A THEODICY CONCERNING CARIBBEAN SLAVERY: TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF BLACK IDENTITY

(Part 1)

by

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Introduction

Experiences of the author, in 'one on one' evangelism within the Caribbean, motivate this research. In personal evangelism, the author has, several times, been asked why Black people: Should we serve "the White man's God" in whose name slavery was justified? These Caribbean persons, being encouraged to believe in Jesus, want to know why God did not prevent slavery. Whereas the author has faith in the goodness and love of God, there has been a challenge in developing a justification for God, a theodicy. There has been a difficulty in suggesting to enquirers that as descendants of the enslaved, the people of the Caribbean should freely interpret God as being loving, all powerful, and all knowing, despite the fact that chattel slavery had occurred. The interpretation of God as being good and just towards the Black people of the Caribbean is critical for many reasons, not least of which is the sound assurance of Black identity.

Chattel slavery in the Caribbean was a dehumanizing system. Plantation owners treated the enslaved Africans as property. They could be sold or traded, and they had no entitlements to property or family. Their slave masters legally owned everything they had. Slave masters freely abused Africans they held as slaves. Chattel slavery, for each of the enslaved, normally lasted a whole lifetime. The slavery was hereditary, by reason of the fact that the children of those held in chattel slavery became the legal property of the slave master, just as would be the case of cattle with a farmer.

The word theodicy comes from the Greek words ¸µÌÂand ´¹º·, which mean 'God' and 'justice' respectively.[1] "The term

1David Birnbaum, *God and Evil: A Unified Theodicy: Theology and Philosophy* (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav Pub. House, 1989), 3.

'theodicy' was coined by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, who published his classic Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil in 1710".[2] Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz was a man of faith in Jesus Christ from Leipzig, Germany; he was born in 1646 and died in 1716. He was a pioneering mathematician and philosopher.

Theodicy finds relevance in any seat of discussion where God is believed to be good, all knowing, and all powerful amidst evil. For instance, Jacob H. Friesenhahn, lecturer in systematic theology, advances:

> Theodicy is not our evaluation of God as if we stood in the superior position. The point is rather that we are giving a plausible account for God's justice, even though God's creation is full of injustice. We are giving reasons for regarding God as just in response to challenges against God's justice based on the presence of great evil in creation.[3]

This culturally held belief of God in the Caribbean arose from the 'Christianising' of the Region throughout the colonisation era. In the missionary work that accompanied the domination, God was communicated to the oppressed to be a truly good God, though in a way that interpreted the gospel as an individualistic life, to the neglect of social issues. This good God, however, did not prevent the events of chattel slavery from occurring. It is now, therefore, the task of the Caribbean descendants of the enslaved to interpret who this God is and how His goodness ought to be elucidated by the oppressed.

This work seeks to offer intellectual tools for interpreting God, given His non-prevention of slavery. Perspectives are provided through which one may understand slavery, to see how God's goodness, omnipotence and, omniscience are unshaken by the reality of the immense and prolonged human suffering that has occurred in chattel slavery in the Caribbean.

The perspectives presented, to examine the experiences of the colonised Africans in the Caribbean, are on 'free will' and 'Divine goodness'. These will be two crucial tools for interpreting this particular matter of God's justice concerning slavery in the Caribbean. The free will framework captures the responsibility on the part of oppressors in instigating enslavement, despite the fact that God is sovereign. This understanding of responsibility can be

2 Jacob H. Friesenhahn, *The Trinity and Theodicy: The Trinitarian Theology of von Balthasar and the Problem of Evil.* (UK: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd, 2013), 10.

3Ibid., 13.

relevantly juxtaposed with Jesus' declaration, recorded in Matthew 18:7, *"Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!"* The offenders are responsible for their misdeed, despite the fact that infractions will occur.

The second perspective of theodicy in this paper emphasises God's goodness. The goodness of God is one primary issue brought into contention by Caribbean persons that have a difficulty accepting salvation in Jesus Christ. The argument is that the Caribbean church preaches the message of Jesus Christ to Caribbean people, which is from and for the White European, who afflicted our ancestors with notable success as they did so under the banner of Christianity. Whereas it is clear that Scripture does not advocate human captivity but rather the setting free of human captives, it is often less clear what the reason is for God not preventing slavery from occurring. The concern by the Caribbean enquirers is whether or not God is good to Black people of the Caribbean. The work affirms that God is for, and not against, the African descendants of the Caribbean and has indeed always been just and equal.

Background

The investigation is to determine who God is to the victims of chattel slavery that occurred the Caribbean. What is the reason why one people suffer enormously, before God's eyes; what does God think of the victims? One people has suffered at the hands of other peoples, and not only so but the oppressors enjoy continuous enrichment in material benefit. This material advancement has been a seemingly uninterrupted reality, whether one argues that their provision came from God or the hands of the oppressors themselves.

European beneficiaries of colonisation purported that God was punishing the Black people, and that slavery was herein justified. Lewin Williams, a theologian and former president of the United Theological College, regards this claim as false; he does not hold that God was punishing Blacks. He recounts in his book, *Caribbean Theology*, that:

> Zinzendorf, the father of Moravianism, in his doctrine prepared for the Caribbean suggested to the slaves that slavery was divine punishment upon the earth's first negroes and Christianity had come to the Caribbean to set negroes free.[4]

4 Lewin Lascelles Williams, *Research in Religion and Family*, vol. 2, *Caribbean Theology* (New York: P. Lang, 2002), 19.

Certainly, this false justification was not unique. In fact, it can be said that this lie under-girded European colonial ideology. There was the permeation of the idea of racial stratification which leaned either towards the thinking of Whites being the supreme race or towards Blacks being an inferior race. It was not uncommon to find both. Shaun Best, a lecturer and author, gives an account of one peculiar variation of this counter-scriptural thinking in a book entitled *Understanding Social Divisions,*

> blackness was associated with evil, whereas whiteness was associated with purity and goodness. Scriptural explanations for the emergence of race, such as the theory of blackness advanced by George Best in 1578, argued that blackness was God's curse upon Noah's son Ham for having sexual intercourse whilst the Ark was afloat, against God's expressed wishes.[5]

We dismiss these erroneous notions as Black people of the Caribbean, and have been renouncing them since the days of slavery. The Africans always held that they are equal with all humans and entitled to freedom. The enslaved Blacks of the Caribbean were so convinced of their equality with all of mankind that they revolted, even at the cost of their lives, towards seeing this conviction realised; for example, Sam Sharpe, Tacky, Duty Boukman, and the Maroons. However, the question is still being asked, "Why did God not stop the great suffering and death caused by European enslavement in the Caribbean?" Lewin Williams posits,

> [A] God who keeps silent on issues concerning justice has to be prepared to be seen as one who does not care that there is injustice. In fact such a God may even be seen as dictating the injustices since those who are most closely related to their perpetration are not only their beneficiaries but also are the bearers of the brand of gospel that embraces them.

