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**MEN, THE
FAMILY, AND
THE CHURCH:
A JAMAICA
TESTAMENT**

By

Jean Lee
D. Min

**Dr. Lee is full Lecturer
at the Jamaica Theology
Seminary and former
missionary to the
Dominican Republic**

In his dissertation entitled *Understanding Male Absence from the Jamaican Church*, Dr. Sam Vassel explores and addresses the problem of the low ratio of men as compared to women in the Church. He concludes that the reasons for this are to be located in the perception commonly held by men that “the Church in Jamaica is ... ‘womanish’ and ‘childish’”, and in the repulsion felt by some of them to the “foreign and erotic iconography of the Church.”²⁰ Vassel’s conclusions are based on “empirical observation among men in Jamaica”²¹ (which includes a case study of the local church where he was pastor at the time of the

²⁰See Samuel Carl W. Vassel, *Understanding and Addressing Male Absence From the Jamaican Church* (Doctoral Dissertation, Colombia Theological Seminary/United Theological College, Doctor of Ministry, 1997). Subsequently published in booklet form by Sam Vassel Ministries. Undated) Abstract, ii. This and any subsequent reference are from the booklet, not the original dissertation.

²¹ Ibid. p. 2.

investigation) and enhanced by statistical data about men's involvement as compared with women's, across various denominations in Jamaica.

Vassel proposes a revamping of the culturally bound Christology informing the kind of evangelism practised by colonial and neo-colonial bearers of the Gospel message, and which has proven inadequate to connect with and, therefore, transform the vast majority of our Caribbean and, in particular, our Jamaican males.

Vassel's study approximates a few of the concerns addressed in this paper.²² However, there are some important differences. First, whereas Vassel's research focuses on the problem as a starting point, the current research has been carried out on the basis of the existence of positive male models in the Church. This is not to ignore or discount the overall positive approach of Vassel in dealing with his subject. Neither is it meant to pass evaluative judgment on that author's approach. The intention, rather, is simply to indicate a difference in approach. In the second place, because of the interest of this project in identifying and interviewing male models in the Church, the approach uses a selected population and may seem less scientific and more subjective than Vassel's. The same is applicable to the selecting and interviewing of women with similar demographics to that of the men. Third, though the burden informing both research papers is similar to a significant degree, the gender difference in the expression of that burden is apparent. Vassel is unapologetic (and, acceptably so) about his personal interest that is a partial motivation for the research. Among the

²² The article is an abridgment of the writer's doctoral dissertation accepted by Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in 2002.

challenges which he sees his study as presenting are: the need to address his own alienation from fellowship with men because of the scarcity of men in the church, and the need to examine his own privileged status as a man enjoying church leadership partly because of that scarcity.²³ In contrast, the parameters of the present study preclude the overt expression of personal interest, though a female perspective may be apparent to some readers. It may be of particular interest to male readers that a woman has embarked upon such a study. In fact, a number of the men interviewed expressed appreciation for this fact. This would suggest that a female perspective may add a welcome dimension to the discussion of male issues and that this project could act as a catalyst in bringing together both men and women in the Church to address the issues. A fourth important difference is that Vassel's study is sharply focused on the Church, whereas the present study focuses on both family and Church as expressed in the thesis statement.

SOCIOLOGICAL EXAMINATION

The issue of male marginalization,²⁴ which contributes to the problem which Vassel addresses in his thesis, is also a theme that is relevant to the present work. Both projects, in this regard, give due recognition to the work of Professor Errol Miller.

²³ Ibid. pp. 1-2.

²⁴ Introduction 1-3.

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Unlike Vassel whose study is Church oriented, the next authors whose works are to be examined are not writing from an ecclesiastical angle, but this in no way precludes their relevance to the current discussion.²⁵

Professor Barry Chevannes's study, *Learning to be a Man* resonates with the current work in its interest in the socialization of Caribbean males. Its focus is wider than that of the present whose investigation focuses on a select group of Jamaican males, whereas Chevannes investigates whole communities in various Caribbean territories. He gives as the rationale for his study: "The relative lack of focus on the socialization of males in the Caribbean and the need to have available more up-to-date knowledge ..."²⁶

Interestingly, Chevannes, whose object of study is primarily the male presence in society, also sees the need to include females in his investigation:

Because the study of one gender is offset against the other, it was envisaged that this study would also keep within its purview the socialization of females, in so far as it was necessary for an understanding of the males.²⁷

²⁵ It may be interesting to note that, both Miller, educator, and Chevannes, sociologist, are churchmen; however, their concern in these particular works is sociological.

²⁶ Barry Chevannes, *Learning to be a Man: Culture, Socialization and Gender Identity in Five Caribbean Communities*: (Kingston: The University of the West Indies Press, 2001) p. 5.

²⁷ Ibid.

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This echoes the concern of Errol Miller, as he makes an apology for the study of male marginalization in a context of the concern for the liberation of women:

Within the context of the present situation any formulation which suggest [*sic*] that men could be disadvantaged in any way could be interpreted as being either invalid or as being a challenge to the women's movement itself. The danger of such a response would be to ignore important dimensions of the situation of men and women in the Jamaican society. Black men [,] and women of all races occupy a similar social niche. The similarity of their situation warrants cooperation and not conflict. In fact, several hardships faced by Jamaican women are direct consequence of the precarious situation of the black man. Meaningful solution must address the dilemmas of both men and women and not just one or the other. This is particularly so when it comes to the socialization of both boys and girls.²⁸

Vassel also expresses concern for the liberation of women and children, maintaining that they, too, stand to benefit from the

²⁸ Miller, *Marginalization of the Black Male*, p. 76.

proposed new paradigm of dialogical ministry as opposed to the authoritarian form usually practised.²⁹

On the issue of the socialization of boys and girls, Barry Chevannes, along with Janet Brown, uses the popular Guyanese proverb, "Tie the heifer, loose the bull" as a summary statement about the ways in which the different genders are socialized.³⁰ This idea of sheltering the female, while giving free rein to the male, is ironically reminiscent of the difference in the treatment of some male and female slaves by plantation owners in the West Indies, where the males (particularly the robust ones) were used as 'studs' for the reproduction of healthy slaves, while female household slaves were often "preserved" for the master's lust. Gender differences in child rearing are seen in the areas of sex education and expectations dealing with sexual conduct. As Brown and Chevannes maintain, boys are expected to experiment but with protection while girls are usually expected to abstain.³¹

Among other differences are matters of discipline. Chores are often gender specific with boys doing outdoor chores and girls doing indoor chores as a general rule³² (In some cases no chores are done

²⁹ Vassel, pp. 36-37.

