

Sabbatical Reflections

'The Ecumenical Context of Jamaica'

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## **1. Sabbatical Arrangements**

My eight-week sabbatical was spent in Jamaica from 17 February to 17 April 2016.<sup>1</sup>

I was based at the United Theological College of the West Indies (UTCWI), Mona, Kingston.<sup>2</sup> My agreed sabbatical task was to examine the ecumenical context of Jamaica and write up my reflections.

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<sup>1</sup> CTE offers its staff an eight-week sabbatical after five years full-time service. It's meant to be time-out for reflection and rejuvenation and the staff-member agrees to produce an outcome. I agreed to focus on ecumenism in Jamaica and produce a circa 10,000-word paper.

<sup>2</sup> UTCWI is an ecumenical theological and ministry training college sponsored by the 'historic' churches in the Caribbean: Anglican, Baptists, Roman Catholic, Methodist and United Church. It was established in 1965/6, with the merger of denominational training colleges and is supported by funding from the World Council of Churches.

## 2. Introduction

Context matters! As Tippet says, 'all things have contexts...it is the context that makes the thing what it is functionally'.<sup>3</sup> In this paper I argue that context is no less important when considering ecumenism. The Christian church is a universal entity and expresses itself in a myriad of ways; and in its expression of unity always seek to serve the greater good of those it lives among as God's incarnational presence. However, contexts vary widely and it is important not to assume that conclusions drawn from reflection done in a developed country, like Britain, will be applicable in a developing one such as Jamaica. Reflections and conclusions will be qualitatively different because of context.

Not long after arriving in Jamaica to begin my sabbatical, it became apparent that any consideration of ecumenism on the island had to factor in the wider social, economic and political context of the Jamaican people, not just their religious or ecumenical situation. If the church and its unity is to have meaning for the masses in Jamaica, it must address their pressing challenges.

This paper, therefore, includes several brief overviews of varying aspects of Jamaica's context including the effects of the colonial legacy and discussion regarding a specific Jamaican Theology. Only after this do I turn to address the contribution of ecumenism; its history and contemporary situation to determine whether greater unity among the churches could lead to greater contribution to the country's nation building efforts in its post-independence, postcolonial era.

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<sup>3</sup> Tippet, Alan, Introduction to Missiology, California: William Carey Library, 1987, p.18

I do not claim any special insights into the findings in this paper; but would assert that these are the observations of a theologian with deep affection for ‘Jamaica, land we love,’ after spending just eight weeks on a sabbatical on the island.

While in Jamaica, I was based at an ecumenical college, and enjoyed the use of its library facilities and that of the University of the West Indies. I also visited churches and ecumenical organisations, met with several key individuals, engaged with local people, from robot<sup>4</sup> and licensed taxi drivers to jelly coconut sellers - and news outlets such as newspapers, television and radio. Some of what I say may be regarded as anecdotal; and the reader may conclude that my discourse represents no more than a personal point of view. However, the validity of this paper is rooted in the narrative discourse I have conducted with informed individuals, the varied sources I have consulted and my personal knowledge of and interest in the matters under discussion. It is my understanding that this represents ground-breaking academic research by a diasporan Jamaican.

I was greatly impressed by the amount of work that is being done in Jamaica on a daily basis by people in all walks of life, including the churches and ecumenical organisations. People’s commitment to worship and to serve God through the church and its agencies, is evident everywhere. Given the extent of ecclesial diversity, the agency of ecumenism seems all the more important; introducing, networking, resourcing, and encouraging when individual churches may be tempted to become self-absorbed, or myopic in denominational life and mission. Ecumenism reminds them of the bigger picture, the wider family and of the dual responsibility the

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Robot’ is an unlicensed taxi – passengers travel at their own risk!

church has to engage bi-focally in 'earnest labour and fervent prayers' (Holness, Prime Minister 2016.).

### 3. Social

There are many angles from which a country's social situation can be viewed. I have chosen four that indicate something of the social milieu of Jamaica; these are: ethnicity, family life, homicide and sexuality.

#### 3.1 Ethnicity

Jamaica's 2011 Census shows little change in ethnic profile of the island from the 2001 Census.<sup>5</sup>

<b>Ethnic Origin</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2001</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Black	92.11	91.61
East Indian	0.75	0.89
Mixed	6.06	6.21
Chinese	0.19	0.20
White	0.16	0.18
Other	0.07	0.08
Not Reported	0.65	0.82

Of the 2.7 million population, 50% were under 25 years old, which marks Jamaica out as a young country, and at 92.11% the nation is overwhelmingly ethnically Black. 'Mixed' is the next largest ethnic group at 6.06%, but this may be misleading since only a small percentage of the 'ethnically Black' are likely to be of 'pure' African ancestry.<sup>6</sup> Even someone presenting as African in features, as I do, have other

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<sup>5</sup> [https://issuu.com/digjamaica/docs/1\\_pdfsam\\_general\\_report\\_census\\_2011/63](https://issuu.com/digjamaica/docs/1_pdfsam_general_report_census_2011/63);

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.real-jamaica-vacations.com/jamaica-people.html>; See also Nettleford, Rex M., Caribbean Cultural Identity – a case of Jamaica, Kingston: Institute of Jamaica, 1978, p.9

ethnicities in their family lineage. 'Creole' is sometimes used to describe Jamaica's 'out of many one people,' indicating there is more underneath the presenting African majority.<sup>7</sup> For example, within historic Caribbean slave-based Creole societies existed a sinister system whereby the dominant European group subordinated all others by colour gradation; a system that some feel still persists in Jamaican society as learned behaviour, now not always headed by Europeans.<sup>8</sup>

### 3.2 Family Life

According to the 2011 Census, of Jamaicans over 16 years old, 67.99% never married (the equivalent UK figure is 33.9%); 23.97% married (a UK equivalent of 51.2%); 3.86% widowed, 0.94% legally separated, 1.94% divorced, 1.77% not reported.<sup>9</sup> With such a high percentage of age-eligible people who have never married, it is taken for granted that significant portion of them are in 'common-law' relationships or other arrangements.<sup>10</sup>

Currently, several family types operate on the island; such as a) the regular marital family with father and mother, b) common-law union, c) visiting relationships and, d) single parents.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Small, Stephen 'Black people of Mixed origins and the politics of identity' in Christian, Mark, Ed., *Black identity 20<sup>th</sup> Century: expressions of the US and UK Africa Diaspora*, London: Hansib, 2002, pp167-194

<sup>8</sup> Brathwaite, Kamau, *The development of Creole society in Jamaica 1770-1820*, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2005, p.296; See also Balutansky, Kathleen M. and Sourieau, Marie-Agnes, eds., *Caribbean Creolization – reflections on the cultural dynamics of language, literature and identity*, Jamaica: The Press University of the West Indies 1998, p.3

<sup>9</sup> [https://issuu.com/digjamaica/docs/1\\_pdfsam\\_general\\_report\\_census\\_2011/63](https://issuu.com/digjamaica/docs/1_pdfsam_general_report_census_2011/63)

<sup>10</sup> Panton, Vivian G., *The Church and Common-law union – e new response*, Kingston: Vivian G. Panton, 1992, p4

<sup>11</sup> Information shared in a presentation at UTCWI students seminar on Monday 4 April, 2016

During the years of African enslavement in Jamaica and the Caribbean, family life was severely eroded as families were routinely separated; and one imagines that current practices are informed by elements of that past. What influence the church has on the shape of family life in Jamaica is not clear. However, what is evident is that the traditional family promoted by the church is on the retreat.<sup>12</sup> However, Mahabir citing Jesus' shifting of 'family' away from solely blood relations in Matthew 12, suggests that it is necessary to accommodate diversity in family arrangements and in particular to decentre patriarchy in the Caribbean context and to recognise and embrace the matrifocality of the Caribbean family.<sup>13</sup>

### *3.3 Homicide*

A recent report read, 'Jamaica homicides jump 20% to its highest level in 5 years'. It went on to show there were 1,192 murders in Jamaica during 2015, a rate of 45 per 100,000 citizens that leaves Jamaica rated by the United Nations as the world's 6<sup>th</sup> worst country for homicide.<sup>14</sup> I was interested to learn that the new Prime Minister has tasked the Police Commissioner with keeping the number of murders in 2016 to under 1,000.<sup>15</sup> Even before the General Elections, the 73 murders for January 2016 as against 103 in January 2015, a 29% drop, was encouraging.<sup>16</sup> The murder rate in Jamaica has remained consistently high over a long period, increasing fear among citizens as well as among would-be tourists and visitors to the island.

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<sup>12</sup> Clarke, Edith, *My mother who Fathered me – a study of the families in three selected communities of Jamaica*, Kingston: The Press University of the West Indies, 1999, p.47

<sup>13</sup> Mahabir, Olive Sampath, 'Reconfiguring the Caribbean family', in Sheeratan-Bisnauth, Patricia, ed., *Righting Her-Story: Caribbean Women Encounter the Bible Story*, Switzerland: World communion of Reformed Churches, 2011, pp.64-70

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/Jamaica-homicides-jump-20-per-cent--highest-level-in-5-years\\_48331](http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/Jamaica-homicides-jump-20-per-cent--highest-level-in-5-years_48331)

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/PM-urges-commissioner--minister-to-keep-murder-toll-below-1-000\\_57649](http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/PM-urges-commissioner--minister-to-keep-murder-toll-below-1-000_57649)

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/Murders-down-in-January>

### 3.4 Sexuality

According to a recent survey, 92.8% of the population believe homosexuality is prevalent in Jamaica; and about 50% say they became aware of homosexuality by the time they were 14 years old. The presumed prevalence of homosexuality seem to do nothing to dilute anti-homosexuality sentiments on the island. When people were asked about their own feelings towards homosexuality, 88% deemed male homosexuality immoral, similarly 83.7% female lesbianism and 83.5% bisexuality. Concerning attempts to bring about changes in Jamaica's buggery law, 76.7% disagreed with amending it.<sup>17</sup> Recently, some churches took to the streets to protest against any change in the law. Waithe suggests that the church may benefit from viewing human sexuality in a wider dimension than any 'sex act' and be willing to 'dialogue' with and offer pastoral support to people from the varied cultures and practices present in the society it serves.<sup>18</sup> And given the age at which it is believed Jamaicans become sexually aware, both state and church should have an interest in the education of young people in these matters.<sup>19</sup> The situation with homosexuality may point to wider complexities in the nations moral and ethical dilemmas.