Aim

Arguing that God has neither been silent nor passive regarding Caribbean slavery is the task of this work. In arguing for this position, the form of slavery experienced by the Africans in the Caribbean will be further discussed. This study prepares the context for the intellectual examination of defending God's justice. The discourse of the experiences of slavery gives readers a framework from which one may consider the justice of God. The intention is to offer a lens through which readers may thoroughly and honestly look at slavery and yet still identify God as being

5 Shaun Best, *Understanding Social Divisions* (London: SAGE, 2005), 151.

fully able in His power, total in His awareness and at the same time loving towards the enslaved people of the Caribbean.

Methodology

The method used is a qualitative study, whereby written sources/works are examined. The material is read to examine what the experience of chattel slavery in the Region had consisted of as well as some of the effects it has produced in the Caribbean. The subject of theodicy is explored, and the salient perspectives of free will and God's goodness are juxtaposed with Caribbean arguments regarding the suffering that Caribbean people have experienced because of slavery. The exchanges of writers in the discipline of Caribbean theology are also brought into the discussion of theodicy and are advanced into an analysis of the socio-religious experience vis-a-vis a theology of Black identity.

Structure

Four sections delineate the work. The first will serve as an examination of the socio-religious experiences of the enslaved throughout the colonial era in the Caribbean. In the second section, two essential themes in theodicy will be explored, as a C.S. Lewis Christian apologetic expresses them.[6] Lewis' intellectual perspectives in theodicy will converse with Caribbean thinkers, who understand suffering from the angle of the exploited, such as Oral Thomas, Garnett Roper, Lewin Williams, and Ashley Smith. The third section will analyse the findings from the exploration of theodicy, in discussion with Caribbean scholars. From this analysis, a theology of Black identity will be advanced, with recommendations for the Caribbean.[7]

A Reflection on Slavery in the Caribbean

This section explores the history of Black persons' suffering in the Caribbean. The aim is to provide readers with a perspective on both slavery and its consequent impact, throughout the colonial period. A function of this section of the work is also to highlight challenges in the Region's development of Black identity; those challenges which the history of chattel slavery in the Region has cultivated.

[6] C.S. Lewis was a European in the seat of empire who would not have had any contact with the suffering experienced under the institutionalised oppression of slavery. However, he does offer useful intellectual perspective on the subject of theodicy.

[7] The third and fourth sections will conclude the work with a summary.

The history of European exploitative agenda in the Caribbean has its origin dating as far back as 1492. It was in 1492 that Christopher Columbus and his ill-willed crew stumbled upon the Region. The unsuspecting community of the native people of the Caribbean island welcomed the opportunistic band. The lands were found to be rich in resources of gold, silver, and tropical crop. Soon the Spanish foreigners were set on conquest and exploitation to take loot back to Spain. This encampment includes a mission to Christianize the so-called 'uncivilized' peoples of the non-European world. The missionary framework was faulty to begin with, but then its association with economic impetus made the work a more destructive one.

> [T]he European evangelization process tended to venture only into areas where there was material reward. It is by no means accidental then, that the Caribbean territories first settled by the Spanish expeditions were those that had mineral resources. In fact the deposits of gold and silver found in the Caribbean and on the Mainland promptly inspired colonialism for the sole benefit of the colonial expansion of Europe while it brought death and destruction to the "natives". [8]

Following that early period of Caribbean colonisation, the inhabitants suffered a genocide that left no island exempt from its horror. The Tainos, Kalinagos and Ciboneys were consequently dwindled out of existence, as a result of the severe cruelty they experienced. The Region was no more the home of its original inhabitants. After their genocide, new immigrants arrived chained, to serve as their replacement. “the Caribbean is an immigrant society. The indigenous Taino, Ciboney, and Carib populations were decimated by the early encounters with the Europeans.” [9] It is this decimation that led to an interest in the forced importation of Africans to the Region, in a cruel system called the Triangular Trade. A detailed discussion about the TriangularTrade is presented later in this chapter. Black men, women, and children were carried off the coast of Africa, for forced labour in the Caribbean. The demography of the Caribbean Region had rapidly changed to a population made up of a Black majority of enslaved Africans, under the minority rule of White Europeans. This case applies to all Caribbean states, as all have had European, colonial slavery as a part of their history. “In consequence of its history the Caribbean territories share a common social identity. Each has

8Lewin Lascelles Williams, *Research in Religion and Family*, vol. 2, *Caribbean Theology* (New York: P. Lang, ©2002), 10.

9Garnett L. Roper and J Richard Middleton, eds., *A Kairos Moment for Caribbean Theology: Ecumenical Voices in Dialogue* (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick Publications, ©2013), 6.

been a colonized people."[10] This chapter will discuss the following themes of slavery in the Caribbean:

The Triangular Trade

As mentioned earlier, the slavery in the Caribbean had already been started through the enslavement of the Tainos, Kalinagos, and Ciboneys, who were the people indigenous to the Region. However, their numbers had declined through the abuses they faced at the hands of the European colonisers.[11] The Triangular Trade was developed to replace the extinct natives. Africans were taken as captives from the shores of West Africa and forcefully transported to the Caribbean to work as slaves, primarily on sugar plantations.

> The triangular trade was an extremely lucrative line of business and enabled England to become a prosperous country ... the capital accumulated, thanks to the slave trade, enabled England to finance her industrial revolution and turned Bristol and Liverpool into prosperous cities.[12]

Sugar and rum were processed in the Caribbean and taken to Europe for commercial distribution. From Europe to the coast of Africa, to the Caribbean and back to Europe again; this was the pattern of this lucrative industry that very significantly boosted the economy of European countries such as France, Spain, Portugal, England, and the Netherlands. Labour cost was significantly lower, with no wages to consider for the enslaved.

The most infamous part of the Triangular Trade was the Middle Passage. The Middle Passage was the portion of the journey between West Africa and the Americas (including the Caribbean). The sale of Africans to Europeans was the primary means by which the Europeans acquired slaves directly from Africa. African merchants would have obtained slaves under a variety of conditions. Africans were made slaves as spoils of war or were made slaves due to a legal penalty, for example. Some Africans were made slaves as a tribute of a smaller kingdom to be given to a more powerful dominion, all within mainland Africa. There were Africans who were captured by kidnapping, but this was relatively infrequent. Once held by the African slave merchants, the enslaved were usually imprisoned in baraccoons

10 Lewin Lascelles Williams, *Research in Religion and Family*, vol. 2, *Caribbean Theology* (New York: P. Lang, 2002), 67.
11 Lynn Marie Houston, *Food Culture in the Caribbean*, Food Culture Around the World (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2005), 5.
12 Lennox Honychurch, *The Caribbean People*, [rev. ed. (Surrey: Nelson Caribbean, 1995), 24.