³⁰ Janet Brown and Barry Chevannes, *"Why Man Stay So": An Examination of Gender Socialization in the Caribbean*: Kingston, University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, 1998. The proverb appears at the bottom of each page of the study. The Jamaican Creole title of this work may be roughly translated "Why men are as they are".

³¹ Ibid. p. 30.

³² Chevannes, *Learning to be a Man*, p. 207.

by the boys. Even where these are prescribed, there is often a laxity extended towards the male that is not enjoyed by his female counterpart who is encouraged to be more compliant). Interestingly, a significant number of the men interviewed for the current project reported no heavy gender bias where chores were concerned. Among these especially were to be found those intentionally engaged in mentoring.³³ Here and elsewhere during the investigation such encouraging signs of the family's positive influence on well-adjusted males could be detected. On the other hand, in the case of punishment, the findings among men and women interviewed for this project revealed a concurrence with Brown and Chevannes: harsher punishment was meted out to boys.³⁴

Miller,³⁵ also, referring to various studies, highlights examples of how male children suffer more disadvantages than their female counterparts. Boys are more abandoned than girls, suffer more from poor nutrition and make up the vast majority of street children.

Robert Beckford's *Dread and Pentecostal* treats the situation of Blacks in Britain arguing for the need to present Christianity to them in a theopolitical framework and from a theocultural perspective. Written by a British Black who has Jamaican roots, this

³³ See p. 71 of this study, where it is recorded that 40% of male respondents reported no gender bias in chores.

³⁴ Brown and Chevannes, p. 30. Compare with the findings of this study, p. 73.

³⁵ Miller, 1991, p. 92.

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work, while addressing a context that is not identical to the Jamaican situation, is nonetheless relevant as it speaks to the decolonisation of the Gospel and the presentation of it in a way that communicates to the Black male.

Beckford proposes that one reason Black men in Britain have not warmed to the Christian Faith is that Christian theology has not addressed issues of identity, race, and culture.³⁶ Borrowing a word drawn from Jamaican Rastafari protest vocabulary, *Dread*—used in Jamaica as both noun and adjective—Beckford describes the kind of Pentecostalism that will be effective for the transmission of the Gospel to his people. He outlines the three components of what he calls “Dread Pentecostal Theology”: holism, transformation, and eschatology.

In its holism this theology is unabashedly political, acting as a corrective to the original stance of the Black Church: ... the Black Church, while driven by the Spirit, is not always willing to be steered in particular socio-political directions.³⁷

Describing Dread Pentecostal Theology as “a religion of the head, heart and ‘street’,” Beckford counsels the wisdom of balancing thought and action for this is a theology which embraces dichotomies—of Church and world, of Black and White. He points to the dangers of thought without action and action without thought—paralysis in the first case, and misguided action in the

³⁶ Robert Beckford, *Dread and Pentecostal: A Political Theology for the Black Church in Britain* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2000).

³⁷Ibid. p. 190.

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second.³⁸ (This echoes one of the concerns of Mark Noll in *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*).³⁹

The action proposed is informed and focused activism that leads to transformation. The component of transformation reflects the components of holism (in that it stresses education) and hope (in that it sees “The knowledge of the future victory [as] a driving force for contemporary struggle and joy.”⁴⁰ Beckford here echoes the concern expressed variously by Nettleford, Miller, Ventura and others about the role of education in the lifting of our people. He paints a scenario familiar to Jamaicans:

... we live in a context where Black men are overrepresented in prisons but underrepresented in institutions of higher education.⁴¹

Beckford describes the third component—eschatology—as “grounded in the contemporary struggle for justice.”⁴² He

³⁸ Ibid. pp. 188-189.

³⁹ Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1994). See especially Chapters 1, 6, 8, and 9.

⁴⁰ Beckford, p. 190.

⁴¹ Ibid. Here Beckford makes reference to the work of D. Hiro, *Black British, White British: A History of Race Relations in Britain* (London: Paladin, 1992, pp. 197ff.)

⁴² Ibid. p.191.

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intentionally stresses the *now* or *the already* of the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God. This is a *Dread event*, a radical movement against oppressive structures, and it is pitted against “the apocalyptic despair that emerges from the high rates of incarceration, academic failure and racial attacks.”⁴³

Beckford’s positing of Pentecostalism as a vehicle of transformation, albeit with the proposed adaptations, is reminiscent of the argumentation of Harvey Cox in *Fire From Heaven*. For example, Cox sees ‘speaking in tongues’ as liberating in that it gives a voice to the voiceless, those who in formal settings where there are formal ministries would never be allowed to speak because of their low estate.⁴⁴ This recalls Vassel’s argument that the Pentecostals’ exercise of spiritual gifts is an assault on the authoritarian structure of the church.⁴⁵ Beckford, for his part, while acknowledging the usefulness of Cox’s work, points to a limitation he sees in the absence of analysis of the socio-political dimension of Black faith that fuelled Azusa Street.⁴⁶

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and The Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA. : Da Capo Press, 1995) p. 95

⁴⁵ Vassel, p. 47. Vassel also observes that “... Pentecostalism seems to strike a resendent cultural chord and is in sync with the cultural heart beat of the Jamaican people.” p. 48.