## 4. Economic

Building on its social fabric, Jamaica's economic situation is probably the single most consequential aspect of its context. If one cannot provide for oneself and one's

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<sup>17</sup><http://www.aidsfreeworld.org/RSS/~media/Files/Homophobia/Jamaica%20National%20Survey%20on%20Homophobia.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Waithe, Neilson A., *Caribbean Sexuality*, Bethlehem PA: Department of Publications, Moravian Church, 1993, p.12

<sup>19</sup> See for examples of dealing with young people and sexuality; Richardson, Arthur, *Caribbean Adolescents and Youth – contemporary issues in personality development and behaviour*, New York: Caribbean Diaspora Press, 1999, p.171

family, life is miserable indeed. Little wonder the Bible says, money meets every need (Eccl 10.19); and Jesus taught his disciples to pray, 'give us this day our daily bread'. I am not an economist, but it is apparent to me that Jamaica is in a challenging economic situation; for which I offer a few supporting data borrowed from sources. I touch briefly on the following: Jamaica as a Third World country, debt and reparations, GDP and growth, unemployment and poverty.

#### *4.1 'Third World'*

The overarching economic reality of Jamaica is that it is a Third World, developing country in a postcolonial era. This situation has been described as the West versus the Rest, and Jamaica is very much part of the Rest.<sup>20</sup> The island's economic challenges are deep-rooted in a history of European exploitation through invasion, enslavement and colonialism first by Spain in 1494, and the British since 1665, followed by independence in 1962, which, some argue has not changed the power dynamics much. The countries regarded as First World and developed include those which were the colonizers of Jamaica and continue a lopsided relationship that leaves Jamaica with an uphill battle to achieve prosperity for its near three million citizens. Centuries of exploitation have drained Jamaica of resources; modern geo-economic and political arrangements militate against progress even after independence, in what former Prime Minister, Michael Manley, described as Jamaica trying to move to the next floor of international development on a 'down escalator'<sup>21</sup> As Lewis reminds us, the postcolonial situation leaves power and control in global

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<sup>20</sup> Young, Robert J. C., *Postcolonialism – a very short introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

<sup>21</sup> Manley, Michael, *Up the Down Escalator: Development and the International Economy - A Jamaican Case Study*, Howard University Press; 1983

economic matters in the determinative hands of the global north, a decision making process in which the global south has very little influence.<sup>22</sup>

#### *4.2 Debt and Reparations*

As a consequence of Jamaica's predicament, it is heavily dependent on external economic support including long-standing arrangements with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Until recently, Jamaica is said to have been paying up to 70% of its annual income on debt repayment; which has reduced slightly. Some I have talked with view this relationship between Jamaica and the IMF/World Bank, in light of the history of the West and the Rest, as tantamount to an exploiter lending someone the money they extorted from them.<sup>23</sup> In the view of some, the IMF has become Jamaica's latest slave master. Highlighting the historic injustice that has led to the current gap between The West and The Rest, Jamaica is one of the countries that launched a ten-point Reparations claim under the auspices of CARICUM against former slave-holding nations.<sup>24</sup> The churches and ecumenical groups should seriously consider throwing their weight of support fully behind the reparations movement.

#### *4.3 GDP and Growth*

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<sup>22</sup> Lewis, Marjorie, 'You have to stand on crooked and cut straight – reflections on Tamar' in Sheeratan-Bisnauth, Patricia, ed., *Righting Her-Story: Caribbean Women Encounter the Bible Story*, Switzerland: World communion of Reformed Churches, 2011, pp13-18

<sup>23</sup> For a former slaved society like Jamaica, the deal made in 1834 between the British government and the slave/plantation owners that paid them £20 million – estimated at £20 billion in today's money) and the enslaved nothing has both symbolic and real lasting effects. The beneficiaries continue to profit and the descendants of the enslaved find it almost impossible to catch up. These differentials have become entrenched in the relationship between the rich and advanced 'west' and the rest.

<sup>24</sup> [http://caricom.org/jsp/pressreleases/press\\_releases\\_2013/pres285\\_13.jsp](http://caricom.org/jsp/pressreleases/press_releases_2013/pres285_13.jsp)

The Jamaican economy has been in stop start mode for many years. A World Bank report confirms that for decades the island has struggled with low growth, high public debt and many external shocks that have further weakened the economy; and that over the last 30 years, real per capita GDP increased at an average of just one percent per year, making Jamaica one of the slowest growing developing countries in the world. GDP per capita in Jamaica is equivalent to 44% of the world's average.<sup>25</sup> Jamaica's GDP contracted 1.2% in the third quarter of 2015 over the previous quarter; and the country has experienced GDP Growth Rate averaging 0.11% from 2003 until 2015. The economy reached an all-time Growth Rate high of 2.2% in the fourth quarter of 2003 and a record low of -2.10% in the third quarter of 2014. The economy is vulnerable as it is characterised and affected by high dependence on tourism – 60% of GDP, remittances from the Diaspora; high unemployment, drug related crime and persistent fiscal deficits.<sup>26</sup> The paradise island is in the midst of tough conditions, but recent economic reforms have seen the economy jump 27 places to 58 among 189 economies worldwide in the 2015 'Doing Business' ranking.

#### *4.4 Unemployment and Poverty*

Jamaica's official unemployment rate is 13.2% (April 2015, Statistical Institute of Jamaica), with youth unemployment at 38%.<sup>27</sup> Strikingly, a 2014 report states that over one million Jamaicans live below the poverty line.<sup>28</sup> The Poverty Line is currently circa US\$1.90 or JA\$230 per day. In my mind at least, there is a thick red

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/jamaica/gdp-per-capita>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/jamaica/gdp-growth>; <https://www.gfmag.com/global-data/country-data/jamaica-gdp-country-report>;

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/jamaica/overview>

<sup>28</sup> <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20140326/news/news2.html>

line that links economic poverty, hardship, and hopelessness to high levels of crime that has led to Jamaican homes being routinely fitted with burglar bars.

#### *4.5 Encouraging signs*

Whilst there continues to be challenges in the areas of the consistent provision of utilities like electricity and running water, there are encouraging signs of infrastructural development in a roadbuilding programme aimed at connecting the main economic centres of the island arteries; and visible signs of increasing use of solar panels for electricity.

### **5. Politics**

If economics is the motor of a country, politics steers it, but it is worth recalling that Jamaica is a very young democracy. Britain has been a democratic monarchy since 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> Century, Jamaica has been independent since 1962, a mere fifty-four years in 2016.

#### *5.1 Democracy*

Jamaica is a member of the Commonwealth, with Queen Elizabeth II as its Head of State, although the new parliament is to consider a constitutional amendment to replace the Queen, as Head of State, and make the island a republic. Although there is no reason why there cannot be more parties, currently the country has a two-party democratic system comprising the Jamaica Labour Party (conservative), the current government, and the People's National Party (socialist); and operates on the British Westminster model. At the April 2016 General Elections, the JLP won 32 to 31 although turnout was a low 47%, the lowest ever, it is thought. Popular opinion

is that the low turnout was due to voting apathy. These elections were said to be the most peaceful in recent times, for which some church leaders have taken credit in conversations I have had with them about the influence of the church in society. There is also an evolving devolved element to the governance of Jamaica with mayors, custos and local councillors for example providing opportunities for citizen engagement.

## *5.2 Politics and God*

Jamaican church leaders do politics and political leaders 'do God' – unlike the well-known Blairite British doctrine espoused by former 'spin doctor' Alistair Campbell. This became evident as former Prime Minister, Portia Simpson said repeatedly in the run-up to the General Elections that she would name the date when her Heavenly Father gave her the go-ahead. New Prime Minister Andrew Holness when he was sworn in said: 'I recognize that I stand here today only by the Grace of God. It has not been an easy journey to this podium, but earnest labour and fervent prayers conquer all. To God be the glory.'<sup>29</sup> Since the February 2016 General Elections the new Prime Minister has stated repeatedly his commitment to working in partnership with the church, though it remains to be seen what his government proposes; or whether the churches through their national ecumenical framework pre-empt him with a proposal of their own. There is some scepticism about the possibility of the church becoming the handmaiden of government, thereby losing its independence in mission.

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<sup>29</sup> <http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/latestnews/ANDREW-IN-FULL> It should be noted that the current Prime Minister and the Governor General are Seventh Day Adventists.

## **6. Brand Jamaica**

Brand Jamaica is the idea of identifying certain products, values, concepts or personalities with Jamaica. It straddles the social, economic and political areas and acts as a national and international stimulus to Jamaica's presence and benefit in the world.

### *6.1 Diaspora*

Jamaica's Diaspora is probably its most productive brand. Remittances, returnees with their resources, and business connections are just some of the benefits of the Jamaican Diaspora, reckoned to be as numerous as the near three million living on the island.

### *6.2 Music, sports,*

Reggae music is Jamaica's most distinct export, made popular particularly by singer Bob Marley, with many others. Jamaica punches above its weight in athletics, with its most recent phenomenon being Usain Bolt.