(barrack-like huts) until they were traded or sold to the European, colonial ships. The European crew of sailors on these ships was cautious regarding docking right up against the beaches of the African coasts, for fear of being attacked. As such, they would only dock if they were confident of what they considered a 'good trade.'[13]

The journey from the barracoons to the ships was usually a long and arduous journey that resulted in sickness and death, for some of the enslaved. The experience did not become easier once the Europeans acquired the enslaved and they boarded the ships en route to the Caribbean and Americas. The conditions on the ships were abhorrent, because of severe overcrowding and the associated problem of ventilation below the deck. Medical aid was minimal, and sickness proliferated readily, as excretion waste was not separate from the very congested holding area. Attempts were made to keep slaves alive as slave merchants still regarded the Africans as profitable cargo for sale or trade. Therefore, they were at points allowed to come up on deck for air and were forced to dance to maintain circulation. The conditions were harsh and included sexual assaults on females and frequent whippings. The psychological stress was immense as these were men, women, and children who had been captured and sold. They would not be permitted to see home again, and trade often resulted in the separation of Africans from their families. Suicide was common during the Middle Passage transit.[14]

Although colonies provided food, clothing and shelter, the conditions under which the enslaved persons experienced captivity were such low standards, that the financial profits to Europe were affected somewhat, though still very significant. What was lost, by plantation owners, in the sustenance of the enslaved (through the provision of food and other basic necessities), was more than regained through the rigor and duration of labour that the enslaved were forced to undergo. Once on the plantations, the African people were valued with a likeness to livestock; this is the nature of chattel slavery, as was the type of slavery practiced for almost four hundred years in the Caribbean. Slave owners traded Africans for goods or money.

The Triangular Trade was a greedy instrument of colonialism. Europeans treated Blacks in the manner of cattle.

13Toyin Falola and Amanda Warnock, eds., *Encyclopedia of the Middle Passage*, The American Mosaic (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2007), 54.

14Junius P. Rodriguez, *The Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 1997), 436.

Denial of the humanity of Blacks hushed the conscience of the European instigators of colonialism. Avarice was a primary motivation.

Insistent Attack on Black Legitimacy and Black Fervor

The enslaved Africans in the Caribbean apparently maintained a strong sense of self, right throughout the duration of slavery. It is this sense of identity that the European plantation owners sought vigorously, though never quite successfully, to subdue. Revolts and uprisings reveal the rich sense of self that was held by the oppressed. The enslaved Africans maintained that their oppressors are wicked men and that freedom from their hold of power was their God-given right. Gelien Matthews, a historian and lecturer at the University of West Indies, accounts,

> Abolitionists maximized the extent to which they could convert the rebellion of the slaves into useful antislavery materials. They were convinced now more than ever that slave rebellion was the just retribution exacted on a nation guilty of the sin of upholding slavery. They reconciled the humanitarian struggle with the idea of justice in slave violence by reflecting that God is a just God and that his justice would not sleep forever.[15]

The oppressors feared the enslaved and actively sought ways to suppress them. This work was directed not only towards the Africans but their fellow Europeans as well. Research Fellow and Consultant in Black Theological Studies Anthony Reddie, in making this point, highlights that the suffering of Black people in slavery had, at its root, the erroneous view that Blacks were intrinsically inferior. "Inherent within that Black transatlantic movement of forced migration and labour was a form of biased, racialized teaching that asserted the inferiority and subhuman nature of the Black self."[16] Even in the presentation of the gospel by the European missionaries, there was a glaring inconsistency. Lewin Williams, in his book entitled Caribbean Theology, points out that the missionary gospel was a gospel that contradicted the doctrine they taught at home. Lewin Williams argues that the Europeans did embrace the gospel message for self-determination but only preached it in the gospel taught at home in Europe; the missionary gospel to the Caribbean, however, had no such declaration. Williams goes on to highlight the miseducation advanced by the European missionaries:

15Gelien Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts and the British Abolitionist Movement* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2006), 167.

16Anthony Reddie, *Black Theology*, SCM Core Text (London: SCM Press, 2012), 4.

If a missionary believes in freedom for the home people under God but not the same freedom for the colonized under God, then missionary theology has to be a misrepresentation of Christian theology to accommodate the contradiction.[17]

This misrepresentation, too, has contributed to the colonial attack on Black identity, resulting in an added difficulty in interpreting God, as Caribbean people.

A Biblical interpretation of the Genesis 9:19-26 narrative, commonly called Ham's curse has been a favorite tool in this colonial miseducation. R S. Sugirtharajah, a professor of Biblical Hermeneutics, points out in his text entitled *Vernacular Hermeneutics* this agenda-driven corruption of Biblical interpretation:

> It used to be the suggestion that the only reference to Black people was that of Ham and his descendants who were a cursed race. Some have interpreted this reference as God giving an okay for Blacks to be treated as slaves.[18]

Genesis records Noah cursing his son Ham for dishonouring his father as he was drunk and uncovered. Noah states that his grandson Canaan, the son of Ham, would be a servant to his brothers. As the text reads on in Genesis, Ham is seen to settle in African lands. Anthony Agbo, Christian and career politician in Nigeria, outlines this in his book. He writes,

> …migrations took children of Ham to settle in the geographical locations of ancient Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya, and the Canaanite kingdoms, which were later destroyed and annexed by the Israelites to become Judea on the direction of God after they were freed from Egyptian captivity.[19]

This interpretation of the Bible, as a justification of Black enslavement, stands in direct opposition to the gospel. The gospel reaffirms the oneness of all people and erases stratification between bond and free.[20] The intrinsic inferiority suggested by this interpretation disregards the message of unity in Christ and the

17 Lewin Lascelles Williams, Research in Religion and Family, vol. 2, Caribbean Theology (New York: P. Lang, 2002), 33.

18R S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *The Bible and Postcolonialism*, vol. 2, *Vernacular Hermeneutics* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, ©1999), 127.

19Anthony Agbo , *Africa: The Glory, the Curse, the Remedy* (Abbott Pr: A, 2014), 14.

20There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:28-29, KJV).

related fact that Jesus died for the liberation of the oppressed - the setting free of captives.[21]

The identity of the transplanted Africans was attacked in other ways as well. Language and culture were also suppressed, on the plantations. Slave masters feared that unified communication among the enslaved, in a language foreign to them, posed a dangerous threat. As such, the displaced Africans were beaten for speaking in their home languages and forced to learn English as the tongue of communication. Also, the use of drums and the traditional, communal singing and dancing were also prohibited. Plantation owners realised that these practices were a source of unifying strength and reaffirmation of an identity that is free from chains and shackles. In fear of rebellion every attempt was made to rid the Africans of their identity.

