the subsequent elevation of former colonies to the status of independent states, there has been a push for a more indigenous Christianity in many instances, the foreign legacy still dominates. The persistence and the strength of that exogenous influence seem to give credence to the view that in many ways the Christianity that exists outside of Europe continues to be an extension of what can be called the incipient denominationalism that developed there between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.

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But what configuration did that incipient denominationalism take and how has it impacted the development of Christianity in the places to which it was exported? The balance of this article will seek to address these questions. With respect to the latter query, the focus will be on the Caribbean region, the battlefield for the European powers during the period extending from sixteenth to the nineteenth century. However, when deemed appropriate references will be made to other parts of the world, where the Caribbean experience finds resonance.

I. EUROPE'S INCIPIENT DENOMINATIONLISM

By the mid-1500s it became apparent that European Christianity could no longer continue to exist as a monolithic and uniform body. Rome's unyielding stance to the call for theological and moral reforms hardened the resolve of its critics and led to an outright revolt. That development resulted in a general schism which brought into being two separate and competing versions of the western Christian faith: Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. With the Protestant Revolution, for the first time Roman Catholicism lost its monopolistic hold on Western Christian Europe (Latourette 1970, 439). To be sure, it will continue to be the faith of the majority, but from that moment on, it ceased to be the universally accepted faith.

This initial bifurcation brought about by the Reformation storm would not be the end of the story. From the very outset, the Reformation movement served notice that homogeneity would not be one of its hallmarks. Having been motivated by differing concerns and divergent agendas, it was bound to opt for heterogeneity instead.

The Reformation started out by forming a cluster of churches around the teachings of Martin Luther and Jean Calvin and their acolytes. Owing to the recognition by these men and the newly established churches of the right of secular authorities to interfere in matters religious, the movement that they led became known as the

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Magisterial Reformation or Mainstream Reformation (McGrath 1998, 158-59). Anglicanism -- the *via idia* between Calvinism and Roman Catholicism -- which later on adopted a similar stance, has come to share that appellation as well. But as is well known, from the very outset, the theological and social thoughts of Luther and Calvin and their colleagues led to the establishment of two separate ecclesiastical bodies: Lutheranism and Calvinism.

These bodies have different theological emphases. Advocating a theology of the cross which views the crucifixion as the privileged locus of God's gratuitous self-disclosure, Lutheranism which gained ground in the countries of Northern Europe, eschewed a theology of glory with its search for the divine being in transient reality and made the *sola fidei* its theological bedrock. As for Calvinism, at its heart is the notion of divine sovereignty which not only makes much of God's freedom, but places the secular order under God's rule and therefore subject to God's transforming action through the church. The groups which adopted Calvinism as the basis for their religious beliefs and practices have come to constitute the Reformed branch of the Church. In the English-speaking world of the seventeenth century, Puritanism emerged as a dominant form of Reformed Christianity.

Early on, Calvinism gave birth to Arminianism which in time became its staunchest theological rival (Gonzalez 1984, 2:179 ff). With respect to the relationship of church and state, the Magisterial Reformation did not differ appreciably from Roman Catholicism from which it separated. Mainstream Protestant Christianity continued to view the *Corpus Christianum* as an acceptable *modus vivendi* between the religious and the secular domain. As David Bosch (1991, 275) explains:

> In each European country the church was "established" as state church--Anglican in England, Presbyterian in Scotland, Reformed in the Netherlands, Lutheran in Scandinavia and German territories, Roman Catholic in most Southern Europe. It was difficult to differentiate

between political, cultural and religious elements since they merged into one.

But this area of agreement between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism was to become a leading cause for the further splintering of Christianity into yet another sector: Anabaptism. Also referred to as the Radical Reformation, Anabaptism made ecclesiology its primary focus. Very early, it distanced itself from the church state association position insisting that Christianity is not a national entity to which a community automatically belongs by virtue of historical accidents, but a faith into which people enter "one by one through personal dedication and experience of salvation" (Latourette 1970, 437). A non-established movement within state-supported Protestantism, Anabaptism existed in the form of persecuted fringe groups in many countries of Western Europe, stressing moral living, church state separation, and thoroughgoing commitment to the Christian ideal as exemplified in the lives of the early Christians (Bainton 1952, 95-109). If the mainline reformers sought to reform the church, the Anabaptist's concern was its restoration.