## **7. Summary**

The foregoing provides glimpses into the complexities of the social, economic and political context within which the churches and their ecumenical endeavours in Jamaica exist. Some of it is quite depressing for me as a Jamaican. I suspect that if the Christian church is to be truly relevant to the Jamaican people these realities and their effects upon people's everyday lives, hopes and aspirations must inform the church's prayer, liturgy, preaching and work. As will be discussed later, ecumenism has a role to play in helping a diverse Christian family engage in mission together;

not only as a worshipping community, but as a community that actively promotes the means by which social, economic and political transforming come to people's lives. I am not convinced that all churches get this; i.e. that people are body and spirit, and both need to flourish.

## 8. Ecclesiology

It is impossible for me to write about the church in Jamaica without referring up front to its historic complicity in the subjugation and enslavement of the Indigenous and African peoples of Jamaica and the Caribbean. As Boothe makes clear the churches involved in Jamaican life were complicit in both enslavement and liberation, they have been poacher and gamekeeper.<sup>30</sup> In reference to what constitutes 'church' in Jamaica, I am adopting a fairly flexible approach that corresponds with Giles' definition of church as a 'Christian community'.<sup>31</sup> McGrath makes the point that long before Christians began to reflect seriously and systematically about what kind of institution the church was meant to be, it already existed as an institution.<sup>32</sup> I am aware that in Jamaica, as elsewhere, some churches deny the legitimacy of others; but I am operating on the understanding that Christians all 'are one in Christ, having been baptized by one Spirit into one body'.

### 8.1 2011 Census

<b>Affiliation/Denomination</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>% Variance</b>
Anglican	2.79	3.61	-20.00
Baptist	6.73	7.27	-4.31
Brethren	0.88	0.93	-2.35
Church of God in Jamaica	4.83	4.78	4.32

<sup>30</sup> Boothe, Hyacinth Ione, *Breaking the silence – a woman's voice*, Jamaica: Faith Works Press, 1999

<sup>31</sup> Giles, Kevin, *What on Earth is the Church – A Biblical and Theological Inquiry*, London: SPCK, 1995, p.15

<sup>32</sup> McGrath, Alister E, *Christian Theology – an introduction* 4<sup>th</sup> Edition; Oxford: Blackwells, 2007, p.391; see also Leith, John H., *The Church – a believing fellowship*, Atlanta: John Knox Press, p.21

Church of God of Prophecy	4.52	4.36	7.22
New Testament Church of God	7.16	6.31	17.19
Other Church of God	9.20	8.31	14.36
Jehovah's Witness	1.90	1.70	15.04
Methodist	1.62	1.93	-13.37
Moravian	0.68	0.82	-12.51
Pentecostal	11.00	9.53	19.29
Rastafarian	1.08	0.93	20.84
Revivalist	1.35	-	-
Roman Catholic	2.16	2.59	-13.78
Seventh Day Adventist	12.01	10.84	15.53
United Church	2.06	2.47	-13.71
Baha'i	0.01	0.01	-.3.58
Hinduism	0.07	0.06	26.36
Islam	0.06	0.04	47.75
Judaism	0.02	0.01	41.74
Other Religion/Denomination	6.30	9.77	-33.37
No Religion/Denomination	21.32	20.95	5.17
Not Reported	2.35	2.78	-16.39

## 8.2 Analysis

The 2011 Census is quite revealing and signals significant shifts in church demography in Jamaica.

- No Religion/Denomination at 21.32% is by some distance the largest single grouping which indicate that secularism is catching up with Jamaica too. Some suspect that this may reflect non-denominational identity more so than atheism.
- The Seventh Day Adventist Church is the largest denomination on the island, but still only 12%.
- Pentecostals grew significantly between Censuses courting the headline: 'Evangelicals climb sharply'.<sup>33</sup> Added together Pentecostals account for over 40% of the Christian population on the island, and growing.
- The 'historic'<sup>34</sup> churches declined significantly between Censuses, near correspondingly with Pentecostal growth.
- There are many smaller denominations/churches not listed, which is understandable given the existence of in excess of five hundred differently named churches on the island..<sup>35</sup>
- Representation of 'Other Faiths' is small in Jamaica.
- The two indigenous religions Rastafarian<sup>36</sup> and Revivalist are also very small.

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<sup>33</sup> <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20121021/lead/lead3.html>

<sup>34</sup> I refer to the European-initiated such as Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, United Church, Moravian, et al as 'historic' for practical reasons of identity, and because they were the first Christian churches

<sup>35</sup> See for example Clark, David B., *The Missionary Church in Jamaica. 1980/2000*. Clark introduces to this evangelical church established in Jamaica since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century by missionaries from Scotland, US and Canada; part of the international Missionary Alliance and founding supporter of the Jamaica Theological Seminary; but not specifically mentioned in the 2011 Census

<sup>36</sup> Not everyone would agree that Rastafarianism is Christian although in some cases, particularly the Twelve Tribes brand has close sometimes participative relationship with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Similarly, not all agree the Revival is Christian; although the General Secretary of Revival Mission is in no doubt it is a Christian Church that worships, observes the rites and festivals of mainstream Christianity.

### 8.3 Diversity

For those who struggle with the diversity of the Church in Jamaica, Freeman reminds us that ecclesial diversity is not new; it has been so since the beginning of Christianity. He cites variations such as i) the community that gathered around Jesus, from which he chose the twelve, resonating with the Twelve Tribes of Israel; ii) Pauline churches developed after the Jewish synagogue model; iii) the Jerusalem and Matthaean churches patterning after the community of the Essenes at Qumran. Freeman concludes that Christian communities down the years have flowed into forms available within the culture even as the church in turns affects the society through its life and mission.<sup>37</sup> Jamaica has the widest cross section of churches from Charismatic Roman Catholic to New Thought<sup>38</sup> to indigenous Revival emerging from its roots in Myalism.<sup>39</sup> As we see later, ecumenism has the task of attempting to cohere this Christian diversity. There is also some evidence of interreligious or interfaith work ongoing.

### 8.4 Significance

The church in Jamaica is of considerable importance in the nation's cultural life.<sup>40</sup> Initially imposed upon the indigenous Tainos and enslaved Africans by the Catholic Church,<sup>41</sup> Christianity has not only survived but flourished from 10 denominations in

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<sup>37</sup> Freeman, Arthur J., *An ecumenical Theology of the heart*, Bethlehem, PA: The Moravian Church in America, 1998, p.242

<sup>38</sup> A pastor at Temple of Light Centre for Spiritual Living , a New Thought Church in Mona, Kingston was careful to disassociate his church from the 'Christian Science Church', saying in stead New Thought is linked with Centers for Spiritual Living with head office in Golden, CO.

<sup>39</sup> Myal is thought to have been brought from West Africa by the enslaved and preserved out of sight of slavemasters

<sup>40</sup> Mordecai, Martin & Mordecai, Pamela, *Culture and customs of Jamaica*, London: Greenwood Press, 2001, p.39; See also, Sherlock, Phillip, Bennett, Hazel, *The story of the Jamaican people*, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers Ltd., 1998, p.1 Say the Jews arrived in Jamaica first in the sixteenth century

<sup>41</sup> See, Osborne, Francis J., *History of the Catholic Church in Jamaica*, Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1988. The Catholics were of course 'asked to leave' Jamaica when the Spanish was ousted by Britain in 1665 and was

1865 to 547 differently named organisations by the 1990s.<sup>42</sup> It is reported that Jamaica holds the Guinness Book of World Records for the most dense church presence of any country in the world; 2.75 churches per square mile. Jamaica is circa 4,400 square miles, therefore there may be over 12,000 local churches on the small island.<sup>43</sup>

### 8.5 Typologies

I have categorized the churches on the island into four groups

- Europe-initiated 'historic' churches: Roman Catholic, Anglicans, Baptists, Methodist, United Church, Moravian, Salvation Army, etc.<sup>44</sup>
- American-initiated churches: mostly Pentecostals: New Testament Church of God, Church of God of Prophecy, Church of God, et al; Seventh Day Adventists; including many independent churches started in Jamaica from the main US Pentecostal plants
- New churches from other parts of the world: Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, New Thought/Christian Scientists, etc.
- Indigenous: Revival of various dioceses throughout the island.<sup>45</sup> Rastafarianism is indigenous but not necessarily Christian, although some from the 'Twelve Tribes' Rasta denomination have association with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church

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absent from the island for a considerable time, returning only after several other denominations had established themselves.

<sup>42</sup> Dick, Devon, *Rebellion to Riot – The Jamaican Church in nation building*, Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2002, p.2. The figures are supported by both SDC Database and the Registrar for companies recorded.

<sup>43</sup> [http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/columns/Time-for-church\\_8322467](http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/columns/Time-for-church_8322467);

<sup>44</sup> Dick, Devon, *Cross and the Machete*, Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2014

<sup>45</sup> In an interview with the General Secretary of Revival Mission Churches International, one of several zones or denominations, of Revival I learned that this church is rooted in the West African (Ghana/Nigeria) religion of Myal that in Jamaica has spawned Pocomania, Obeah and Revival, which marks its genesis from 1860. As Myal was driven underground by the enslavers/colonisers, Revival et al have survived and now widespread in Jamaica. It is a spirit based religion believing in and engaging with heavenly spirits (angels, archangels, the Holy Spirit) and earthborn spirits (of ancestors as well as earth's equivalent of angels). Holistic healing is the

### 8.5 Church services/meetings

I visited several church services and ecumenical meetings and graciously and warmly welcomed. My general comments are:

- Historic churches seemed to have strong denominational and European identities. Eurocentric iconography was particularly evident among Catholics and seemed incongruous in a predominantly Black context – why would you have images of a White, blond-haired, blue-eyed Jesus and angelic beings on Jamaican church walls? Much of the liturgy seemed indistinguishable from what I've heard and read in Britain and seemed to cry out for indigenous liturgy mined from the Jamaican experience. I suspect that as Ashwood says crafting liturgy requires commitment and hard work so in an increasingly busy world using what's there is hard to resist.<sup>46</sup>
- American churches: The Seventh Day Adventist church I visited seemed orderly and studied. Pentecostals seemed to borrow much from US tele-evangelists; they were spirited, more in touch with people's life challenges, but greatly given to calling things into being, and heavily reliant on the miraculous, the phenomenological, with little or no hint that hard work may be needed for conditions to improve, or medical help may be necessary for healing. I thought about the Prime Minister's 'earnest labour and fervent prayers conquer all', which was said in a church. Pentecostals may need to become a little more honest about how much effort is generally required to change people's circumstances – miracles are called miracles not least because they are rare - and that conditions

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purpose of Revival, by whatever means the spirits direct including medical intervention or use of natural remedies, bushes; or exorcism. For worship White garments are worn.