To add to this was the institutionally enforced repression by the Europeans against insurrection from the Africans. White domination met opposition from the Blacks, with harsh and brutal penalties. Defiance provoked torture of various forms that were not only excruciatingly painful but also lengthy in duration. These included burning, amputation, and being forced to wear a triangular iron around the neck so as to prevent the victim from lying down for rest.[22] Some who could not bear the foresight of suffering for their children euthanized them in the womb or at birth. In the refusal to live under the sub-human conditions of chattel slavery, they resisted even to the point of death.

Slaves, under the colonial law, could be mortgaged and rented out, and given in repayment of debts. Rose-Marie Belle Antoine, Dean of Law at the University of the West Indies, writes, "Yet, slaves, being human beings with intelligent minds, independent will and depth of feeling, were not property in a real sense. Consequently, they rebelled both in spirit and in action."[23] The Caribbean folk had always been a passionate people and would fight back. Great leaders arose in the midst of the ongoing suffering and fought for freedom even with the knowledge that this could cost them their lives. Masses of desperately resilient individuals who were determined to fight for freedom often accompanied the unrelenting instigators of rebellion; they were not

21 Luke 4:18.

22 John Andrew, *The Hanging of Arthur Hodge: A Caribbean Anti-Slavery Milestone* (Indiana: Xlibris Corporation, 2000), 61.

23 Rose-Marie Belle Antoine, *Commonwealth Caribbean Law and Legal Systems*, rev. ed.2 (Routledge 2008),19.

alone. This action had taken various forms, from the subtle poisoning of slave masters (by house slaves) and the burning of large plantations to bloody political confrontations, in the colonial era that lingered following the abolition of slavery.

Haiti was the first Caribbean island to emerge from colonization and earned its independence, in 1804. It was fought for in a bloody conflict which resulted in large scale destruction of colonial homes and farms. Haiti was the first Caribbean state to receive independence, with many to follow. Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago declared independence from Britain, both in 1962 and four years later Barbados did the same. Gradually, Europe lost nearly all Caribbean islands as colonies, as the islands became independent nations themselves; Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, and Montserrat have, however, have remained as British Territories.

There were doubtless many attempts to break the spirit of the enslaved. The Bible was dishonestly interpreted to imply that slavery is justified and that Blacks ought to yield. Cruel attacks on liberation uprisings were also used to suppress the passion of Blacks, but they were never successfully quenched as time eventually showed Blacks emerging from slavery and many Caribbean states coming into being.

Slavery and the Breaking of the Family Institution among the Enslaved

The enslavement of Black people in the Caribbean had existed as far back is in the early 16th century and continued until the 19th century. Though slavery ended, unsurprisingly, conditions did not change significantly for Black persons living in the Caribbean. Oral Thomas, Caribbean theologian and president of United Theological College of the West Indies accounts,

> The abolition of slavery was essentially a change in the basis of exploiting labour. The race-based ideology of slavery days functioned to ensure the large supply of a domesticated and unskilled labour force. Moreover, freedom was hollow, as those "freed" had no economic (land ownership) and political (say in the decision-making process) power.[24]

The same governing power that oversaw slavery was in leadership, throughout the Caribbean, in the immediate period following slavery. It is evident, therefore, why the oppression continued but merely took less blatant forms. Even under new ways of dominion,

24 Oral A W. Thomas, *Biblical Resistance Hermeneutics within a Caribbean Context* (London: Equinox Pub. Ltd, 2010), 35.

the social and cultural wounds of slavery were deep. The cruelty of chattel slavery culture went beyond flogging and physical torture of human beings to the psychological, social, and religious repression of the Caribbean people. Slaves of the same tribe were also intently separated, to ensure disunity. Susan Dwyer Amussen, a social and cultural historian, accounts in her book entitled *Caribbean Exchanges*, *"planters prevented rebellion by mixing together slaves from different regions of Africa, so that in addition to speaking different languages, they "hate one another."*[25] This division was to reduce the likelihood of unified bonds of Africans strengthening themselves against the colonisers. There was also the intentional tearing apart of families. Amussen also emphasises the social breakdown that occurred among the victims of slavery in the Caribbean. She observes that:

> Slavery severs the ties that bind people into society, effectively leaving isolate individuals to fend for themselves. Slavery denies the enslaved the right to establish and reinforce social identities, including family identities, and also minimizes their possibilities...of doing so. [26]

As slavery continued in time, across generations, Black persons were having newborn babies entering the slave society. These would be individuals who do not know how the freedom of their ancestors looked. They would have no nostalgic experience of formerly being out of chains and free to choose one's life goals and work towards them. As these plantation babies grew up to have babies of their own, the deepening of the slave culture worsened as the whole existent family of a Black person was soon comprised, exclusively, of persons who would have never observed Black independence, as seen in African communities. Entire families themselves were a rarity, as relatives were often forcefully relocated upon being sold. Betty Ann Rohler, author of *Social Studies for the Caribbean*, writes:

> No family structure had any guarantee of lasting; at any moment a man, woman or child could be sold. The role of father as provider and protector did not exist. Children belonged to the owner of the plantation, although women were still able to have some authority over their children.[27]

25Susan Dwyer Amussen, *Caribbean Exchanges (Easyread Edition): Slavery and the Transformation of English Society, 1640-1700* (UK: ReadHowYouWant, 2009), 84 .

26 Brian L. Moore, ed., *Slavery, Freedom and Gender: The Dynamics of Caribbean Society* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2003), 263.

27 , B.A Rohlehr. *Social Studies for the Caribbean: CXC Core Units and Options*, new ed., Heinemann for CXC (Oxford: Heinemann, 2002), 16.

One critical problem with this is the impact this system has on identity; identity as father or mother to protect, provide for and nurture. Chattel slavery ripped away from a man the expectation and opportunity to be able to protect and feed his family. A son grew to understand the volatile nature of the plantation family and so would not grow up expecting to bear responsibility for children he may have. Women had some measure of nurturing and contacting to expect, but the insecurity of the expectation would have heightened the psychological and emotional difficulty. Slave owners could auction children at any time, and there was a high and ever present risk of a mother or her children suffering abuse. These disturbing realities resulted in broken and dysfunctional family settings, not only in the observed structure but one's expectation.