⁴⁶ Beckford, p. 171 (For many Church historians the Revival on Azusa Street marks the beginning of the modern Pentecostal movement).

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Beckford's vision, while Afrocentric, is unbiased and universal. He boldly states that "not all of Black culture is sustaining or uplifting."⁴⁷ (This theocultural approach resonates much more with the stance taken in this study vis à vis culture than Cote's more benevolent posture in *Re-Visioning Mission*,⁴⁸ but this difference may be explained by perspective since Cote speaks, generally, from the position of an outsider looking in, whereas Beckford is an insider looking in and out). Beckford's stance is similar to that of Vassel who proposes the following approach of the Church to culture: Respect and reflect, resist, redeem and recreate.⁴⁹

Beckford presses for the need to be critical in the midst of the celebration that comes with Afrocentrism, for the need to see differences and even contradictions between African cultures, the need to explore the grotesque rather than romanticize.⁵⁰ Beckford here makes reference to the limitations of celebration as psychological empowerment without political mobilization. It is perhaps this kind of concern that underlies the negative posture Locksley Lindo takes toward the projection of Jamaica's success in sports, the arts—theatre, dance, singing—seeing this projection as a deliberate distraction from the serious consideration of the socio-

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 144.

⁴⁸ Richard Cote, *Re-Visioning Mission: The Catholic Church and Culture in Postmodern America*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1996)

⁴⁹ Vassel p. 44.

⁵⁰ Beckford p. 136.

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economic morass which keeps us from progress.⁵¹

The universality of Beckford, as well as his impartial approach, is instructive for all who are convinced of the need to allow the Gospel to speak to people in their culture, for wherever the Gospel goes it carries with it a missionary mandate, and that mandate is universal in scope. So, then, Black liberation is not only about liberating Blacks, but also those outside. Though the work starts here, it does not end here or else we shall simply have a new set of oppressors. Black theology involves liberating the oppressed and marginalized to preach the Gospel of liberty to the world or, as Beckford expresses it "to participate in God's work of liberation in the world."⁵²

Dread Jesus,⁵³ written by American theologian and educator David William Spencer is a sensitively written apology for Rastafarian Christianity. Soundly orthodox in his theology, Spencer is appreciative of, and fully endorses, the need for a new paradigm in Christianity, one that confronts the Europeanized presentation of Jesus Christ and his Gospel and situates them in the midst of an oppressed people in a manner that calls forth an authentic identification with the Incarnate Christ.

⁵¹ Locksley Lindo, *Jamaica Betrayed*. See especially p. 37. The validity of this interpretation was confirmed by Dr. Lindo in a telephone interview, 8 April, 2003.

⁵² Beckford, p. 146. Here the author references J. A. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis, 1970), p. 1.

⁵³ William David Spencer, *Dread Jesus* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1999).

In contrast to Robert Beckford's Black Pentecostal theology, which also values Rastafari and draws especially on its element of Black resistance in epistemology, theology, culture, and politics,⁵⁴ the *Dread* or Rastafarian Christianity exemplified is a movement "from below". It is somewhat of an evolution from an embrace of Rasta by those disenchanted with or repulsed by a white-robed religion handed them by oppressors (who even dared to use the name of Jesus for a ship transporting slaves to the Caribbean) to a quest for, or an encounter with, a God in their own Black likeness (which for some has meant worshipping Haile Selassie I as God Incarnate or as a reincarnation of Christ) to an embrace of the Christ worshipped by Haile Selassie whom such Rasta Christians recognise as King of the Blacks. Spencer sees this representation of Christ as a possible paradigm shift that will be embraced by the Two-Thirds World to which the centre of Christianity has now moved.

Spencer cites an interview with former Rastafari, Judy Mowatt⁵⁵ who still refers to Rastas as her sisters and brothers. In this interview Mowatt makes the observation that Rastas turned from the churches because of the projection of a White Christ and because of the refusal to recognize Black history.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Beckford, pp.114-118.

⁵⁵ Judy Mowatt was a member of the "I-Three", who started out as Bob Marley's back-up group, but who have achieved fame in their own right both as a group and as individuals. She is now a popular Gospel singer among other popular singers who committed their lives to Christ in recent years.

⁵⁶ Spencer, p.147.

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Mowatt's opinion is reflected in the words of a Rasta poet interviewed in 1990 who sees Rasta as representing "the decolonization of a religion shrouded in White mythology."⁵⁷

Spencer's concern for a truly incarnated Christianity that takes on the trappings of the culture of the people is reflective of the call of Vassel and Beckford for the decolonization of the Church's iconography. Professor Rex Nettleford, however, warns of the limitations of this. Submitting that "it is to be doubted that an entire moral system can ever again be based on notions of goodness that is white and evil that is black", he shows both what is inadequate and what is needed to address effectively the uplift of our people:

... symbolic transfigurations of portraits of a white Christ into black representations of 'Our Lord' or white Santa Clauses into black St. Nicholases will hardly solve the problem; ... For much must be based on solid achievement, not in the sense of building empires at other people's expense but in the production of work through creative activity and sustained application. The souls of Jamaican black folks will continue in confusion and debilitating turmoil unless they find roots in a discovery and understanding of self as well as in the nurturing of a capacity to

⁵⁷ Jean Lee, "The Appeal of Rastafari and Implications for the Christian Church in Jamaica." (Research paper, Caribbean Graduate School of Theology, Kingston, Jamaica, 1990), 44.