<sup>46</sup> Ashwood, Nicole, 'Liturgical Resources' in in Sheeratan-Bisnauth, Patricia, ed., *Righting Her-Story: Caribbean Women Encounter the Bible Story*, Switzerland: World communion of Reformed Churches, 2011, pp.225-241

don't often change by stomping feet or shouting Hallelujah ten times, etc. An explicit 'work ethic' is urgently needed to be added to the 'spirit ethic'!

- New Churches: I did not visit any of these churches, but my observation is that evangelism and recruitment are their first priority. Some of the practices I read about and observed on television bordered on being dangerous; such as reliant for healing on drinking anointed water, staged 'testimonies' of former drug addicts healed by the laying on of hands or exorcism of the 'man of God'. There were subtle and not so subtle encouragement to desist from seeking medical attention.
- Indigenous: these are purportedly widespread across Jamaica under independent leadership and dioceses (see footnote #45). Revivalist network of churches exist and embrace a philosophy of engaging wholly with the spirit world in seeking answers to life's questions; they are said to have an African impulse, and rely heavily on drumming.

### *8.6 Surprising*

The visit that surprised me most was to a Roman Catholic church. This was easily the liveliest Catholic church service I have ever attended, and I am reliably informed had I dared to go forward at the Eucharist I would have been served! There were bells and smells, a clear Catholic liturgy, and to my great pleasure a Catholic Jamaican Hymnal, which indicated some thought about what songs the Catholic communities in Jamaica sing. The Priest, Father Peter, who is white, led several choruses before and after his homily; one of which included the words:

I've found a new life,  
I've found a new life,  
If anybody ask you,  
What's the matter with you?

Just tell them 'I'm saved, sanctified,  
Holy Ghost filled, and water baptized  
I've got Jesus on my mind,  
I've found a new life'.

Father Peter clarified later for those who may have misheard the words, 'I wasn't singing 'I've found a new wife, I said I've found a new life'' to roars of laughter.

Needless to say I was, surprised. So, Church can have the unexpected and humor too! All this though surrounded by lily-White icons!

### *8.7 Summary*

Jamaica overflows with churches of a very wide variety; and a sprinkling of non-Christian religions. Denominational and European or US foreign national identities are strong. Indigenization has not taken place in some cases particularly in terms of liturgy and iconography. If Mikey Roberts<sup>47</sup> is correct that you are what you sing, Jamaican churches might consider singing more Jamaican and less European and American songs; and imbibe less borrowed liturgical thought. Maybe homegrown formal and informal liturgy material could help. Churches and preachers may need to take more seriously nurturing greater relationships and partnerships across denominational boundaries in the spirit of belonging to the one church. The churches in Jamaica could be more the churches *of* Jamaica, through a process of ecclesial incarnational living that baptizes itself in the social, economic and political realities of the Jamaican people and be prepared to take those realities into the worship sanctuary. There exists here a clear role for ecumenism, I believe.

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<sup>47</sup> Dr Mikey Roberts, graduate of UTCWI, is Director of Music, Moravian Church EWIP, lectured on 'Worship in Caribbean Theology' at one of the Founders Week events that marked the college's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, on 9 March 2016

## 9. Missiology

What then might the mission of the diverse Church in Jamaica be? I suspect that for most Christians the mission of the church in the world is the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus. This has been nuanced variously, including the Anglican's five marks of mission:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.<sup>48</sup>

While the above has gained some worldwide traction, what is meant by 'the Gospel' has to be interpreted and prioritised contextually. Cone says simply, 'the church is called into being by the power and love of God to share in his revolutionary activity for the liberation of humanity'.<sup>49</sup> A country in Jamaica's situation as mentioned above, can ill afford the luxury of its churches indulgence in bland commitments to preach the Gospel, particularly when this is used as euphemism for evangelism. Yet, worse than blandness has been charged against the Jamaican church's mission. Some charge that the Christian church has been from the outset a colonising agency; initially working alongside slave and plantation owners and colonial administrators – and that it continues to be so.<sup>50</sup> 'The church in Jamaica is a re-colonising agency', one person told me. Clearly, if the church is not part of the

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<sup>48</sup> <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/identity/marks-of-mission.aspx>

<sup>49</sup> Cone, James H., *Black Theology and Black Power*, New York: Harper & Row, 1969

<sup>50</sup> Hylton, Patrick 'Pops', *The role of religion in Caribbean history*, Washington D.C. USA: Billpops Publications, 2002, 2013

liberating and empowerment infrastructure in Jamaica, it is part of the continuation of the status quo or worse. Several missional insights are further considered.

### *9.1 Missio Dei*

The Church does not have a mission of its own - not its own survival, not its pet projects – only God’s mission in the world.<sup>51</sup> The Church’s mission is the *Missio Dei* i.e. God’s mission to and in the world. The Church must always therefore ask itself, what is God’s mission to this people in this context where we serve? Although from the outset, the ecumenical movement in Jamaica (see below) committed the churches to improving the wellbeing of Jamaicans, evidenced by the church’s work in education for example, over centuries; much of this has been viewed as being in support of the structures that maintain the status quo. For example, denominations establish schools and colleges identifiable with the denomination’s ethos and become absorbed in their maintenance and orthodoxy. God’s mission to the world should focus first on the people being served, not on the servant.

### *9.2 Liberation*

As someone from a Pentecostal background, I was struck by the way Pentecostals on the island appeared to understand the church’s mission first as expressing itself powerfully in worship; as though its first objective is to make people ‘free to worship’ – Pentecostal style! Real power changes things, and a Pentecostal power ethic focussed on changing the life conditions of Jamaica’s poor in material ways (socially, economically, politically), not as an extracurricular overflow, and not just having a good time in church, is worth reflecting on. ‘Abundant life’ cannot wait for heaven, or

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<sup>51</sup> Bosh, David J., *Transforming Mission – shifts in theology of mission*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999, p.15

should it concern exclusively the 'spiritual' life here on earth.<sup>52</sup> Rather the abundant life is a holistic one that recognises *life before death*, as the Christian Aid ad says. During this sabbatical I have grown in my appreciation for the non-exploitative forms of 'Prosperity Gospel' practised by some Pentecostal churches that focuses people's minds and energies on turning their lives around in a holistic way; educationally, economically, ethically, spiritually, etc., not just spiritually. A Pentecostal belief system that highlights the immanence and power of the Holy Spirit should settle for no less than what Cone calls the liberation of humanity, since power should not just idly look on while people suffer.<sup>53</sup>

Churches do well to recall Jesus' designation of his followers as 'salt and light' (Matthew 5) and his proclamation of Isaiah 61 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord' (Luke 4.18,19 KJV).

### *9.3 Self-determining*

As stated above, God's Mission requires contextual discernment, and works in the best interest of the poor. Cone in declaring God as God of the oppressed, says it is for oppressed community, not its oppressors, to define the church's behaviour within its context.<sup>54</sup> This is why the church in Jamaica needs its European, American and other colonial-leaning church interests curtailed or cut so it can prayerfully self-

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<sup>52</sup> See Arnold, S E., *From scepticism to hope – one black-led church's response to social responsibility*, Nottingham: Grove Books, 1992

<sup>53</sup> Cone, James H.. *God of the oppressed*, US: The Seabury Press, 1975, p.163

<sup>54</sup> Cone, James H., *God of the oppressed*, p.206

determine its prosperity goals. With many significant churches in Jamaica answering to foreign headquarters their ability to be incarnational and self-determining in the interest of Jamaica seems in need of close scrutiny.

In response to my questionnaire to leaders of the seven umbrella groups that form the Jamaica Umbrella Group of Churches, one said the mission of the church is: 1) To disciple the nation, 2) to be the agent of spiritual transformation in the nation, 3) to become the pillar and ground of the truth in the nation, 4) to be the apostolic and prophetic voice to the nation, 5) to model change to the nation by offering transformational leadership to the nation and this generation. There is much here to unpack, however, space does not allow me, except to say churches need to explore what these might mean and how they affect praxis.

#### *9.4 An example from NOI*

Christianity has been losing ground to Islam, particularly the Nation of Islam (NOI) and particularly young people. Muslims I have met in Jamaica insist their number is greater than circa 1% indicated in the 2011 Census. In a recent telecast Muslim Minister Louis Farrakhan demonstrated the kind of candor that has proved effective in engaging young black men in particular. He said: 'We have to attack the condition of our people morally and spiritually in order for us to become strong economically...people earn respect by being productive. Get busy and start becoming productive...Black people: instead of moving out of the hood, let's make the hood what we desire it to be'.<sup>55</sup> Farrakhan's messages about socio-political and economic transformation hit home as Marcus Garvey's, 'Up You Mighty Race',

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<sup>55</sup> Minister Louis Farrakhan, telecast 30 March 2016

continues to strike a chord with many whose situations self-evidently need changing for the better.<sup>56</sup> Within the Jamaican churches' worship of the Almighty the desperate condition of so many worshippers and citizens need find a place and be reflected upon.