Edith Clarke, author of *My Mother Who Fathered Me*, highlights that family life in the Caribbean is predominantly marked by fatherlessness, as a result of the slave system.[28] Paternal abandonment has prolifically become desensitized as each subsequent generation has had to come to terms with the absence of fathers. The repulsion of neglecting one's child or children loses its sting with the prevalence of the occurrence. Blacks frequently experienced this destruction of families. Where there is fatherlessness, there tends to be a scarcity of critical nurturing to prepare a boy for manhood and parental responsibility. Even in Caribbean homes where the father is physically present there is often an emotional detachment, as the emotionally absent father was, in many cases, emotionally or physically neglected himself. A woman may not easily realise the consequent, sociocultural problem and become a victim as well. It is not uncommon in the Caribbean for women to be mentally prepared for absentee fathers. It is unfortunate that there are Caribbean women who find a disheartening sense of pride in the father of her child contributing financially to their child's life, yet not present for the critical social and emotional nurturing.

Whereas these consequential influences on Caribbean family life are a reality, they are clearly not a necessary response or necessary by-product. Caribbean people were never a group to concede and yieldingly accept social currents of negative perception. We may fall but never yield. Plantation owners

28 Edith Clarke, *My Mother Who Fathered Me: A Study of the Families in Three Selected Communities of Jamaica*, rev. ed. (Kingston, Jamaica: Press University of the West Indies, 1999), 1-2,

suffered because of the defiant determination with which the unchained souls, of the physically enslaved people, resisted. There are vast numbers of men who are commendable fathers to their children, as it regards to nurture, protection and support of their families. Very many women have also determined for themselves a standard of expectation for stable and functional family lives.

Family life among the enslaved was broken and dysfunctional. White plantation owners feared unity among the Blacks. This systematic breaking up of families had resulted in lingering dysfunction in the Caribbean today, as broken families had become the usual case.

Slavery and Its Influence on the Perception of Skin Colour

This section reviews the world view which slavery shaped among the Black Caribbean people, particularly concerning being Black skinned. The Blacks would have to deal with the problem of self-esteem and self-definition as a result of cunningly deviant purporting. It is evident that there were still the ideological problems of defining Black identity, among the Caribbean people, even after slavery's abolition. Caribbean pastor and author, Devon Dick identifies the issue of skin colour perception extending well beyond the duration of slavery and colonisation. He writes of this challenge in the Caribbean island of Jamaica even after its Independence in 1962.

> In post-independent Jamaica, black and white denoted not skin colour, objectively speaking, but skin colour as a symbol of attitudes and status, with black being a negative term. This negative connotation was not confined to Jamaica but, as the renowned sociologist Orlando Patterson demonstrates, there was a pattern in both the Latin and non-Latin West Indies of marrying lighter skin color for upward social mobility.[29]

This illustration is salient in exemplifying the great social difficulties which have emerged and made understanding Black identity a challenge in the Caribbean. Social systems had, historically, reinforced the stratum divide between those of darker, more visibly African descendant skin complexion and those who were of lighter skin colour. As such, persons had concluded that if their children and children's children could be born of lighter complexion, then things would be easier for the new generation as Devon Dick alluded to in the citation above. What followed was a bias for a partner of a lighter complexion than one's self so as to bring forth lighter skin coloured offspring. Increased association

29 Garnett L. Roper and J Richard Middleton, eds., *A Kairos Moment for Caribbean Theology: Ecumenical Voices in Dialogue* (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 196.

with lighter pigmentation was preferred. Light skin colour identified with progress.

The colour of one's skin was not the only dividing feature. The creole languages across the Caribbean, which were born out of a mixture of African languages and the language of the colonizers, were also despised. Fluency in the standard language of the colonizers, whether French, Spanish, Dutch, English, or Portuguese, based on the colonial history of the nation, had been deemed as commendable and evidence of having been 'well brought up'. In fact, fluency in the standard colonial tongue and a difficulty in the creole languages have been seen as commendable. The reverse, however, has been seen perceived as shameful. While it is true that these cases of ability in language fluency tend to be indicative of one's level of education, it is still at core a fruit of identity suppression. Moving away from Africanness had become progressive.

It is useful, however, to end this section on a positively updated note, because today in the Caribbean, Africanness is proudly celebrated and embraced. Blacks in the Caribbean proclaim Blackness with honour as our identity. Being African descendants is revered as our heritage. Slavery is in many ways a sobering past, but a sobriety of proud reflections. The reflective narrative of Black history in the Caribbean is a chronicle of triumph. One can reflect on the soulful incidents of fearless and unrelenting uprisings. The Black forefathers of the Caribbean were undaunted by the threat of punishment or death. They have indeed laid a deeply important foundation. We have emerged in building upon that foundation as we push forward in permeating this proud awareness and resisting suppressive notions within, or without, our Caribbean communities. Our academics, our entertainers, and our athletes continue to inspire us, should we ever grow weary in the realisation of our vigorously independent identity.

The Black Caribbean and Post-Slavery Problems in Interpreting God

Doubtless, there are significant influences that the church has had on the goal of liberation for the enslaved. Christianity has been instrumental as a source of vision and strength to resist the powers of institutionalized oppression that the Caribbean people have faced. Through the church, Black people have indeed reinforced an already extant worldview that stubbornly affirms that all human beings are equal and are entitled to freedom. Indeed, theology has been hugely relevant and beneficial to the Caribbean's impetus for liberation. However, this subsection of the work will discuss several significant themes in religious perspectives that

have negatively affected the Region as a part of the wicked events of colonialism. As a work on theodicy, attention is being given to the suffering experienced, here ideologically. That is, Caribbean thinking has been affected by colonial teachings; this section highlights some prominent effects.

The Caribbean church has inherited some erroneous hermeneutics about God's relationship with the oppressed from the colonial period. The evil agenda of the colonial, missionary church read the Bible in a way that suggested that the excellent response from the oppressed is submission. Black people were taught to await their glorious freedom in the resurrection, instead of demanding freedom in this life. Old Testament scholar and author, Professor J. Richard Middleton identifies this that the Caribbean church has attenuated under a narrow theology that is marked by inertia towards material, self-empowerment and a neglect of the very evident repression.

> Historically, the otherworldly vision that has been inculcated into the consciousness of the Caribbean church allows for little or no explicitly Christian norms to guide life in contemporary society (with the prominent exception of sexual mores). In particular, an otherworldly focus on heaven hereafter prevents the biblical gospel from addressing the economic and societal realities of our time. [30]

Individuals who had been significantly influenced by colonial teachings of the church were especially harmed by the hermeneutic of repression of Blacks. Incidentally, very many Caribbean individuals have grown up having been influenced by the church as children. Attending church has become a regular part of the weekend's activities for children. As such, church culture has formative influence. In addition to worldview influences through the church directly, a vast majority of schools in the Region have been fundamentally attached to the church and school devotions. They have been a regular part of the educational activity from infancy up to the secondary school level. In the post-slavery Caribbean, involvement in political opposition or representation has widely been frowned upon and criticized in many churches. In the Region, the statement "We vote for Jesus" has not been uncommon.