Though severely mistreated by state and official religion alike, Anabaptism lived on. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Anabaptist spirit could be clearly seen in (and indeed provided the inspiration for) the emergence from within mainstream Protestantism of several religious groups which adopted a non-conformist stance vis-à-vis church and state. From the bosom of Lutheranism sprang Pietism and Moravianism with their emphasis on religious fervour, and evangelistic and missionary zeal. Anglicanism was the seedbed upon which Puritanism and Wesleyan-Methodism, and several other independent groups such as Congregationalists and Baptists grew (Gonzales 1984, 2:149-51). What began to emerge was a religious *pot-pourri*, or a denominational plurality that would take greater dimension when transported to the Thirteen British Colonies of North America and subsequently to the rest of the world.

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II. THE IMPACT OF EUROPEAN DENOMINATIONAL PLURALITY ON CHRISTIANITY

Kevin Giles (1995, 200) has contended that, strictly speaking, denominationalism found its real beginning in colonial America where differing religious bodies bereft of the privilege of the support of officialdom were forced to tolerate each other. He is basically right. But I would like to suggest that the religious plurality that developed in Europe in the aftermath of the Reformation provided the basis without which modern-day denominationalism would probably not have arisen. And since, as was mentioned before, that religious melting pot was not confined to the place of its birth, but was exported to the rest of the world, what impact did it have on the Christianity that developed there? To this exploration we now turn, using the Caribbean as our main point of reference, but glancing at other parts of the world when it is deemed necessary. We will argue that the impact of Europe's denominational plurality on non-European Christianity is mixed. We will see that in significant ways it has been an asset to extra-European Christianity, while in other ways it has been an impediment to its credibility and development. We will do so by focusing on five areas relating to the expansion, renewal, religious freedom, prophetic witness and the maturity of Christianity.

Expansion of Protestantism

A significant impact of European Christian plurality on the development of Christianity concerns the expansion of the faith amongst persons of non-European stock. It is doubtful that Protestant Christianity would have known the kind of global expansion that it has enjoyed if the Reformation had given rise to a monolithic Protestantism. Due to a variety of reasons, among them an erroneous view of missions which confined the execution of the Great Commission to the Apostolic era, and a misguided soteriology which questioned the theological significance of non-Europeans, the

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groups which emerged out of the Magisterial Reformation, unlike Roman Catholicism, did not make missionary outreach one of their major concerns (Verkuyl 1978, 18-19; Bisnauth 1989, 104-105; Bosch 1991, 243-248). In the Caribbean, for instance, where Anglicanism and the Reformed Church -- both in its Dutch and Scottish versions -- came early and formed part of the colonial quest of their countries of origin, the Black slaves were initially deemed unworthy of christianisation. For a long time, both denominations directed their religious activities almost exclusively to the white plantocracy and made no effort to evangelize the slave population until the 1800s. Even then, Black evangelism was conducted under the objection of many in the established churches and by persons who had been touched by the evangelical revival that swept England in the eighteenth Century.

But while the established churches were wondering whether or not non-Europeans fell within the purview of God's saving purpose, the non-conformists were hard at work winning Black slaves and the autochthonous peoples to Christian faith. Early in the eighteenth century, the Moravians led the way followed by the Methodists, the Baptists, the Quakers and the Congregationalists. Convinced that God's grace was freely offered to all, these groups travelled the length and breadth of the region proclaiming the Gospel to the disenfranchised and establishing congregations among them much to the displeasure of plantocracy and clergy alike. When the official church finally joined the evangelization effort, it did so with the assurance that christianisation would not be subversive of the slavery system, hence not harmful to the plantocracy. By that time, however, the evangelization of the Blacks, was well advanced, thanks to the non-conformists.

The evangelistic impact of the non-conformist groups was by no means limited to the Caribbean. During the first half of the 19th Century, Black Baptist Jamaicans made a bold and valiant effort to spread their newly found faith to portions of West Africa (Newman 1997, 20; Sanneh 1983, 107-108). In England, Anglican-turned-

Baptist William Carey provided the spark for the modern missionary movement which took Protestantism around the globe (Kane 1977, 84-89).