### *9.5 An example from the Native Baptists*

Dick highlights some of the traits of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Native Baptists in Jamaica that may provide a model for today's church engaging in mission to its people.<sup>57</sup> For Native Baptists, a relationship with the Spirit was important, but liberation of the people from the oppression of enslavement was priority; they made no distinction between secular and sacred; and they saw no division between politics and religion. Their religious faith inspired political action and political activism; prayer and liberation were intertwined; they were independent but willing to ask for assistance when needed – as they did soliciting help from British Baptists with a growing following. A key shift Jamaican churches could make, is the cessation of treating the 'worship space and time' in church as given wholly over to 'holy' things. The integration of the supposed 'secular and sacred' aspects of people's lives into one whole being made evident in liturgy using songs, prayer, sermon, etc in church may be more urgent than is thought. Temporary respite from hardship is good, but permanent, holistic attention is needed. For hard pressed and oppressed peoples, liberation songs and prayers belong in worship, followed by action; or we run the risk of unwittingly supporting Marx's statement that religion is the 'opium of the poor'.

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<sup>56</sup> See Jacques-Garvey, Amy, ed., *Philosophy and opinions of Marcus Garvey*, Massachusetts: Atheneum/ Hollis T Lynch, 1968

<sup>57</sup> Dick, Devon, *The Cross and the Machete*, Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2014

## 9.6 Suspicion

I suspect that lingering deep in the subconsciousness of many descendants of colonised people may be the 'Jomo Kenyatta factor'. He said, 'When the missionaries arrived the Africans had the land and the missionaries had the Bible. They taught us to pray with our eyes closed. When we opened them they had the land and we had the Bible.' Some Jamaicans may yet need to be convinced the church is on Jamaica's side, and is not a recolonising agency. Such suspicion may be erased over time as the church's mission of salvation addresses the holistic concerns *of Jamaicans by Jamaicans for Jamaicans*; resulting in spiritual and material provision; intentionally mixing fervent prayer with earnest labour.

The mission of the church in Jamaica is a subject I feel is in need of serious interrogation. In particular the social, economic and political as well as its spiritual, moral and ethical dimensions need balancing in ways that value the now and the hereafter in light of the liberating Gospel of Jesus Christ. If in its mission the Jamaican Christian church is not a transformation agency in society, it is not living up to its divine calling. .

## 10. Colonial Legacy

I have for many years now sang along to Bob Marley's 'Redemption Song', with the challenging line; 'Emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds'.<sup>58</sup> This along with the Biblical text, 'For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery' (Gal 5.1); reminds me of the nature and imperative of God-given freedom. It is God's gift to humanity and I should be intolerant of mental and physically enslavement. And when free, do not allow yourself to be enslaved again. It is to freedom that God has called us and each of us has a responsibility to free ourselves and others. For descendants, like me, of enslaved and colonised people – as a boy I lived as a colonized person in pre-independent Jamaica – holistic freedom of body and spirit remains a generational struggle in the face of the seductive ways of neo-colonialism. Mental-spiritual enslavement rooted by self-doubt, self-pity, self-hate and perverse dependence on the abusive 'other' can remain in place long after physical freedom has been achieved. What is needed is described by Smith as, 'the total reorientation of life which implies the transformation of people's consciousness and the consequent reordering of the structures of the society in which they participate'.<sup>59</sup> I want to highlight here some aspects of colonial legacy in the Jamaican as well as in the wide context.

### 10.1 *The colonial mind*

One way to understand what people mean by a colonial mind-set and as Marley sings, 'mental slavery', is that under slavery and colonialism, different only by

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<sup>58</sup> These are of course the words of Marcus Garvey

<sup>59</sup> Smith, Ashley, *Real roots and potted plants – reflections on the Caribbean church, Jamaica*: Mandeville Publishers, 1984, p.6

degrees, the victim was coerced into serving one's master or mistress and their interests. A mind so trained can continue to think subserviently long after the mechanisms of slavery or colonialism are no longer in place. Under neo-colonialism, structures of control are still in place, if differently arranged. When the process of inferiorisation is complete, this entrenched child-like deference to the superior, 'adult other' can be seen depicted in old films where a grown Black man answers to being called 'boy' even by a younger White person. Young says that to legitimise Black subjugation European conquerors viewed them as inferior, childlike, or feminine, incapable of looking after themselves, (despite having done so perfectly well for millennia) and requiring the paternal rule of the West for their own best interest (today they are deemed to require 'development').<sup>60</sup> In some respects Jamaica as a former colony continue to portray traits of the colonial mindset.

### *10.2 Church/Christianity as colonial legacy*

In the minds of some, probably an increasing number, the Christian church itself is a legacy of colonialism. That much of what seemed to happen in the churches keep the minds of the masses occupied with 'spiritual things' whilst their domestic situation remain unaffected by their closeness to God in worship suggests the doubters may have a point. Some years ago in a BBC broadcast I called for the discarding of European images of the Divine from Black homes; and after seeing that this situation continues in Jamaica I would make the same call again. The Christian church in Jamaica in all its expressions should make every effort to affirm Jamaican humanity, Creole and overwhelmingly African, not perpetuate colonial mindset.<sup>61</sup> Nor should

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<sup>60</sup> Young, Robert J. C., *Postcolonialism – a very short introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p312/3173

<sup>61</sup> Erskine, Noel Leo, *Decolonising Theology in the Caribbean*, New York: Orbis Books, 1981, p.85. Erskine make a case for Black identity and I have borrowed it to apply it to Jamaican identity.

Jamaica swap European colonialism for American colonialism. Those churches with European roots can over time do the 'Jesus thing', become incarnate, truly put on the flesh of Jamaica so that the texture and feel is Jamaican. In the words of Smith, the Jamaican church needs to be rooted in the Jamaican soil, not remain European – or indeed US - potted plants.<sup>62</sup>

### *10.3 Disrespect for African Religions*

I make the observation that while non-African nationalities that brought their faiths to Jamaica have enjoyed some degree of respect, Judaism and Hinduism for example, the religious practices of indigenous Tainos and enslaved Africans have been routinely condemned. Myalism that has given rise to Obeah, Pocomania, and Revival are all generally regarded as irredeemably evil. Chevannes has shown that what drives this adverse reaction is anti-African prejudice.<sup>63</sup> Revival, he points out, draws from Myalism and Christianity. African-initiated Native Baptists and Rastafarian have also suffered from similar anti-African prejudice.<sup>64</sup> I wonder whether in the work that needs to be done in ecumenism and macro-ecumenism the time has come to view all religious expressions with regard and deploy dialogue as a means of expressing that. Most respectable religions today did not start out that way, but it is clear that African-phobia has worked to militate against African religious expressions, including now by African descendants.

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<sup>62</sup> Smith, Ashley, *Real roots and potted plants – reflections on the Caribbean church*, Jamaica: Mandeville Publishers, 1984, pp17, 18.

<sup>63</sup> Chevannes, Barry, *Rastafari and other African-Caribbean Worldviews*, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995, p.7

<sup>64</sup> See for example, Morrish, Ivor, *Obeah, Christ and Rastaman*, Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 1982

#### *10.4 Bewitchment and exorcism*

British theologian Beckford advances the argument that Black British Pentecostals have been bewitched by colonial Christianity resulting in their zombification into passivity and anti-intellectualism.<sup>65</sup> For Beckford one of the more obvious manifestations of this condition is the way many Black Pentecostals eschew political action and instead defer to prayer almost as a fatalistic end in itself. His solution is exorcism. Some of what I've seen of Pentecostalism in Jamaica suggests a similar condition and cries out for a similar response to the one we engineered in Britain by launching before the last British General Elections the Black Church Political Manifesto.<sup>66</sup> Operating mostly among the poor, Pentecostal power could be deployed to stimulate: entrepreneurialism and innovation; involvement in the global village, educational attainment, political activism, employment opportunities.

Instead, some Pentecostal practitioners seem to find innovative ways to separate the poor from their money through 'seed sowing' in their ministries, slaying them in the Spirit by blowing on them, swinging their jackets and a host of other histrionics; none of which appear to positively change the life condition of the poor. If supernatural power is at the disposal of the preacher might it not be better to use it to change people's crippling material situation in these difficult times? It is this decoupling of faith and practice that Beckford alludes to as a bewitchment. When Jamaican Christians, especially the poor, say, 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me' (Phil 4.13), they should be encouraged to understand this as

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<sup>65</sup> See Beckford, Robert, *Documentary as Exorcism – resisting the bewitchment of colonial Christianity*, London: Bloomsbury Academic; 2014

<sup>66</sup> In the 2015 British General Elections, the National Church Leaders Forum – a black christian voice, published for the first time a Black Church political manifesto: see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uQtqaFHLvK8>

applicable to all areas of their lives. To apply this spiritually only is to demonstrate the bewitchment Beckford speaks of.

### *10.5 Colonial ambivalence*

Another legacy of colonialism is that some Whites and Blacks are ambivalent to the lingering effects of slavery and colonialism. Some may be even positive about colonialism. I have heard it said more than once, 'Jamaica was better when it was ruled by the British'. Two evidences of this ambivalence to the past include British Prime Minister David Cameron's recent visit to Jamaica which caused consternation in much of the international Black community when he sidestepped calls for reparations for slavery, saying it was time to 'move on'; but offered a grant of 40%, or £60 million, to help build a new state of the arts prison on the island so Britain can deport Jamaican prisoners currently imprisoned in Britain at a cost to the British tax payer.<sup>67</sup> Second, in 1960 American historian Morrison said; 'If then, we weigh what the Indians had against what Columbus and his successors brought to the New World, there can be only one conclusion. All that we value in modern life – liberty under the law, representative government and democracy, freedom of religion, freedom to choose our own career or occupation, enjoyment of technological advances of civilisation – are direct consequences of Columbus' discovery'.<sup>68</sup> So, enslavement? Colonialism? Weren't so bad after all?