The Bible speaks of a God that empathized with the poor and marginalized such that God incarnated as a poor man who had "nowhere to lay His head". Interpreting this, in view of social

30 Garnett L. Roper and J Richard Middleton, eds., *A Kairos Moment for Caribbean Theology: Ecumenical Voices in Dialogue* (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 94.

inequality, God's unanimity with and defense of the poor is understandably confusing for some; because while the poor seek and do find comfort in Scripture, there had been the reality of the prosperity of the wicked. The oppressors would meet for Sunday worship and pray for increases, and the oppressors did increase. The legitimate concern is as the Psalmist records in Psalm 73:3-8,

> For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily.

Summary

This section of the work covered several points in reflecting on the socio-religious experiences of slavery in the Caribbean. We looked at the forms of oppression in Caribbean slavery, the discourse on the Triangular Trade, Black legitimacy, slave families, skin colour perception and the challenges that all of this poses for understanding God in the socio-religious experience of chattel slavery in the Caribbean.

Perspectives in Theodicy

This section will examine theodicy (an attempt to defend the claim that God is omnibenevolent, omnipotent, and omniscient, despite the existence of evil[31]) in light of the lived realities of the oppressed people of the Caribbean. Suffering raises several intellectual problems in interpreting who God is. Fundamentally, it will be important to understand what the sovereignty of God means for Caribbean people, given the autonomous will of oppressors and what the 'goodness of God' means. Sovereignty implies that God is in control of our future, but God was sovereign over the future of each that subsequently became enslaved. It is important then for the Caribbean thinker to examine what the experience of slavery might mean in the face of God's rule. For the Caribbean community, our theology is not asking questions of whether or not God exists; it is about who God is. Garnett Roper, a theologian and president of Jamaica Theological Seminary, writes, concerning

31Linda Edwards, *A Brief Guide to Beliefs: Ideas, Theologies, Mysteries, and Movements* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 62.

Caribbean theology: "It wants to know what kind of God is the God that exists."[32]Roper further posits,

> The interlocutors are the poor and marginalized, along with the pastors and intellectuals who share an organic connection with the marginalized or a commitment to and solidarity with them. They want to know, therefore, if the God who exists is a just God, or is on the side of justice for those who have been denied justice.[33]

This examination to find out who God is will discuss two perspectives in theodicy concerning the experience of Caribbean slavery: Free will and Divine Goodness.

Free Will

There is a passive majority in the Caribbean church which neglects thought about injustices altogether and excuses their passivity from God being sovereign. Lewin Williams calls this type of thinking 'providencialism'. He defines providencialism as follows: "Providencialism is the kind of theological perspective which encourages people "to leave it all in the hand of God"[34]. He points out that the idea does have some merit, but it does prove problematic in the fact that it leaves the responsibility of work and effort to someone else, in the strife for liberation. Consequently, the oppressed Blacks of the Region who hold to this belief become opposed to Christian political involvement. Williams points out that this leaves Christianity without praxis, towards social change. Not only so, but this pious passivity is a tool of the colonial powers to neutralise any urgent determination or spirited fervor that may arise among the disenfranchised of the Caribbean. Thomas makes it clear that this neutralisation was premeditated and calculated to deflect their victims' concern away from the social injustice that was around them. He writes the following in view of the instructions given to missionaries regarding their assignment in the Caribbean:

> [T]he missionaries arrived in the Caribbean, not primarily on a mission, but decidedly with a mission: to ensure that moral education and their religious work neither challenged nor disaffected the institution of

32 Garnett L. Roper and J Richard Middleton, eds., *A Kairos Moment for Caribbean Theology: Ecumenical Voices in Dialogue* (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 3.

33 Garnett L. Roper and J Richard Middleton, eds., *A Kairos Moment for Caribbean Theology: Ecumenical Voices in Dialogue* (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 3-4.

34 Lewin Lascelles Williams, *Research in Religion and Family*, vol. 2, *Caribbean Theology* (New York: P. Lang, 2002), 138.

slavery. The missionaries were willing accomplices, genuflecting to economic power as they chose not to see anything conflicting between Christianity and slavery.[35]

Certainly this was a dirty work, but Black people of the Caribbean must take responsibility in our emergence from such injustices, in our self-development.

So far in this section, we have looked at the more passive and negligent type of response to free will. This segment seeks to address the enquiring Caribbean thinker that is suspicious concerning the goodness of God. Indeed, as a part of thinking about the problem of human pain and suffering, God's willingness and ability to prevent painful events are brought into question. Ashley Smith, Caribbean theologian and ordained minister, identifies this type of inquiry in the Caribbean. In *A Kairos Moment for Caribbean Theology*, he points out that the oppressed in the Caribbean feel a mixture of anger and hopefulness in waiting for a reversal of social conditions. He states that on the other hand, however, those who hold the power in society feel an uneasiness that their power will be taken by those who feel disallowed by them, the presently powerful. Ashley Smith further articulates that:

More than anything else, many feel that God is ultimately responsible for the entrenchment of systems of injustice, hence the deep-seated resentment of God by those who have ceased to be fatalistic about the structure of the cosmos.[36]

Not to believe in fatalism suggests that things could have gone differently than the way they did. This identification results in disgruntled persons seeing God as having not stopped the evil which He could have stopped. This disgruntlement is the feeling of many in the Caribbean and as such preaching about God's love becomes a challenge for them to receive. It is this type of thinker and thinking that has motivated the production of this work: those troubled by a difficulty in interpreting God's love and justice towards the oppressed Black people throughout history.

This resentment is, in one sense, a reasonable position. However, when juxtaposed with human free will, there are some logical problems with this judgment of God's sovereignty. The reality of human free will and its implications make pain

35Oral A W. Thomas, *Biblical Resistance Hermeneutics Within a Caribbean Context* (London: Equinox, 2010), 25.