The Renewal of Christianity

The significance of the work of the non-conformist denominations does not lie solely in the evangelization of ethnic groups considered undeserving of such favour by the religious establishment. It is to be found also in the introduction of *a different kind* of Christianity into the environment.

Both in its Roman Catholic and Protestant versions, the official Christianity that existed in the Caribbean during the colonial era was superficial and barren. Given the state of religious life in the region at the time, it could not have been otherwise. Roman Catholicism engaged in the practice of mass conversion (Romain 1985, 87, 100; Bisnauth 1989, 104-105). As for mainstream Protestantism, as a national religion, it not only assumed the conversion of all citizens, but the religious instructions and pastoral care that it offered were sorely inadequate (Lawson 1998, 59-64; Romain 1985, 87). This situation produced a Christian nominalism which was content to exist side by side with blatant syncretism and questionable ethical behaviour -- even on the part of the clergy (Lampe 2001, 47).

By contrast, the Christianity propagated by the non-conformists emphasized the presentation and an understanding of the basic elements of the Gospel, the need for a personal response, instruction in the faith and commitment to ethical living. They presented their faith with a fervour and passion which resonated with their audiences. Speaking of the Moravian missionary effort, Caribbean church historian Dale Bisnauth asserts that "it was responsible for entrenching at the very beginning a pious sentimentalism in the Christianity inculcated in the blacks of the Caribbean" (Bisnauth 1989, 109; Romain 1985, 138-39).

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Bisnauth's comment could easily be made of all the non-conformist groups. This is evident from the manner in which the plantocracy and the official clergy characterized the activities of these groups. In their views, the non-conformists were "illiterate or ignorant enthusiasts" (Romain 1985, 128) whose preaching produced "a fanatic Christianity" which, when "working on the uninstructed and ardent temperament of the Negro, produced the most pernicious consequences" (Romain 1985, 136), and thus was dangerous to the community.

The sentimental and pious religion that the non-conformists introduced continues to be a significant part of Caribbean Christianity. There is no doubt that the introduction of that more exuberant form of the Christian religion into the environment was salutary. It exerted a renewing impact on a sterile and decadent Christendom that perhaps would not have happened otherwise. This is another positive effective of denominational plurality that needs to be recognized.

Historically, the emergence of new groups from within the church -- groups which later developed into separate bodies -- seems to be one of the means used by God to bring renewal to the church when it becomes lethargic and moribund.

For instance, despite Rome's negative response to the Reformer's call, it did take advantage of their agitation to introduce changes into the church (McGrath 1998, 163). In fact, some scholars do not hesitate to label these efforts, the "Catholic Reformation".[1] In an article which provides a broad historical overview of worship in Britain, Peter Lewis illustrates this point. According to Lewis, soon after the Reformation arrived in the United Kingdom, resulting in the establishment of the Anglican Church, and the Church of Scotland, what later became known as Puritanism emerged from within Anglicanism seeking to reform it (Lewis 1993, 149).

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[1] For example, Latourette and McGrath himself.

Stressing simplicity of worship, biblical preaching and godly living, Puritan religion led to the establishment of congregational churches which became a "powerful and attractive force in the land" (Lewis 1993, 149). However, as the 17th Century drew to a close, the Puritan fervour began to wane under the impact of religious intellectualism and formalism. "The breaking fetters of petrified Puritanism" (Bosch 1991, 277) would necessitate the emergence in the 18th Century of new forces of renewal.

These came in the form of Methodism which emerged from the bosom of Anglicanism and the Great Awakening which, in America, arose from Puritan circles. These movements had profound effects on the historic denominations and the general culture. But during the 19th Century, partly due to the pressure of the enlightenment's critique of biblical faith and partly due to Non-Conformity's own successes, there occurred a relapse into sterile formalism and a departure from religious simplicity and theological soundness (Lewis 1993, 151). Early in the twentieth century two movements emerged which helped combat that religious lethargy: The Plymouth Brethren movement and the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement. With roots in Anglicanism and Wesleyan Methodism respectively, these movements which advocate a return to the simplicity and fervour of biblical religion have profoundly impacted contemporary Christianity (Lewis 1993, 152). This is particularly true of the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement. Now the most dominant form of Protestantism, it has impacted all denominations and enjoyed a worldwide reach (Lewis 1993, 150). Even after the deficiencies and excesses of these movements, which eventually developed into denominations, have been acknowledged and critiqued, few would curse the day of their birth.