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<sup>67</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/30/jamaica-should-move-on-from-painful-legacy-of-slavery-says-cameron>; See also [http://m.jamaicaobserver.com/mobile/news/Prime-Minister-Cameron-s-insult-as-apology\\_19233371](http://m.jamaicaobserver.com/mobile/news/Prime-Minister-Cameron-s-insult-as-apology_19233371)

<sup>68</sup> Osborne, p.16. This from an address by Samuel Eliot Morrison's 'Address at St. Ann's Bay Jamaica 12 Oct 1960. Morrison was a Rear Admiral in the United States Naval Reserve and an American historian noted for his works of maritime history. In 1964, Morison received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Lyndon B. Johnson: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel\\_Eliot\\_Morison](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Eliot_Morison)

### *10.6 Public*

Theologian Roper highlights four aspects of colonial legacy descendants of enslaved Africans need to deal with: a) learned self-doubt; b) creolised identity; c) persistent poverty; and d) an identity in the shadow of empire.<sup>69</sup> All of which are in need of further discourse and action.

### *10.7 Economic disadvantage entrenched*

Economic disadvantage is a significant legacy of colonialism. Bob Marley was correct, 'Them belly full, but we hungry; A hungry mob is a angry mob. A rain a-fall, but the dutty tough'. Added to the differential in outcomes during the period of chattel slavery, a decisive economic moment of lasting impact was reached when in 1834 the deal struck between the British government and slave-owners that officially ended chattel slavery, awarded slave-owners £20 million (circa 20 billion in today's money) for 'loss of property'; and compensated enslaved Africans nothing. The impact of both outcomes are still felt today.

10.8 How Jamaicans overcome the complexity of colonial legacy is a matter of concern and concerted action is needed on personal and corporate levels. The tools will be spiritual, psychological and practical with education and enterprise among the most essential. Right now leadership in positive action and truth-telling become important. I agree with Miller who warns that our religious remedies may not always work, 'it may well be that there are limits to the ways any contemporary struggle for freedom can benefit from biblical narratives, declarations, and images. In some

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<sup>69</sup> Roper, Garnett, *Caribbean theology as public theology*, Kingston, Jamaica: Xpress print, 2012, p.17

instances they will be enlightening, but in some quite inadequate.<sup>70</sup> I became convinced during my sabbatical that some western theological and liturgical imperatives that are appropriate in the west may be unsuitable in Jamaica. Preachers and liturgists need to carefully select words that do not further lock in black inferiorisation.

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<sup>70</sup> Miller, Michael St A., *Freedom in resistance and creative transformation*, Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2013, p.132

## 11. Jamaican Theology

During my sabbatical the question arose repeatedly whether Jamaica needs a specifically Jamaican Theology to help its churches of all denominations incarnate the challenges of Jamaica; including them in the whole life of the church; liturgy, worship, preaching, etc. Caribbean Theology is a well-established discipline in Contextual and Liberation Theology, and a Jamaican Theology sitting within the broader rubric of Caribbean Theology could draw significantly from it given the similarities of contexts, and together feed into world theology.<sup>71</sup> I agree with Stewart who argues that ‘with little exception, Black Christianity in Jamaica is Eurocentric Christianity’,<sup>72</sup> but we must add, as has been mentioned above, that there are strong currents of US and world expressions of Christianity on the island too. Jamaica needs a Christianity that is Jamaican, eclectic but unmistakably Jamaican; and a Jamaican theology may be a significant means of helping the churches discover more fully that authentic Jamaican Christian self. Such a theology may follow various contours. I mention a few – while acknowledging this is a task in the main for Jamaicans living in Jamaica.

### 11.1 *Recovering religious dignity*

One of the first task of a Jamaican Theology could be to revise the history of religion on the island. The historic tendency has been to illegitimise practices that were other than Christian if they were followed by the indigenous Tainos and enslaved

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<sup>71</sup> See for example, Taylor, Burchell. *Saying no to Babylon – a reading of the book of Daniel*, Kingston: Burchell Taylor, 2006; Miller, Michael St A, *Reshaping the contextual vision in Caribbean Theology*, Plymouth UK: University Press of America, 2007; Williams, Lewin L., *Caribbean Theology*, Paris: Peter Laing, 1994; Erskine, Noel Leo, *Decolonising Theology in the Caribbean*, New York: Orbis Books, 1981; Davis, Kortright, *Emancipation still comin’ – explorations in Caribbean emancipatory theology*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990

<sup>72</sup> Stewart, Diane M. *Three eyes for the journey: African Dimensions of the Jamaican Religious Experience*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p.189

Africans. For example, Dick in his excellent discourse on the Native Baptists in 'The Cross and the Machete' goes to great lengths to demonstrate that Native Baptists theology and praxis were rooted in orthodox Christianity, not African religious expressions like Myal.<sup>73</sup> Dick may well be correct, but I am suggesting that Myal should be respected as the faith expression of many enslaved Africans in the same manner any other faith or religion might be. And a Jamaican Theology could contextualise Tainos, African and indigeneous Jamaican religions as legitimate religious expressions. Stewart argues that 'sacraments of divination, libation, incantation, offering, visitation, and communion that are common features of African and African-derived religions...are simultaneously revelation, prayer, incarnation, transformation, blessing, and thanksgiving as understood in Christianity; 'administered for the purpose of establishing and sustaining conditions conducive for human thriving and the wellness of community and of all creation.'<sup>74</sup>

### *11.2 Jamaican Christology*

James Cone's bold statement 'Jesus is Black' in his seminal work *Black Theology* and *Black Power* serves as a reminder that every people need to conceive and embrace Jesus as incarnated in them. And that they should never allow Jesus incarnate in another to be imposed upon them – a form of Christological colonisation. Mulrain has pointed out that one of the tasks of Caribbean Theology has been to decolonise theology of its westernised mould, its Eurocentric character, thereby incarnating it in a Caribbean context.<sup>75</sup> The same needs to be constructed of a

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<sup>73</sup> Dick Dick, Devon, *Cross and the Machete*, Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2014

<sup>74</sup> Stewart, Diane M., *Three eyes for the journey: African Dimensions of the Jamaican Religious Experience*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p.16

<sup>75</sup> Mulrain, George, 'The Caribbean' in Parratt, John ed., *Third World Theologies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp.163-181

Jesus incarnated in Jamaica. To see, as is still often the case, images of Jesus in Jamaica depicted as a European does not help the self-esteem of a Jamaica, 92% of which population designate themselves in the 2011 Census as 'Black'.

### *11.3 Jamaican resistance and flourishing*

A Jamaican Theology needs to show how a liberating God works within the Jamaican context to enable Jamaicans to overcome the many postcolonial challenges it faces; defeating principalities and powers that prevent the flourishing of the Jamaican people. Forgiving but not forgetting the past, lest history repeats itself; and holding to account perpetrators of past wrongs who now flourish on ill-gotten gains for restitution and reparations, so that a future flourishing can be secured for Jamaican children and grandchildren.

### *11.4 Tools of construction*

When the Jamaican Bible was published recently it received a mixed reception inside and outside Jamaica. It nonetheless represented a milestone for the emerging Jamaican language and culture. In spite of the challenges, a Jamaican Theology could utilise the Jamaican language, idioms and symbols that help to root the project as peculiarly Jamaican, even as it borrows selectively from the Caribbean and world. Jagessar utilises Anancy the trickster as a 'cultural and discursive partner' in the construction of Caribbean Theology, the same can apply to a Jamaican Theology.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Jagessar, Michael N., 'Spinning Theology: trickster, texts and theology' in Reddie, Anthony G & Jagessar, Michael N, *Postcolonial Black British Theology: new texts and themes*, Werrington: Epworth, 2007, pp.124-145.

### *11.5 Matrifocality<sup>77</sup>*

I am the product of a matriarchal family unit, as for many years my father had migrated to the UK to seek a better life for all of us. This meant that my mother was responsible for leading our home for a considerable time. My experience is not rare in Jamaican culture, and a Jamaican Theology could go a long way to recognise the crucial role women have played and continue to play. This might include a Jamaican Womanist Theology, no less, as part of a Jamaican Theology.

### *11.6 Taking responsibility*

Because so much of the origins of Jamaican Christianity are rooted outside the country, forms of spiritual neo-colonialism are easily perpetuated. This trait is highlighted by Davis who says the people of the Caribbean have not yet taken hold of the basic roots of their institutions: schools, church, public services and the judiciary; and therefore they have been unable to transform their existence toward an emancipatory and affirmative dynamic.<sup>78</sup> Although Davis wrote in the 1990s, indications are that not a lot has changed significantly. The idea of a Jamaican theology is not likely to be embraced by all overseas interests, so ownership of such a project would need to come from within Jamaica. The main national ecumenical body could be best placed to lead such a project.

11.7 Theology must apply itself to its context. As Jamaica matures as a nation and its spiritual, social, economic and political mores become better honed, theological reflection dedicated to assist the process, particularly from the vantage point of the

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<sup>77</sup> Mahibir, Olive Sampath, 'Recovering the Caribbean family' in Sheerattan-Bisnauth Righting her-story. Matrifocality is defined as societies which focus on the centrality of mothers and by extension women in families. Pp64-70

<sup>78</sup> Davis, p6

poor is vital. A Jamaican Theology would demonstrate God's concern for the plight of the Jamaican people as they escape the gravitational pull of post-colonialism and chart a course to the prosperity of the nation, not just by divine benevolence but by human ingenuity and hard work empowered and guided by God. If the link between faith and practice is not made clear, I believe a faith drift looms, even in Jamaica. Already the 2011 Census demonstrates the rising presence of atheism and secularism, as mentioned above, and so a theological apologetics that capitalise on the current high level of religiosity in Jamaica could be timely.