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exploit that *self* to levels of human excellence.⁵⁸

While Nettleford's concerns are expressed in broader terms than the religious, his work is nonetheless relevant in its socio-cultural interest wedded to a deep concern for development that takes into account the soul of the Jamaican people (speaking in broad psycho-social terms). His critical appreciation of the Rastafari movement is shared by other authors under discussion here, notably, Vassel, Beckford, and Spencer, and is consonant with the stance taken in this project, particularly with reference to the appeal of Rastafari, especially for our men because of the strong element of resistance and the value placed on cultural identity.⁵⁹

Another work which has some relevance to the current project but, like the other works cited, does not embrace its scope, is the paper on Rastafari to which reference has been previously made.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Rex Nettleford, *Mirror, Mirror*, p.222.

⁵⁹ Nettleford's vision is universalist, while being strongly patriotic. He also takes seriously the national motto "Out of many, one people" and so is inclusivist, giving affirmation to all races represented, though naturally having a burden for those most marginalized. It is understandable, then, that he does not subscribe to the tenets of the Rastafari movement, though it must be allowed that many adherents of that faith have grown away from some of the traditional exclusivism and dogmatism. Similarly, Beckford cannot subscribe to the exclusivism in terms of color and gender, while Vassel's and Spencer's critique would, while not excluding other considerations, be colored more by their Evangelical doctrinal views.

⁶⁰ Lee, "The Appeal of Rastafari ..."

As others writing on this topic demonstrate, Rasta theology is particularly attractive to our men. Aspects of the theology and praxis of Rasta treated in this term paper which are significant to the current project because they speak powerfully out of, and to, marginalization, are: the protest-resistance element; liberation of the self; affirmation of race and culture; *communitas*,⁶¹ work ethic; music and male dominance. Implications of the appeal of Rastafari for the Christian Church are dealt with in relation to two statements: "The Church needs to answer the questions people are asking" and "The Church needs to teach people to identify other questions they need to be asking and to help them find the answers".⁶² Under the first statement felt needs are listed. These include needs of survival, safety (physical and psychological) acceptance, self-worth and self-affirmation. (Many of these needs are addressed by the Rasta movement). Under the second statement, though the term is not used, it is issues of Christology that need to be addressed. The writer holds out the challenge "to present the biblical Jesus to people, the Christ stripped of the traditional conservative cloak in which he was handed to us."⁶³ In this regard it is noted that "the image of "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild" has been overdone."⁶⁴ This is consonant with the difficulty expressed by Vassel with the "womanish" and

⁶¹ Ibid. See pages 29-30. "Communitas" refers to the spirit or strong sense of community evident among Rastas.

⁶² Ibid. See pp. 37-43 for discussion of these two statements.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 40.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

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“childish” iconography of the Church as it is perceived by many Jamaican men. While expressing a concern for cultural relevance, the writer submits that culture is not sacrosanct and warns against any diluting of the Word of God in the name of theocultural interests.⁶⁵ The danger of this can be seen in a socio-cultural reading of Genesis 4, cited by Robert Beckford.⁶⁶ Here Itumeleng J. Mosala, reacting to a spiritualized, personalized reading of the text, gives an elaborate interpretation of the text based on the Black South African experience:

... The agenda of this story seems to be the legitimization of the process of dispossession of freeholding peasants by the new class of estate holders under the protection of the monarchical State. *Clearly*, Cain the tiller of the soil must be seen to represent the freeholding peasantry who became locked in a life and death struggle with the emergent royal and latifundary classes, represented in this story by Abel ...⁶⁷

Although Beckford uses this example to show the need for broadening one's frame of reference as Scripture is read, he does

⁶⁵ Ibid. pp. 40-41.

⁶⁶ Beckford, pp. 196-197.

⁶⁷ Beckford is citing Mosala's *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989) pp. 36-37. Emphasis added for purposes of the current research.

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critique this interpretation for relying, as it does, on some speculation⁶⁸, a charge that is made against the 'spiritual' interpretation.

The paper under discussion is relevant to the research in its focus on what was once said to be the only religion in Jamaica that has wooed more male adherents than females.⁶⁹ However, it is limited in scope as the condition of our men cannot be addressed simply by studying the appeal for men afforded by a single religious grouping. It could also be maintained that although Rasta is enjoying the respect of many who might have previously held the movement in contempt, Rasta culture is not synonymous with Jamaican culture and so, although this paper does not go as far as Spencer does in proposing a Rastafarian brand of Christianity, what could be understood by some as creating a more acceptable cultural window through which the Gospel may be seen could effectively be a closed door to others.⁷⁰

Pius Wakatama's *Independence for the Third World Church*, while focused particularly on the subject of missions, is instructive for this study in that it engages some of the points made about Africa and Christianity from an African Christian Evangelical perspective.

⁶⁸ Beckford, p.197.

⁶⁹ Vassel, p.49. Here Vassel cites the 1982 Jamaica Census results.

⁷⁰ For information regarding some historical, theological, and cultural claims of Rastafari, and rebuttal of these, see Clinton Chisholm, "Rastafarianism Revisited" (audio-taped recording of articles which had previously appeared in *The Jamaica Record*, 1990)

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Wakatama does not see the problem with Western missionaries as a threat to African culture as he sees all living cultures as dynamic and, thus, constantly changing; rather, he focuses on the failure to “adapt the naked gospel to different cultures.”⁷¹ In other words, it is a failure of western Christians to model the stance of the Apostle Paul in becoming “all things to all men.” One should not be surprised that some persons will react negatively to the Gospel when it comes “wrapped with the cumbersome paraphernalia of western culture.”⁷²

Wakatama brings balance to the Africa vs. Europe discussion in that, while not denying the negative side of missionary involvement in colonization, he also argues that missionaries in many cases softened the cruelty of colonization and often spoke out against this, doing so at times to their own detriment. He points to their involvement in education of the nationals whereas the colonial powers thought of Africans as less than human, as worthy objects of exploitation, not fit to be educated. He argues that the missionaries, in giving them the Bible that teaches the *imago Dei*, gave them the arsenal to fight for their rights. Thus, he concludes:

⁷¹ Pius Wakatama, *Independence for the Third World Church: An African's Perspective on Missionary Work* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press) p. 13.