36Garnett L. Roper and J Richard Middleton, eds., *A Kairos Moment for Caribbean Theology: Ecumenical Voices in Dialogue* (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 46.

prevention contradictory to the allowance of free will. If one should wish that an evil event was stopped or prevented by God, then he/she must necessarily also want all bad occurrences stopped or prevented, if that person is to think reasonably. As the logical consequence of this desire is examined, one may realise that they are asking for a world that is inconsistent with reality. For one to experience free will, as we experience it now, is to be able to make decisions, including those that are extremely good or extremely evil. Human decisions have a ripple effect on those that share time and space with us. The wish for God to have prevented any particular wrongdoing committed while accepting free will may indeed be an unreasonable request. On this C.S. Lewis, writes,

> If you choose to say, 'God can give a creature free will and at the same time withhold free will from it,' you have not succeeded in saying anything about God: meaningless combinations of words do not suddenly acquire meaning simply because we prefix to them the two other words, 'God can.'[37]

Thus, reflecting on the atrocities of slavery and arguing that if God loves Black people, then He would have prevented slavery is faulty logic, when free will is a part of the equation. The abuse of free will by the Europeans of the colonial period encroached upon the freedom of our ancestors. Conversely, the emboldened free will of our forefathers resisted and fought for their freedom. In Garnett Roper's *Caribbean Theology as Public Theology*, he accounts that slavery was marked by continuous armed resistance throughout generations among the enslaved.[38] This resilience is evident because of the uprisings and revolts that occurred. In harmony with this identification of resistance regarding the embrace of responsibility by the oppressed in the Caribbean, Lewin Williams writes:

> Caribbean theology has looked at the old way, the missionary way of defining sin and salvation in their most privatized significance, and it has reconstructed those definitions. It has redefined sin to include a systematic responsibility, and salvation to include rescue from those forces that leave persons hungry and immobilized in desire for self-actualization. The Caribbean liberation process has examined the missionary church's view of the Kingdom and has reinterpreted it through Scripture to mean much more than pie in the sky by and by.[39]

37C S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (London: Fount, 1998, 1940), 18.

38 Garnett L. Roper, *Caribbean Theology as Public Theology* (Kingston, Jamaica: Garnett Roper, 2012), 37-38.

39 Lewin Lascelles Williams, *Research in Religion and Family*, vol. 2, *Caribbean Theology* (New York: P. Lang, 2002), 162.

Lewin Williams here captures the point that our interpretation of God, as Caribbean people, must call the rest to be responsible for our destiny as a people. In so doing, he criticises a deferral of the hope of Blacks to when we get to heaven, though he does not deny the reality of eternal life.

Pitifully wishing that Caribbean slavery did not occur is an "intrinsically impossible" request. It is not that God is unable to prevent suffering (He most certainly is); but God cannot because of the illogical nature of the wish. God has permitted humans to utilize free will, despite the fact that God is sovereign. Human autonomy is an important factor to bear in mind when examining God's justice in oppression. C.S Lewis argues,

> Can a mortal ask questions which God finds unanswerable? Quite easily, I should think. All nonsense questions are unanswerable. How many hours are in a mile? Is yellow square or round? Probably half the questions we ask - half our great theological and metaphysical problems - are like that.[40]

Based on what are commonly understood to be yellow, circle and square the answer cannot be provided for the situation in question is intrinsically impossible. The point is the total prevention of pain and suffering at the hands of other humans is logically unrealistic if free will is allowed to persons. One may accept that evil is a by-product of free will. However, the magnitude to which colonialism impacted the Caribbean still casts doubt on the universal justice of God. Evils on a small scale are more bearable to perceive, but when its consequence is so far reaching God is expected to end the injustice.

The examination continues and here takes into account the enhancement of human power by use of fixed matter, tools. One can choose to run and achieve covering a particular distance quickly. But one can choose to travel by airplane and cover an even greater distance, even more quickly. This reality of free will and human dominion over tools allows for increased effectiveness, whether for good or evil. Lewis writes,

> Hostility can use fixed nature to hurt others. The fixed nature of wood that makes it useful as a beam also enables us to use it to hit our neighbor over the head. Thus when humans fight, the victory usually goes to those with superior weapons, skill, and numbers even if their cause is unjust.[41]

40 C S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2001), 81.

41C S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (London: Fount, 1998, 1940), 30.

Matter allows for the production and use of tools, such as chains, guns, and ships. Free will impacts other human beings because we all share the same space and time, with fixed matter. In effect, "Try to exclude the possibility of suffering which the order of nature and the existence of free-wills involve, and you find that you have excluded life itself."[42]This reality contributes to the account of why colonisation's harmful impact was so severe and extensive - human free will exercised through tools. For the Caribbean thinker who has difficulty identifying God in the colonial suffering of Blacks, this discourse should help in at least one aspect of his/her work to define God. It should become clear that the sovereignty of God does not imply 'injustice of God' when evil is carried out as a result of human choices. This intellectual consideration also implies responsibility.

One often neglected duty in the Caribbean is the responsibility of rereading the Bible towards an interpretation relevant to the Caribbean context. Oral Thomas, in his book entitled *Biblical Hermeneutics within a Caribbean Context*, argues that the missionary interpretation of the Bible is an interpretation that suits the Europeans in the colonial context. Thomas demystifies this missionary reading of the Bible and explains that a Caribbean person, through the lens of his/her Caribbean experience may read the same Scriptures as the European missionaries and interpret entitlement to freedom in this life versus retention of institutionalised repression.

Indeed, the oppressed people of the Caribbean ought to take an active interest in matters of social justice for themselves. Garnett Roper postulates that the gospel calls persons to effect social change. He posits that Caribbean theology is a Public theology, such that the church is responsible for actively engaging national leaders and governance. The church, he argues, ought to "pastor the powers, confront the powers, and unmask the powers"[43]. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a powerful message of liberation – the responsibility and empowerment to set captives free and open blind eyes and prison doors.

42Ibid., 25.

43 Garnett L. Roper, *Caribbean Theology as Public Theology* (Kingston, Jamaica: Garnett Roper, 2012), 174

Summary

This section explored free will as a tool for giving account for the justice of and goodness of God. Free will of human beings demands human responsibility in misdeeds, despite God's sovereignty. Human free will accounts for the evil in its various forms that were perpetrated in chattel slavery in the Caribbean. In the same way, that free will brings the oppressors to account it. It also brings the victims into account for their response to the infractions. Liberation is the active responsibility of the Caribbean people.

Divine Goodness

This portion of the work examines what is understood by the goodness of God. It will look at the fact that the Almighty God did not prevent slavery and what God's nonprevention of human suffering discloses about God's goodness. Also, we will look at slavery of Africans in the Caribbean in juxtaposition with slavery of the Hebrews in Egypt, to see what interpretation we may draw from the parallel.