## 12. Ecumenism

Finally, I turn to ecumenism, the glue that binds everything together. Ecumenism is described as the organised attempt to bring about unity of all believers in Christ, and is derived from the Greek *oikoumene* meaning the entire inhabited earth.<sup>79</sup>

Thoughts of wholeness, oneness, communion, interconnectivity, unity inspire ecumenists, like me, to keep before the church the reality of its oneness, the need to live in unity as the Body of Christ, and the church's mission in the world. We seek to help to maintain the fellowship or communion between different ecclesial parts of the diverse universal church. It is because of the nature of ecumenism as I practice it, that I have chosen to discuss it last after sketching out the context of the work the church does.

### 12.1 *Ecumenism in Jamaica*

The involvement of the Christians and churches of Jamaica in the work of ecumenism is deeprooted. I had the pleasure of spending time with ecumenists and those keen to develop inter-Christian and inter-church relations and action. I heard stories about communities of mixed denominational persuasions living in unity, of multi-denominational family units, joint evangelistic 'crusades', and ministerial fellowships. I have also heard the converse of 'sheep stealing', and denominational egos threatening Christian unity. The good and not-so-good practices of Christians and churches at local levels are replicated at national levels in Jamaica with some churches refusing to join ecumenical instruments for different reasons including exclusivist ideologies.

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<sup>79</sup> Elwell, Walter A., ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984, p.340

12.1.1 Jamaica's involvement in the worldwide Ecumenical Movement<sup>80</sup> can be traced to an initiative by the 1910 Synod of the Anglican Church in Jamaica that reached out to other churches on the island concerning the 'united witness of the churches in Jamaica'.<sup>81</sup> This came in the wake of the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland that led eventually to the launch of the World Council of Churches in 1948. As early as 1911 the fledgling ecumenical movement in Jamaica, initially led by the Anglicans and involving the European-initiated (historic)<sup>82</sup> churches, envisaged 'organic unity of Christians...not only in spirit...but visible'.<sup>83</sup> Also from the outset, the focus on organic unity had as an aim 'to promote, in light of the Christian ideal, the physical, moral and social welfare of the people of Jamaica'. This was a purpose-driven quest for unity. To this end, the churches worked together to address poverty and illiteracy, the latter contributing to the establishing of the University of the West Indies in 1948, amongst other things.

12.1.2 By 1921 the discussion involved ten churches, and all except one, Church of God, were historic churches.<sup>84</sup> Thirty-one years after the initial suggestion in 1910, on 30 July 1941, the Jamaica Christian Council (JCC) was launched, changing its name to the Jamaica Council of Churches in 1971. The process that resulted in the JCC ensured that it had become the 'face', 'voice' and official representative of the

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<sup>80</sup> By 'Worldwide Ecumenical Movement' I am referring to the movement led by the WCC and modelled in countries around the world. There are other ecumenical initiatives notably among Evangelicals and Pentecostals that may not use the term 'ecumenical' nevertheless falls within my definition of deepening communion and engaging together in mission.

<sup>81</sup> History of the Jamaica Council of Churches

<sup>82</sup> I have opted to use 'historic' to refer to those churches in Jamaica that were planted by missionaries European missionaries. These include the Roman Catholic Church and other denominations resulting from the Protestant Reformation. They are 'historic' in that they predate later Christian denominations from America and elsewhere.

<sup>83</sup> Full visible unity is currently the goal of the World Council of Churches

<sup>84</sup> Churches involved in 1921 were: Anglicans, The Jamaica Baptist Union, Church of Scotland, Presbyterians, Congregational Union of Jamaica, Wesleyan Union, Moravian, Church of God, Salvation Army, Religious Society of Friends.

church in Jamaica. JCC has continued to promote communion and mission by facilitating and encouraging the churches' involvement in social witness in the nation in matters relating to education, health, self-organising local ministers fraternal, pulpit swaps, and social projects.<sup>85</sup> JCC has, however, remained the ecumenical instrument of the historic churches, almost exclusively.

12.1. There is also historic expressions of ecumenism among Jamaica's churches other than the historic churches.<sup>86</sup> Evangelical and Pentecostal churches have long maintained the impulse of cooperation with other ecclesial forms amenable to them. Here the word 'ecumenical' is rarely used, but churches working together is not an oxymoron among Evangelicals and Pentecostals, even when accompanied by elements of competition! For example, the Jamaica Association of Full Gospel Churches started in 1966. The association states on its website; 'Jamaica is confronted with many challenges which negatively impact its citizenry on a social, economic, psychological and spiritual level. Erosion in values and attitudes, increases in crime and violence, financial hardships and economic stagnation among others have fostered a sense of hopelessness among our people. It is our belief that the nation needs to look to God as the source of healing and guidance that the country so desperately needs in these difficult times. 2 Chronicles 7:14 (NIV) says, "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will

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<sup>85</sup> Callam, Neville, *Voicing Concern – the social witness of the Jamaica Council of Churches*, Kingston: Pelican Publishers Ltd., 2004. The JCC has plans to branch out into partnership in farming to provide jobs, food and income to support its work.

<sup>86</sup> See for example this article in October 1999 heralding joint working, here on an evangelistic 'crusade' and promising more cooperation in the future, as has been the case:  
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1999/october4/9tb064.html?type=next&number=17&id=2492&start=5>

forgive their sin and will heal their land.”<sup>87</sup> The Jamaica Apostolic Pentecostal Union started in 1979. I have been unable to ascertain the start date of the Jamaica Association of Evangelical Churches, but believe this to be decades old too. Therefore, the drivers for change to the near exclusive public leadership of Jamaica’s Churches by the JCC on behalf of the historic churches have long existed in the form of ecumenical instruments not so called. The inauguration of the Jamaica Umbrella Groups of Churches (JUGC) in 2006 bespoke years of inter-church collaborations beyond the ecumenical activities of the historic churches.

12.1.4 Sources told me that in their determination to stand with the poor of Jamaica, the JCC and its historic member churches became known as ‘the PNP at prayer’, reflecting perceived or actual association with the socialist People’s National Party. Tangentially, the conservative Jamaican Labour Party courted and formed closer relations with the Evangelical/Pentecostal sector of the Jamaican church through national appointments and prayer breakfasts, for example. The raising of the Evangelical/Pentecostal profile created or encouraged, but certainly highlighted, the churches’ political divide along the lines of the two-party system: the ‘liberal’ historic churches as PNP aligned, the ‘conservative’ Evangelical/Pentecostals as JLP aligned.

12.1.5 In conversation with some Evangelical/Pentecostals, among the issues they raised were: a) they viewed the historic churches’ JCC acting as mouthpiece and representative for the entire church in Jamaica as a form of neo-colonialism; b) their non-engagement with the ecumenism represented by JCC was due, at least in part,

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<sup>87</sup> <https://nationaldayofprayerja.wordpress.com/about/>

to a belief that it is biblically and theologically liberal; c) they worry that ecumenism with its emphasis on organic unity, leads inexorably to Rome and to eventual papal control; d) they were pleased that the breadth of the Jamaican Church had been recognised in the forming of the Jamaica Umbrella Groups of Churches (JUGC).

12.1.6 It was concerns over persistently high levels crime on the island that was the catalyst for bringing representatives of the major umbrella/ecumenical groups together in 2006 to consider proposals based on researched evidence concerning the scale of the problem.<sup>88</sup> The inter-church initiative was also the product behind the scenes, working by church leaders determined to build a coalition of church unity broad enough to make decisive intervention to reduce crime and violence levels for a more peaceful and prosperous Jamaica. The resulting framework, the Jamaica Umbrella Groups of Churches (JUGC), is described below: -

Members of the Jamaica Umbrella Groups of Churches:

- 1) Jamaica Council of Churches
- 2) Jamaica Association of Full Gospel Churches
- 3) Jamaica Pentecostal Union
- 4) Jamaica Evangelical Alliance
- 5) Jamaica Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
- 6) Church of God in Jamaica
- 7) The Independent Churches of Jamaica

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<sup>88</sup> <http://gradworks.umi.com/34/55/3455165.html>

12.1.7 In a move towards formalisation, the following draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was being considered: -

### **Jamaica Umbrella Groups of Churches**

#### **Memorandum of Understanding (Draft)**

- *The Heads of Umbrella Groups will organize themselves into a formal structure and shall be known as the Jamaica Umbrella Groups of Churches.*
- *Each Umbrella Group will maintain its autonomy.*
- *Leadership of the body will be rotated among the Heads and shall be for a period of one (1) year.*
- *The Group will work towards better understanding among churches by seeking ongoing opportunities for fellowship and dialogue among Heads of the Umbrella Groups.*
- *The Group will encourage member denominations and congregations to become more intentional in building positive bonds of partnership and relationship characterized by mutual respect so that the witness of the Church will be enhanced.*
- *The Group will work towards bringing a prophetic and pastoral voice and perspective in addressing issues (socio-political, moral/ethical, economic, etc) in a united way while respecting the right of each body to speak on its own behalf.*
- *The Group will endeavour to consult with, and seek consensus among each other before issuing public statements, engage in public debate or holding formal dialogue with public servants on issues of national significance’.*

Like the initiative started in 1910 that led eventually to the launch of the JCC in 1941, progress here appeared to have been slow. Not only had the MoU not yet been signed, but the meeting I attended discussed the opening of a bank account, ten years after the launch of the initiative. Significantly, the JUGC as an umbrella of umbrellas, was estimated to represent up to 99% of all Christian churches in Jamaica.<sup>89</sup> This was stoutly contested in another meeting I attended; because of a perceived lack of buy-in from individuals and member congregations of the sub-umbrella groups. In my experience this challenge can be made against almost all ecumenical groups. Were the JUGC to stay true to a commitment, present since 1910, to address not only spiritual, ecclesial and moral/ethical matters, but also socio-political, and economic too, it could bode well for Jamaica.