⁷² *Ibid.* (Someone has made the observation that the religion of Islam, by contrast, shows flexibility in allowing persons to express the faith within the framework of their own cultural understandings).

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It is therefore an indisputable fact that in Africa, at least, the struggle for self-determination was a direct result of missionary work. Most of the leadership of today's Independent Africa was educated in mission schools.⁷³

An important point made by Wakatama, and which is also relevant to this study is that "Christians should not follow the pattern set by secular culture".⁷⁴ For clarity, one could add "when that culture is in conflict with biblical principles". This is the position taken in this paper. In our quest for cultural relevance we dare not pander to the palate of the world by removing from the Gospel presentation those essential elements that may cause offence.

Wakatama's vision, like Beckford's, though differently expressed, is universal. He points to the universal character of the Church, referring to the intended diversity of the body, which is meant to apply, not only to particular gifts to individuals in the body, but also to gifts given to different cultures.⁷⁵

Other significant emphases of this work are the stress on servanthood as the biblical paradigm of leadership,⁷⁶ and the

⁷³ Ibid. p. 16.

⁷⁴ Ibid. pp.24-25.

⁷⁵ Ibid. See p. 26.

⁷⁶ Ibid. Wakatama speaks out against the arrogance of foreign missionaries who often expect to come in at top leadership levels instead of working with the people under the authority of the local leadership (see p. 30). He

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importance placed on educating Evangelicals, and especially the clergy, so that they can articulate their faith in their own culture with their own professional colleagues.⁷⁷ While promoting higher academic learning (and Wakatama does not buy into the sacred/secular divide; in fact he sees a sound liberal arts education as a necessary qualification for cross-cultural missionaries)⁷⁸ he also promotes education for the purpose of training in diverse trades and businesses.⁷⁹ He is desirous, too, of seeing the production of a high quality of national Christian literature that can compete with secular literature and also gain international acceptance.⁸⁰

The foregoing review is by no means exhaustive but serves to give a brief overview of the field which yields no replication of what is attempted here. It also is meant to reveal the extent to which these works, along with others cited throughout this paper, have enriched the thinking invested in this research.

also criticizes the missionaries for reserving for themselves the title *reverend* as though Africans were not worthy of such a title. See p. 33. (The indignation this information evoked was put into perspective by contemplating the fact that sexist discrimination that still persists is indicative of the same brand of arrogance).

⁷⁷ See pp. 54-60.

⁷⁸ See p.87, where he is explicit about his position differing from that of Peter Wagner.

⁷⁹ See p. 52.

⁸⁰ See pp. 60-61.

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Our search for theological foundations for any research being undertaken must give priority to truth, however uncomfortable that truth may be to the context to which it is being applied. It is important to establish what is non-negotiable in our Faith, and what are cultural variables. For us, as Two-Thirds World people, predominantly Black, who received the Gospel mainly from western Whites; it is crucial for our understanding of God and his ways in the world not to fall into the same trap of equating God's revelation with the cultural package in which it may be conveyed. The Word of God must always be allowed to judge culture, whether that culture is alien or our own. It is also important to establish that God's revelation is never conveyed in a cultural vacuum. This is crucial for the fulfilment of our missionary mandate.

Some time ago, there was a raging debate being carried out in one of our local newspapers about the intrinsic good versus the depravity of humankind. Author and educator, Faith Linton⁸¹ brought an informed and balanced view to the table. She questioned the need to polarize on the issue, showing that the biblical record embraces both views. The challenge to her readers was to begin where God begins, placing the priority where he places it. Linton demonstrates a high regard for Scripture coupled with a deep sensitivity toward the psychological needs of her people who still

⁸¹ Faith Linton, "The Dignity and Depravity of Man", *The Daily Gleaner* (Kingston) "Letters to the Editor".

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carry around in spirit, if no longer in body, the shackles of more than a century of slavery.

Because of the emphasis of this study, the theme of the nature of man will be central to the theological discussion that forms the base of its treatment. This is not to indicate that we shall be engaging in "theology from below"; theology, we affirm, is from above because theology begins with God himself, the Self-revealing One. This is amply illustrated in the Scriptures from the Creation, from God's response to fallen mankind in Eden, through to the call of Noah, Abraham and the other patriarchs, the Exodus-- indeed throughout the length and breadth of Salvation history--culminating in the Incarnation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ through whom the Spirit of God is poured out upon "all flesh". Because man, for all the glory placed on him by his Maker, was never meant to be self-sufficient, we shall naturally be also engaging in consideration of the plans and purposes of God for his children of creation, and this will involve reflection on God's sovereignty, his plan of redemption through the Incarnate Son, the Second Adam, and God's plan for the family, both in terms of natural human ties and in terms of spiritual family or Body of Christ, that is, the Church.

Here, and elsewhere in this study, the terms man, mankind, and humankind are used interchangeably except where the context would indicate a different reading. This is not intended to indicate a gender bias, but to make for more fluid reading, especially where the third person singular pronoun is to be employed.

The first observation to be made pertaining to the nature of man is that he is made "in the image of God." Although Scripture seems to be deliberately silent as to the precise meaning of this term, it may safely be assumed that the term implies that man has a special

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relationship with his Maker such as is not enjoyed by the other objects of God's creative acts. There is no intention here to enter into debate as to whether *imago Dei* is to be understood substantively, relationally, or functionally but the position taken here leans toward that enunciated by Erickson,⁸² 1992, which is a substantive interpretation that has implications for relationship as well as function. What needs to be highlighted here, especially for a people whose self-esteem continues to be crushed by oppressive forces, is that man is created with intrinsic value which has its source in the Creator himself and that he is immensely valued by his Creator.