C.S. Lewis usefully points out that humans have come to commonly reduce goodness to mean hardly anything more than kindness. Kindness, as Lewis presents it, is weak by itself. Kindness, by itself, may carry with it a narrow interest in seeing the happiness of its object without regard for the morally destructive nature of its means. He writes, "I do not think I should value much the love of a friend who cared only for my happiness and did not object to my becoming dishonest."[44] By extension, when considering the goodness of God, one must take into account what is ultimately profitable for anyone or any people. Now this is not so easily evaluated. In fact, we cannot conclusively decide what is that ultimate good for humans or even ourselves as individuals. This is an impossibility that stands presently as a result of our human ignorance. It is clear, however, that one's understanding of God cannot be wholesome if it is merely accounting for immediate happiness in the earthly sense. Lewis expresses this idea thus:

> What would really satisfy us would be a God who said of anything we happened to like doing, 'What does it matter so long as they are contented?' We want, in fact, not so much a Father in Heaven as a grandfather in heaven- a senile benevolence who, as they say, liked to see young people enjoying themselves', and whose plan for the universe was simply that it might be truly said at the end of each day, 'a

44C S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (London: Fount, 1998, 1940), 37.

> good time was had by all'. . . . I should very much like to live in a universe which was governed on such lines. But since it is abundantly clear that I don't, and since I have reason to believe, nevertheless, that God is Love, I conclude that my conception of love needs correction. [45]

This interpretation of God, being criticised by Lewis, may never be put in quite those terms by any reasonably thinking preacher. However, in the Caribbean we do see a related idea expressed in 'prosperity preaching'. Among other things, prosperity preaching declares that material wealth is evidently proportional to one's faithfulness to God, especially in giving in faith. This doctrine is not an authentic Caribbean interpretation, but it has entered the Region through a North American materialistic brand of the gospel, exported to the Caribbean. David Pearson, theologian and acting academic dean at Jamaica Theological Seminary, uncovers this error that has infected the area. Pearson asserts that the Biblical gospel of Jesus Christ holds no promises of material prosperity being proportionate to one's faithfulness, as prosperity preachers suggest. He identifies that the proliferation of this erroneous purporting is related to the colonial impetus for directing the disenfranchised away from the Biblical call to social justice and towards an individualistic interpretation of the gospel. Pearson posits that the increasing access to cable television in the Caribbean adds to the permeation of this prosperity centred understanding of the gospel being advanced by televised North American preachers.[46]Within the Caribbean, where poverty is so prevalent, prosperity preaching paints an inaccurately poor picture of the faithfulness of the Caribbean people to God. In contrast to the rhetoric of prosperity preaching, Jesus stands in solidarity with the poor and declares their blessedness.[47] The goodness of God cannot be measured by how much the beloved of God prosper or suffer. This goodness, despite suffering, is seen clearly in God's relationship with Israel throughout the Bible. While still under bondage in Egypt they were called "my people", by God.

And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey;

45Ibid., 31-32.

46Garnett L. Roper and J Richard Middleton, eds., *A Kairos Moment for Caribbean Theology: Ecumenical Voices in Dialogue* (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 104-105.

47 Luke 6:20

unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites[48]

In this understanding of the goodness of God, it is useful to here examine the interesting parallel between the bondage of the Hebrews in Egypt and Caribbean slavery. One noteworthy similarity is that both periods of enslavement lasted for about four hundred years. In both cases, the enslaved were feared by their task masters for their large numbers, in the land of their oppression. The real purposefulness in bringing this parallel to light is to offer peace to the heart of the Caribbean thinker that may struggle with seeing the goodness of the sovereign God, in view of the experiences of slavery. For the Hebrews, their history of slavery in Egypt ironically was made the primary reference point for hope. Lewin Williams identifies this parallel and retrospective source of hope, and writes,

History as hope broadens the scope of history to create frontal and progressive perspectives. The very concept of history as reality is by nature one that looks back. The Hebrews looked back at their slavery experience in Egypt, the Jews look back at the Holocaust, and the New World Africans look back at slavery.[49]

It is no doubt that the Hebrews were, even during slavery, the people of God and that they were precious to God. This point was highlighted in the aforementioned reference of Exodus 3:7-8. Nevertheless, God never delivered the children of Israel until four hundred years had elapsed. God miraculously called and empowered Moses with signs and wonders four hundred years after the commencement of the Hebrew enslavement. Looking at this juxtaposition, one can draw some contextually relevant conclusions. The enslavement of a people clearly does not imply that they are inherently subordinate to those who enslave them. Also, the enslavement of a people does not suggest that they are not the people of God. In fact, Israel was more the people of God than any other people group on earth, in one sense.

Lewin Williams takes it a step further by arguing that God, to the Hebrews, was not passive about the four hundred years they spent in slavery. Williams examines the Hebrew use of the word *Qodesh* (meaning 'Holy)' and asserts that God to the Hebrews was a moral God, and as such He actively fought for the oppressed. He comments on the Hebrew reference to God as *Qodesh* and writes,

48 Exodus 3:7-8 KJV

49 Lewin Lascelles Williams, *Research in Religion and Family*, vol. 2, *Caribbean Theology* (New York: P. Lang, 2002), 66.

It described also the inner nature of God which is that God is righteous. This is not so descriptive of a God who takes pleasure in peeping through key holes, as it is of a God who takes sides against oppression and powerlessness. Furthermore it must be understood here that the Jewish God does not merely object with cool passivity to the exploitation of the poor. The wrath of this God is kindled against those powerful who exploit the powerless, to upset radically the structures of oppression.[50]

Williams is identifying that active wrath of God against oppression in the midst of enslavement. This is interesting because the justice of God is here being accounted for even though God did not prevent the enslavement of the Hebrews. C.S.Lewis and the Caribbean theologian, Lewin Williams, both insinuate that human suffering does not contradict claims of God's justice nor God's ability and awareness. This must be understood in the Caribbean context as it is essential to our self-definition, and any advance of a theology of Black identity.

Additionally, as the children of Israel emerged out of slavery, in all the spectacle of the miraculous series of events, they were now to identify themselves independent of Egypt. Any Egyptian longing that was in their hearts was rightly diagnosed as a fault and a defect. Wishing to go back to have Egyptian food and Egyptian forms of worship, grieved God. The Caribbean likewise ought to be, with its independence, free from colonial identity and colonial definition. God called the Hebrews to worship Him and to conduct their existence in a way that was a direct relationship between themselves and God. The Caribbean too must realise its place in the embrace of God, in His goodness and justice. Our theology ought to be a narrative of our own context concerning God.

Conclusion

This section explored the goodness of God. God is good to people even if the oppression of the people is not prevented. Goodness does not narrowly mean preventing pain or suffering. The enslaved Blacks affirmed that God is good in the midst of their enormous suffering. They saw God as being in solidarity with their desire for liberation. The enslaved realised that God was just and it motivated them. This identification of the goodness of God towards Black people is critical for Black identity.

50Lewin Lascelles Williams, *Research in Religion and Family*, vol. 2, *Caribbean Theology* (New York: P. Lang, 2002), 35-36.