12.1.8 I suspect the Achilles heel of the JUGC may be three-fold. First, the ability and/or willingness of the seven sub-umbrella group members, themselves operating on tight budgets and high levels of volunteering, to resource the new project, particularly to finance it. My UK colleague Dr R David Muir is fond of saying, 'money is a sacrament of commitment'. Since ten years on JUGC did not have a bank account, I surmise that the level of sustained financial commitment necessary to maintain an ecumenical organisation has yet to be properly tested. Second, whether the leaders of the JCC will be able to hold the line with their historic churches members who were used to the limelight and the place of national leadership among the churches in Jamaica. If the JUGC is to succeed, it will assume much of the public space occupied until recently by the JCC. I have heard concerns in some quarters that the JUGC, though more representative of the Jamaican Church than

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<sup>89</sup> [http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/Church-gets-a-bigger-umbrella\\_10361455](http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/Church-gets-a-bigger-umbrella_10361455)

the JCC, would replace a liberal public face and voice with conservative ones which did not bode well for public discourse on issues such as gender and sexuality. Third, some in the historic churches are not convinced that the individuals and organisations now sharing the leadership of the JUGC have the necessary training and skills to operate in the spheres of power and influence they now find themselves. As one said to me, 'just turning up at meetings is not enough'; the new ecumenical kids on the block will need to offer more than a ministry of presence. These were early days, but I sensed that while the first ten years may have helped to deepen relationships, much more *koinonia* and convincing was needed as well as the rolling out of a programme that reflects the concerns that brought the JUGC into being in 2006: addressing unacceptable levels of crime and violence in 'Jamaica, land we love'.

12.1.9 In addition to the work of umbrella groups, there existed also self-organising networks of ministers fraternal throughout Jamaica. The system had its roots in the work of the JCC; but was now operating across the churches; fostering fellowship, networking, prayer, and local activism for community development. They encouraged pulpit swaps and other interdenominational exchanges. Somewhat different from Fraternal, but similar in cross-denominational activism were mission focussed initiatives like Street Pastors; some diasporan interchurch initiatives, local groups such as the Hope Area Church Organisation (HACO), a community development project I visited in Kingston; and I suspect some I did not meet. HACO represented a good example of churches in an area tackling local issues cross-denominationally, with the challenges such work posed. Also, the University of the

West Indies (UWI) chapel<sup>90</sup> operated ecumenically by Anglican, Roman Catholic, Methodist, United Church, Baptist, Moravian and more recently by Pentecostal denominations leading each week's services.<sup>91</sup> The Sunday I visited, it was the turn of the Baptists,<sup>92</sup> which was followed later that afternoon by a Pentecostal-led service.

12.1.10 The United Theological College of the West Indies (UTCWI), my base during my sabbatical, is the sole ecumenically owned training college I came across. Sponsored by the 'historic' churches in the Caribbean, it provided theological training and education in the reformed-liberal tradition of those churches. UTCWI though a small college operated as de-facto the theology faculty of the University of the West Indies, and was strategically located within walking distance of the Mona campus of UWI. Another college providing theological training ecumenically was the Jamaican Theological Seminary (JTS), although owned by the Missionary Church of Jamaica. JTS's provided theological training and education, in the main, for Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. I heard much about denominational sub-degree and tertiary education taking place in the churches and this could bode well for UTCWI and JTS if existing pathways are enhanced and broadened.

12.1.11 Another factor contributing to ecumenism in Jamaica has been the innovation of the Caribbean Conference of Churches (CCC). When launched in the 1960s it was viewed as part of a pan-Caribbean socio-political project by the

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<sup>90</sup> I was reliably informed that this chapel was constructed meticulously from the remains of a winery (need to find out more from Trevor Edwards et al). Thereby signifying being filled with the Spirit.

<sup>91</sup> <http://www.mona.uwi.edu/secretariat/node/4> (get pic of chapel at this link)

<sup>92</sup> The service was led by Rev Trevor Edwards, Lecturer at United Theological College of the West Indies and Baptist Chaplain at the University of the West Indies.

churches. Dayfoot considered it as marking a major turning point in Caribbean Christian history.<sup>93</sup> The CCC opened offices in several Caribbean countries, including Jamaica, and engaged in wide-ranging social justice work across the Caribbean; also publishing a series Caribbean Hymnals, the last in 1981.<sup>94</sup> A change in international political climate, post-Cold War, seemed to have precipitated the near closure of the CCC as the World Council of Churches' funding was not renewed. The CCC closed all but one of its offices leaving just one, in Trinidad. The closure of the Jamaica office resulted in the JCC having to relocate as it was housed by the CCC. A scaled-down JCC has been able to continue operating from a new location.

#### 12.1.12 Summary

How one judged the state of ecumenism in Jamaica depended largely on one's vantage point. Many, not all, for whom ecumenism was the inter-church project led by the World Council of Churches, on which national ecumenical models like the JCC were based and for which 'visible unity' was the goal, tended to express dismay at the state of ecumenical affairs;<sup>95</sup> disappointed that the ecumenical project that spawned the United Church for example appeared to have run aground on the rocks of denominational bureaucracy and pride, lack of funding, and a rise in ecumenical visibility of churches hitherto seemingly uninvolved in ecumenism. Many from

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<sup>93</sup> Dayfoot, p1. Dayfoot links the formation of the Caribbean Council of Churches in 1973 with the move towards independence of larger Caribbean countries including Jamaica in 1962, the beginning of the Roman Catholic's Second Vatican Council, the merger of the International Missionary Council with the World Council of Churches in 1962.

<sup>94</sup> Prescod, Patrick ed., *Sing a new song No3*, Barbados: Cedar Press, Caribbean Council of Churches, 1981

<sup>95</sup> This disappointment was evident in a report by Dr Marjorie Lewis, former worker with the Caribbean Conference of Churches, and former General Secretary with the Jamaica Council of Churches in a recent report to GETI (explain); and Rev Marvia Lawes, Jamaican public theologian and broadcaster who spoke at an ecumenical colloquium I attended and began by declaring, circa 'Ecumenism in Jamaica is dead'.

Evangelical/Pentecostal churches that had historically not participated in the European-led ecumenical movement, but instead pursued their own forms of inter-church relations, tended to have a much more positive assessment of the current ecumenical situation in Jamaica. The then Chair of the JCC told me that whilst he recognised there were concerns among some of his historic churches constituency about possible loss of ground in the new arrangements, he believed sufficient movement had occurred to look to the future with brighter hope.

As we have seen some of the Evangelical/Pentecostal inter-church groups had been in operation for decades yet were only just, with the establishing of the JUGC, finding a place on the national church representative platform alongside the JCC. Time will tell how the new arrangements fare, but with the new Prime Minister, Andrew Holness, calling for partnership with the churches there may exist an opportune moment for churches, ministers fraternal and umbrella groups, facilitated by the JUGC to contribute even more together to strategic and grassroots leadership in Jamaica responding to the spiritual, socio-economic and political challenges of the nation. In the long run a well-resourced JUGC, leading a programme that is able to stimulate ecumenical action at national and local levels to deepen Christian communion and inspire churches to engage together in mission, is a noble aim.

### 13. Conclusion

This paper raises more questions than it even attempts to answer. My two months on my birth island revealed a Jamaica slowly making progress against overwhelming odds in a postcolonial context. 'Rain a fall but dutty tuff' sums up much of the social, economic and political situation: some are having a great time but it's hard for the many. It is into this situation that a plethora of churches exist needing to be as 'salt and light' the agents of change for the people of Jamaica. The great diversity of the church is supported by ecumenical agencies that are necessary to ensure effective working of the church as a body delivering its mission in the country. Having raised several questions here I want to offer a few suggestions that may assist transformative ecumenical workings for the development of Jamaica as a place of flourishing for all its citizens.

- Churches should hold the spiritual, social, economic and political condition of the nation and their locality constantly before God and the people, included in prayer, liturgy, reflection and action; recognising the Church has a significant role to play in nation-building. The condition of the poor and still oppressed of Jamaica demands this; and the use of the worship space as an incubator of creativity for the wellbeing of the people may be crucial to developmental progress. For example prayer should not be for healing and spiritual salvation alone, but for education, jobs, entrepreneurialism and creative ideas for advancement
- The churches and ecumenical organisations should throw their weight behind the Reparations Movement as a key way to inject much needed infrastructural support to help build the island's capacity to cater for the needs and aspirations of the Jamaican people, in particular its youth.

- Churches should live with and constantly express their sense of belonging to the one Church of Jesus Christ and that identity as *Christian* and *Church* has a higher and defining status than any denominational status
- Churches should never lose sight that the mission of the church is the mission of God to bring holistic spiritual and literal liberation (salvation) to the people of Jamaica.
- Churches should recognise that Jamaica, having undergone almost five hundred years of slavery, colonialism, ethnic and cultural engineering faces significant challenges in independence not least in throwing off the yoke of mental enslavement and colonial mindset. Churches should therefore make every effort to become truly indigenous to Jamaica.
- Churches should welcome the emergence of the Jamaica Umbrella Groups of Churches as the main national instrument for Christian fellowship, action, leadership and representation. At the same time other forms of ecumenism should be nurtured and valued.
- Churches should work with theologians and religious leaders on the island, facilitated by the Jamaica Umbrella Groups of Churches, to develop a Jamaican Theology.
- In recognition of the relationships that have been formed during my sabbatical in Jamaica, and those that predate it, I propose for mutual learning an exchange visit of ecumenists and church leaders led by the Jamaica Umbrella Groups of Churches and Churches Together in England, during 2017 and 2018.
- The JUGC should include in its role, the encouragement and support of other forms of ecumenism occurring in the nation, as it leads on a national programme

including such as developing interdenominational liturgy, a Jamaican Theology, etc.

- Where good practice exists already, ecumenical bodies could help to communicate them to the wider church.

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