As Linton points out elsewhere,⁸³ "the Roman Road" (referring to the usual Gospel presentation that begins with "For all have sinned..." Romans 3:23) is not an appropriate entry point for witnessing to persons who have been subjected to verbal abuse expressed in such terms as "you won't come to anything good" (reminiscent of the then popular proverb mouthed by Nathaniel as he prejudices Jesus' worth on the basis of the latter's background). We do not need to be told how bad we are; that message is all too familiar and, in our society, especially so to men and boys. What we need to hear is who we are according to God's blueprint and what

⁸² Millard J. Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, L. Arnold Hustad, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1992) pp. 167-168. For full discussion on this topic see Chapter 8 "The Image of God in the Human" pp. 162-170.

⁸³ Faith Linton, "Alienation, Identity, and the Preaching of the Gospel". Address delivered at the Graduation Ceremony of Jamaica Theological Seminary and Caribbean Graduate School of Theology, Kingston, 25 June 1999.

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our potential is through the Redemption effected by Jesus Christ. This is not to say that there is no place to discuss the wretchedness of the human condition caused by sin. Place needs to be made for sharing “the whole counsel of God.” What is being emphasized is the need for an adequate entry point that helps us to connect with people where they are and gives us a map to take them where God wants them to go.

We begin, then, with our value as God’s image bearers. In the first place, as has already been mentioned above, humankind is highly valued by God. His stamp of ownership is upon us. For reasons best known to him, he has chosen to create persons more vulnerable than angels, persons whom he sees as his offspring with whom he can relate in a more intimate way. The pronouncement after Creation has reached its apex in man, is that “it [that is, what God had created] was very good.” (See Genesis 1:31). Human beings bring deep pleasure to God. Part of this pleasure is probably derived from the intimate connection seen in the very way man was created. God not only formed him, as was the case with the lower animals, but he breathed his breath into him. God also communicates with man. When we read the biblical records of the type of intimate communication that even fallen human beings had with God, we cannot begin to imagine the mutual pleasure shared by creature and Creator before the Fall. Perhaps what best illustrates the immeasurable value God places on us is the extent to which he goes to reverse the effects of sin. “God so loved the world that he sent his... Son...” (See John 3:16). There are two major aspects to this act of Redemption. First, God takes on our very nature in the Incarnation. His becoming a human being is in itself a powerful affirmation of our worth. For God is in no way associated with evil. If human flesh were evil, a holy God would be bound by his own

standards to find another way. In identifying with us in this uniquely intimate way, God pays us a remarkable compliment. In the second place, God's identification with us goes to the extreme of experiencing suffering and death to purchase us out of the slave market of sin.⁸⁴ As someone has poetically expressed it, when Jesus' arms were outstretched on the cross, he was saying 'this is how much I love you.' God himself is the paradigm of the "greater love" to which Jesus refers in John 15. Indeed, he goes beyond his own definition of that "greater love" in that he gave his life for those who had, through sin, become his enemies (See Romans 5:8). The mighty bodily Resurrection of Jesus from death that seals our freedom from sin and death is further testimony to God's value placed on the human person.

Our value as human beings is seen, not only in the Divine favour we enjoy, but also in the attention given to us by God's archenemy, Satan. The enemy of God, unable to conquer God himself, seeks to spite God by seducing, attacking, and destroying God's prize creatures, or, better stated, God's offspring. One Jamaican theologian⁸⁵ captures this point colourfully in the

⁸⁴ For a discussion on Paul's use of the Greek term *exagorazo*, (to buy, or to redeem) see *The Hebrew-Greek Study Bible*, New International Version, Spiros Zodhiates, Warren Baker, eds. p. 1622.

⁸⁵ A Guest lecturer, D. V. Palmer, for a module on Caribbean Evangelism at the Caribbean Graduate School of Theology, Kingston. 27 November 2002. The lecture represents a historical sketch of the Christian Ambassadors Football United (CAFU), which was later published in the *Testimony* (2007). The popular Jamaican saying may be translated: "If you can't catch Quaku (the man, as he is fleeing from you), at least, you can grab on to his shirt." The idiomatic meaning may be clarified by the context.

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Jamaican expression: "...*cyan ketch Quaku, yu ketch im shut.*" From the onset of the creation of man, the evil one is on a diabolic mission to destroy the relationship between God and us, ultimately to destroy us and, thus, frustrate the God he cannot depose or dispose of. His power is real and is evident in the havoc he has created (along with our own compliance, conscious or unconscious).

It is essential for us to understand who we are from God's standpoint if we are to regain the status we originally held. If generic man is only matter, there is no index for morality, and the 'values and attitudes' programme being promoted by our Prime Minister⁸⁶ has no rational basis. If the male of the species, in particular, are no more than beasts, there is no justification for any concern about male marginalization, let alone a study of this nature on that subject. Because we believe that man is created in the image of his Maker, we also believe that man is capable of moral choice. There is therefore ground on which we can appeal to men and women to repent. Because there is Redemption, we believe in renewal; we believe that human beings do not have to continue to live in self-destructive ways. We believe, by our understanding of the Word of God and by our own experience of the work of Christ in our lives, that the Redemption of Christ must and does have implications for the present world order, and that the resurrected and glorified Christ is already in our midst, beginning to make all things new. We also believe that his Church, in spite of all her vulnerabilities and imperfections, is his chosen vessel for that work of renovation and

⁸⁶ For a reference to the national consultation on values and attitudes called by the former Prime Minister, the Most Honourable P.J. Patterson, see Lindo, p. 112.

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restoration of which she, too, must be an object. We have the double assurance that Christ will return at the end of the age and also that he is with us in the interim leading us into the plenitude of that time when he will “fill all things” (See Ephesians 4:10). The filling has already begun and, as his redeemed ones, we must open ourselves for that work of his Spirit which is meant to have implications for “all flesh” (See Joel 2:28 and Acts 2:17, KJV) and, indeed, for the entire created order.