Fragmented but Free

The break up that occurred in Western Europe in the aftermath of the Reformation was not only religious; it was also territorial. Applying the rule *cuius regio eius religio*, the dominant Christian groups that emerged from the great schism divided the continent among themselves and became the established faiths in their respective geographical domain. Adherence to that principle meant intolerance of religious dissent as the experience of the Anabaptists and the French Huguenots painfully shows (Bainton 1952, 95-108, 16).

But the fierce religious rivalry that existed amongst Europe's contending powers was not kept there as a family squabble but was exported to their overseas colonies. Even after the signing of the Peace of Ausbourg in 1555, it was understood that the fight would continue West of the Azores. The Caribbean, which lies West of that line of demarcation, became a battlefield. It was carved out and divided up into separate politico-religious spheres. Generally, wherever France and Spain went, Roman Catholicism prevailed. By contrast, in territories occupied by Great Britain, the Netherlands and Denmark, Protestantism in its various forms had the upper hand. As was the case in Europe, so it was in the Caribbean; where a faith was not officially recognized, it was opposed, resisted, persecuted and sometimes forced out. Hence, during the 17th Century, non-Catholics were virtually proscribed in French and Spanish occupied territories. Catholics who attempted to spread their faith in territories controlled by Britain and Holland were returned the same compliments (Lampe 2001, 133; Bisnauth 1989, 65-66).

In South America, where Roman Catholicism prevailed due to the influence of Spain and Portugal, anti-Protestant sentiments continued throughout the 18th Century, and in some countries, well into the first half of the 20th Century (Mecham 1966, 135, 158, 207, 263). African missiologist, Lamin Sanneh, in his study of West African Christianity, also cites examples of Catholic-Protestant

rivalry. However, he warns against sweeping generalizations from these instances (Sanneh 1983, 110).

Neither was religious antagonism limited to the Catholic-Protestant duel. Protestants, too, got in the fray, fighting among themselves, often over theological *minutiae*, which in retrospect do not seem to be worth the fuss. Commenting on the era of Protestant Orthodoxy which followed on the heel of the Reformation David Bosch states:

> When the Reformation shattered the ancient unity of the Western Church, each of the fragments into which it was now divided was obliged to define itself over against all other fragments... Each confession understood the church in terms of what it believed its own adherents possessed and the others lacked....
>
> The Protestant's pre-occupation with right doctrine soon meant that every group which ceded from the main body had to validate its action by maintaining that it alone, and none of the others, adhered strictly to the 'right preaching of the gospel'. The Reformational descriptions of the Church thus ended up accentuating differences rather than similarities.
>
> Christians were taught to look divisively at other Christians. Eventually Lutherans divided from Lutherans, Reformed separated from Reformed... (Bosch 1991, 248-49)

The fragmentation which started in Europe was to make its way very early to the rest of the world principally via the Thirteen Colonies where it underwent a serious metamorphosis through the process of religious de-establishment.

From the 17th Century onward, the Thirteen British Colonies in North America provided a fertile ground for the growth of the various forms of Protestantism transported there through the wave of migration that originated from all over Western Europe. In that new environment where the opposite of the *cuius regio eius religio*

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principle was to become law[2], there developed early legal equality not only between the various forms of established faiths, but also amongst all religious expressions, including the heretofore disadvantaged non-conforming groups. A real pot-pourri emerged which provided the impetus for the further splintering of Protestantism. Later on, this splintered Protestantism, now thoroughly imbibed with the freedom of conscience ideology and separatism (Marty 1972, 212-218), made its way to the rest of the world through the missionary movement of the 19th Century. In many parts of the world that fragmented Protestantism experienced further splintering. Hence in the Caribbean, for instance, where two centuries ago, only two or three versions of Christianity were considered licit, there are now hundreds of legally recognized Christian bodies many of them homegrown. This is a victory for freedom of conscience, which has been recognized as an inalienable right and a prized possession in most parts of the world. As will be seen below, fragmentation does have its downside. But insofar as it led to religious freedom, it must be deemed good in spite of its attendant pitfalls.