Because God through Creation is the Father of us all, all of us who bear his image (and both Christians and non-Christians reflect that image in a fragmented way) are accountable to God for the state of the world over which he has called us to have dominion. It then follows that the Church has a valid prophetic role to play in engaging the rest of God’s world in the renovation project. For, as image-bearers, we share points of commonality that facilitate co-operation. As we are reminded by the on-line *Good News Magazine*⁸⁷ the rationale for the protection of human life given after the first murder is that man was created in the image of God. Though the image of God is now marred in us, it is not removed; we are still valuable to God and should recognize one another’s value as we live and work together.

Lest we underestimate the nature of the work that must be carried out to prepare the way for the renewal God desires, we must give attention to the spiritual dimension of the task. If we proceed

⁸⁷ United Church of God an International Association, “Understanding the ‘Image of God’ ” <http://www.gnmagazine.org/article.cfm>.

simply on the basis of those human powers with which God endowed us (and these powers are awe-inspiring ⁸⁸) we run the risk of the repetition of the ignoble history of Babel. The work of God must be carried out in God's way. This is one of the reasons why we must be aware of our vulnerabilities because of who we have become, while never losing sight of who we are originally and essentially, and who we are potentially through the work of God in Jesus Christ.

As creatures of the Fall we have become tainted by sin in all areas of our being. If we are not self-deceived we will readily admit that we are often overtaken by sin expressed in wrong actions, wrong thoughts, desires or motives or by failure to do the right. We cannot guarantee that in a given situation we will do the right, though we often do so.

We need to be cognizant, not only of our own potential for evil (and the prophet Jeremiah had no illusions in this regard, see Jeremiah 17:9) but also, of the potency of the enemy in deceiving us and using us for his own ends. While we might not wish to use warfare imagery to encompass the total reality of the Christian life, warfare is a valid biblical metaphor that gives us a useful window through which we can view analytically some of the events of our time. Whereas we should not wish to abdicate moral responsibility by using the Flip Wilson "cop-out", *The devil made me do it*, we would be unwise and in error to suppose the non-existence of such a powerful being. Our high regard for the Word of God (written and Incarnate) should be the corrective for such folly.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

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By far the most important consideration in the renewal enterprise is the nature and power of God. Because nothing can ultimately thwart his will and purpose, it makes solid sense to respect and align ourselves with his perspective on all of life. His sovereignty must be constantly acknowledged and affirmed even when the darkness would seem to overpower the light. This is, admittedly, no easy task. It takes a sturdy faith to see the Transatlantic crossing of our forebears as an event within a larger sovereign purpose. It is far more natural to describe it as man's inhumanity to man, or even as an orchestrated plot from the pit of hell—both of which are valid commentaries. However, if we take the higher view (and that view will also give us a vantage point that will embrace the other perspectives) we shall be poised to avail ourselves of the authority given us by the One who has overcome both sin and hell to roll back the devastating effects of both, and cause his purposes to be fulfilled in and through us.

A biblical example of reading the vicissitudes of life through the lenses of divine sovereignty is afforded us by Joseph. Joseph, as a number of preachers and writers have indicated, presents us with an appropriate paradigm by which to understand and analyze our own history of forced alienation by the complicity of our brothers with foreigners, of enforced slavery, and victimization of various kinds. Joseph was certainly not exempt from the resentment, bitterness or the desire for revenge that usually surface when victim and abuser come face to face, but because of his strong sense of the presence of God throughout his life he was empowered to take the higher road. He did not live in denial. He named his brothers' action as evil, but he did not fixate there. He saw the greater good that God had created from the human mess, the good which was an extension of his grace, not only to Joseph, but to his oppressors, to those in the

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foreign land which had become his home and to many more persons beyond those boundaries.

We, too, must draw upon our faith that God has been with us throughout our sojourn from Africa to here. He is not in complicity with our oppressors; he is consistently with the oppressed. In the season of Christmas when this section is being written, these truths are constantly being affirmed. We see this in one of the names of our Lord Jesus, Immanuel, God with us, and we hear it in Mary's *Magnificat*: the abasing of those who corrupt power and the exalting of their victims.

From the themes of man's nature and God's plan for mankind we turn to the theme of family which, in effect, is not a separate theme at all, but rather, a conjunctive theme.

The theme of family can be traced from the opening chapter of Genesis through to the closing pages of the Apocalypse. The initial idea of family emerges with the reference to the "God Family" in the "Let us" of creation. ["The God Family" is the title of an article authored by the United Church of God.]⁸⁹ It is significant that up to this point all the imperatives of creation are impersonal, "Let there be". But when the creation of man is about to take place, the perfect Community, which is a paradigm of the desired relationship among human beings, is brought into focus. God is family—three Persons,

⁸⁹United Church of God an International Association, "The God Family" <<http://www.gnmagazine.org/article.cfm>> 2001.

yet One, living in perfect harmony. Though the doctrine of the Trinity is not very clearly articulated in Scripture (and this should be seen as the express intention of the inscrutable Spirit of God, rather than merely the underdeveloped religious understanding of the human scribes) there is abundant evidence in the Word of God that the God who created mankind to live in community also exists in community. The roles of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the work of Redemption reveal a composite, harmonious purpose flowing from a perfectly unified Being. This harmony is illustrated also in the high priestly prayer of our Lord Jesus to his Heavenly Father (see John 17).

Our next vision of family is, of course, the human family that emerges with the creation of Adam and Eve. This concept of family is seen on two levels: the universal, to which reference is made in Ephesians 3:15, for example, and smaller units, to which reference is made in Psalms 68:6. There is no need to polarize on the issue of which family demands our greater loyalty. We are equally members of both. One is either a macrocosm or microcosm of the other. In speaking of family as a smaller unit, there is no need to be confined to any one particular definition of family; as used here, the expression will embrace such terms as “extended family”, “nuclear family”, and various accepted forms of family, including households. What is important to note is that family is God’s idea, and on both macro and micro levels it is intended to give support to the individual, who in turn finds fulfilment in self-giving to that community.

Similarly, the terms “Family of God”, “Household of God”, “Body of Christ” which speak of those who experience the new birth and are baptized into one Body by the Spirit of God, are to be understood on universal, as well as local, levels. In neither case must

the relationship with the smaller unit negate or nullify that with the wider unit (and the converse is equally true). Rather, the life of the family in the smaller unit should be seen as a paradigm for relationship in the larger unit.

A most disturbing note is introduced by Jesus in Mark 3:31-35 where he redefines the concept of family, removing it from its usual association with kinship and lifting it to a new paradigm. Rodney Clapp⁹⁰ has influenced many of the insights expressed here in relation to the priority Jesus places on the family of faith above the family of natural origin. Clapp's exegetically sound presentation aptly produces the kind of emotionally disturbing effect that Jesus' pronouncement must have caused in his first century hearers. Jesus deliberately counterpoints the Kingdom family, those who give him allegiance, with the natural family. Perhaps, it could be argued, that it is particularly when the family of natural kinship behaves in a way that runs counter to Kingdom business that the sharp distinction must be made. Clapp is careful to establish that while Jesus clearly put the Kingdom before family, as we normally conceive it, he was also affirming of it.⁹¹ However, there is no ambiguity in the mind of Jesus in his insistence on the pre-eminence of the family of faith. It may be somewhat disconcerting to discover that the preferred passage—John 19:26-27—so often used to illustrate Jesus' high regard for family (and this can be justified) is used by Clapp to show that Jesus was offering the new community as family. The personal confirmation of the rightness of this view came with the sudden

⁹⁰ See Rodney Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads: Beyond Traditional and Modern Options* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press) 1993.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* pp. 77-78.

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(and, initially, uneasy) realization of the significance of the absence of the title “mother” in Jesus’ direct words to Mary.

How should we, who often bemoan our own family life scenario, live in the light of Jesus’ articulated position on the priority of the Kingdom family? Perhaps we can best answer this by first determining what it does not mean.

Jesus’ words about how we regard family are not meant to imply a disregard for the unit which God himself has created for the social and general development of persons (See Psalms 68:6, to which reference has already been made, and Genesis 2:18) any more than his words in Matthew 5:28-30 imply a despising of the physical body to ensure our soul’s salvation. The “counterpointing” of the one against the other in each case is made to emphasize the higher value of the spiritual, not the negation of the value of the natural. This is borne out by Jesus’ non-ascetic lifestyle (See Matthew 11:18). Other examples of Jesus’ use of this kind of contrast can be seen in John 4:32-33 where he juxtaposes spiritual food (the will of his Father) with physical food and Luke 14:26 where he sets loyalty to himself over against loyalty to family in very strong terms.

We should, therefore, not seek to use Jesus’ words to justify neglect of the welfare of our families, even in the name of church work. Family and Church must work together for mutual benefit. The home should be the training ground for the lifestyle that must be played out in the wider Church family. It is especially those who give and enjoy the love and commitment of family who are called out of themselves to see and be immersed in the larger picture. Similarly, it is only those who have a healthy sense of self who can begin to embrace the idea of self-denial. Healthy families are desired by God, and healthy Christian families will enhance the body life of the Church. This is not to deny that the Church also functions as a

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refuge for those who are denied safety in their families of origin. As it is true that God puts the solitary in family units, and that from the beginning he saw it fit for man to live in community, so it is also true that the Church is a community for the lonely as well as for those who have much to share with the lonely.

God's relationship with natural and spiritual family systems is good news for all of us who can describe our families (to any degree) as dysfunctional. Although dysfunctional systems are not God's ideal, he works with them anyway. This is a tribute to his loving understanding of us (Psalms 103:14) and speaks to his grace that is demonstrated in the Redemption. This is sharply brought into focus when we contemplate the family systems of some of the biblical leaders who had intimate relationship with God and are important figures in Salvation History (Abraham, Jacob, David) and when we view the "questionable" connections listed in Matthew's version of Jesus' genealogy: Perez, born of the incestuous union of Judah and his daughter-in-law, Tamar; Rehab, the prostitute (also listed in Hebrews 11 among the heroes of faith); Bathsheba (listed ironically as "Uriah's wife") with whom David had previously committed adultery, and Manasseh, one of the most wicked kings of Judah. This willingness to work with and through the dysfunctional is also reflected in Jesus' choice of apostles and in the configuration of the Early Church with its conflicting personalities and groups.

Dysfunction is a product of sin from which we cannot extricate ourselves, and our relationship with God in Christ does not alter the fact that we have been tarnished by sin. However, through the Redemption of Jesus Christ God is creating a sanctified people through whom and with whom his grand purpose for family will finally be fulfilled (see Revelation 21:2-3).

Conclusion

We have briefly examined the topic set out above, against the background of certain social dynamics, the nature of mankind, and our special value to God as his image bearers (as seen in Creation and Redemption) individually and collectively. We have also seen that for people (and men in particular) to achieve their fullest potential, families will need more help than what they have been receiving and the Church will need to relinquish old ways of viewing and doing ministry and be genuinely engaged in servant style ministry which will always be other-centred, rather than self-centred, willing to “make things different” rather than being smugly contented with simply “making a difference” (to borrow the words of a colleague), while freeing itself from the worldly habit of maintaining the status quo and shrinking from challenge. The Church will also need to be less parochial in its vision and more inclusive as it partners with other entities to move our nation forward. We are seeing some examples of this but this needs to be done on a larger scale. And while we glean ideas from others inside and outside of the Church, we will do well to bear in mind that the task of renewal that faces us did not begin with us and will not end with us. Thus, we will draw strength from the One who has created, redeemed, and empowered us and who has already announced: “Behold, I am making all things new.”⁹²

⁹² Revelation 21:5 (New International Version).