Ambiguous Prophetic Witness

When pluriform Christianity left the shores of Europe slavery was in its heyday. Engaged in this commerce in human beings, were European powers who went about conquering and colonizing territories beyond their borders and utilizing slave labour for their cultivation.

The response of the Christian conscience to what has later been seen as one of the most heinous evils ever perpetrated by humanity against humanity, was ambiguous. At one end of the spectrum was

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[2] I am referring here to the Constitutional Amendment barring the establishment of religion of any sort by Congress, but entrenching the free exercise of any religion.

established Christianity which was clear in its pro-slavery stance. Indeed, if the established church opposed slave evangelism, it was precisely on the ground that such activity would be prejudicial to the slavery system, since it was thought that a Christian could not be a slave. At the other end of the spectrum were elements of Non-conformity such as the Quakers who, from the outset, adopted a firm anti-slavery stance.

The third response, which continues to baffle us to this day, came from some non-conformist missionaries who, though staunch advocates of slave evangelism, astonishingly took an accomodationist stance vis-à-vis the slavery system. They argued *ad nauseam* that Christianity was not anti-slavery. They admitted that Christianity taught liberty. But the freedom it promised, they claimed, applied to the realm of the spiritual not the social. Indeed, the argument continued, christianisation would turn the slave into a better slave -- one who would not agitate for a change of status. In Jamaica, the Baptist missionaries have been rightly credited for their role in the emancipation struggle. However, at times, even they wavered. When for instance, William Knibb, a prominent Baptist missionary who was suspected of participating in a slave revolt, was interrogated about whether he had ever preached on the text "the truth shall make you free", his answer was a categorical "no". He explained that this did not mean that he never spoke on the subject of freedom. But he clarified that whenever he did, he took care to explain that "it referred to the soul, not the body" (Bisnauth 1989, 134).

Two further pieces rendered the position of these non-conformists totally puzzling. First, it went against the anti-slavery movement that was gaining strength in Europe, where powerful voices opposed slavery on humanitarian grounds[3]. Indeed, it

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[3] See Gordon Lewis' excellent summary of the literature describing the anti-slavery activism by free thinkers in England and France in *Main Currents in Caribbean Thought* (Kingston: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983) 205-216.

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contradicted the position of some of their parent bodies on the Continent. There, the agitation for abolition and emancipation was being led primarily by persons belonging to the non-established sects. Second, the instructions for the pro-slavery stance on the colonies came from the parent bodies themselves (Lawson 1998. 70-82)! This ambiguity created a credibility crisis for the non-conformist church, which became suspicious in the eyes of the establishment and the slave population alike.

What was going on? What are we to make of this? Did these non-conformist/missionaries really believe in the preaching of a truncated gospel? If so, do we have here the seed of Christianity that focuses on the otherworldly and advocates socio-political disengagement? Was it a strategy *à la Paul* necessitated by the prevalence of an oppressive regime, which, if frontally confronted, would even take away the opportunity of sowing seeds that would undermine the system and eventually lead to its overthrow? Or is it that the missionaries' understanding of their calling in that particular situation was to exercise a ministry of support vis-à-vis the oppressed with a view to preserving them for eventual liberation which would be wrought by those who are specially called for that task?[4]

A thorough analysis of these conjectures and many others that could be mentioned would be instructive, but this would take us far afield. The point that is germane to our purpose here is that in the face of a sinful situation, the prophetic voice was dissonant and the prophetic stance weak.

Infantile Christianity

At a recent send off service for a Caribbean missionary, I heard a speaker use the imagery of the boy and the flying kite to explain the church-missionary relationship. The missionary is the kite and the

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[4] I am indebted to my friend Gordon Mullings for this suggestion.

church the boy flying the kite. It does not matter how high the kite flies, the Preacher explained, it needs to remain connected to the boy holding the string.

The preacher's purpose in using that vivid imagery was to impress upon the congregation the fact that although the missionary will go to a far away country, she will remain dependent upon the church.

That illustration is an apt description of the relationship that obtained for a long time between European Christianity and the Christianity that developed outside of Europe. With the exception of the Thirteen British Colonies in North America, where the kite managed to fly on its own fairly early, the Christianity that Europe transplanted to other parts of the world from the 17th Century onward remained closely attached to its European counterpart. The fact that European Christianity was plural further fostered the dependent status of the nascent faith and delayed its growth into adulthood.

In Bosch's comment on Protestant orthodoxy's theological dispute referred to earlier, he not only underscores the trend toward fragmentation, but also touches on the attendant Protestant tendency to theological exclusivism. Each disputant, he noted, claimed that his position was the only true representation of genuine Christian faith. This exclusivist virus did not take long to migrate to other latitudes. Already, in the eighteenth century it showed up in the Caribbean where Anglicanism, which took pride in its conciliatory and irenic character, was nonetheless being presented as the only acceptable religion to the discredit and prohibition of other Protestant groups, including Methodism to which it gave birth. Although the sectarian spirit was less boisterous in the other Protestant denominations, it was nonetheless present. Dale Bisnauth (1989, 43) laments: "Although the Evangelical Protestants shared many beliefs with their reformed countrymen, they shared as well

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something of the bitterness which years of theological controversy had bred between Evangelical and Reformed Churches in Europe".

But how has denominational plurality assisted in prolonging the infancy of non-European Christianity? Theologians and missiologists from both the First and the Two Thirds-World have pointed to several things. J. Verkuyl (1978, 174) has drawn attention to the fact that where denominational plurality encourages the myopic focus on one group, it discourages interconfessional interaction and fellowship and thereby undermines corporate ecclesial strength and witness. For his part, Gerry Seale (1997, 63) of Barbados laments the reluctance of the Caribbean Church to assume its financial responsibility due to a long history of reliance on support from abroad which has resulted in a dependency mentality. In addition, attention has been drawn to the theological poverty of the Two Thirds World Church produced in part by an over-dependence on confession specific theologies. Besides discouraging homegrown contextual reflection, the situation fosters a theological parochialism that robs the corporate ecclesial community of the kind of theological enrichment which often results from inter-confessional interaction and dialogue.

Related to all of this is the issue of the lack of rootedness of Christian faith in the cultures into which it has been transplanted. Again and again, reference has been made to the fact that the Christianity which was sent abroad was not only wrapped up in the cultures of the various countries of origin, but also in those of the cultures of the sending "mother" denominations. The result was that culturally, the churches which came to be established in these places took on the shape and the structure of their European counterparts (Romain 1985, 85). Their lack of rootedness in the receiving culture has produced what Ashley Smith (1984) of Jamaica calls "Potted Plant Christianity" or what Jules Casseus (1989) of Haiti refers to as "an Angelic Church". Speaking from the African Context, Mercy Amba Oduyoye is categorical in the view that unless Christian faith in Africa interacts meaningfully with African culture, African

Christianity is bound to remain "a fossilized form of nineteenth-Century European Christianity" (Oduyoye 1981, 110).

CONCLUSION

A pluriform and fragmented Christianity is a far cry from the ideal of a united congregation at worship before the Throne, on the basis of a shared experience of salvific cleansing wrought by the Lamb of God (Rev 7:9-17). And insofar as the diversity which now prevails overwhelms and weakens the redemptive tie that binds all those who genuinely name the Name of the Crucified and Risen Lord, it is a negation of His wish for His church and a hindrance to effective Christian witness (John 17). But to fall short of the ideal does not mean to be necessarily bad. Good often comes out of an imperfect thing. The denominational plurality that originated from Europe has over the years produced a mixed effect on the church outside of the European world. In some ways its impact was positive in other ways it was negative. But, from a balanced standpoint, it is doubtful whether the non-occurrence of the post Reformation ecclesiastical break-up would have produced better results than its occurrence. Having said this, however, I must stress that what is incumbent upon us is to find ways to minimize the negative effects of the reality of denominational plurality, so that the church may increasingly approximate the ideal that is set before her, and thus become more true to her nature, more effective in her witness and more pleasing to her Lord.

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