
**FAITH
TRANSFORMING
CONTEXT: IN
SEARCH OF A
THEOLOGY FOR
A VIABLE
CARIBBEAN***

by
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Introduction

Christian faith is a ferment of transformation. What it seeks to achieve first and foremost is the transformation of reality in accordance with God's ideal for life. Its aim is the removal of what is and its replacement by what ought to be (II Cor. 5: 17; Rev. 21: 3-5).

Now the shift from the real to the ideal does not occur by fiat or instantly; rather it involves a process whose completion is eschatological. But the gradualness of faith's *modus operandus* must not be mistaken for the postponement of the transformational process, or the uncertainty of its fulfillment (II Pet. 3: 3ff). Wherever genuine faith is firmly rooted, transformation is under way, however imperceptible it may be to the naked eye. Understood in this way then, faith generates and nurtures hope. Faith is never pessimistic.

But to be transforming, faith must not be muzzled. The faith that transforms is a faith that is communicated in its genuineness, freed from cultural captivity, delivered from ideological enslavement, and is brought to bear on reality with power and incisiveness. Faith has the power to be iconoclastic and creative, but to be so, it must be allowed to be faith.

Faith, however, does not impact reality in a direct and unmediated way. Faith reaches reality *via* theological interpretation. As a link between faith and reality, theology reflects on faith, explains and relates it to reality. The way in which faith affects reality therefore is contingent on the strength of the theological articulation it receives. For example, a theological understanding that restricts faith's province to the realm of the private and the immaterial severely limits its effectiveness. A faith that is kept aloof from reality cannot change it no matter how powerful it may be.

By the same token any conceptualization that merges faith with the context in a manner that alters its content, downplays its claims and nullifies its uniqueness, dulls its challenging edge and reduces its potency. When faith is diluted in reality it loses its critical and corrective force. In such cases faith appears weak and ineffective, but in reality it is the theology that mediates it that is impotent and not faith itself.¹

Hope lies in the expectation of change. Where the possibility of change is removed, despair reigns. If, then, theology is to inspire hope it must do two things. First, it must maintain the integrity of faith. That is, it must be a faithful servant of faith. Second, it must engage faith with reality. It must allow faith to confront the context concretely, pointedly and specifically. The theology that facilitates faith's transforming function is perforce contextual. Its task is to articulate the relevance and implications of faith for a particular socio-historical milieu. Its role is to accentuate the facets of faith that address pertinently the concerns of a given context.

To say this is to acknowledge a great difficulty with this assignment. Our task calls for an analysis of the Caribbean reality and the presentation in broad strokes of a theology that might assist in its transformation. The problem is that the Caribbean reality is not homogeneous but complex and multifaceted. Hence no one theology can accomplish this task satisfactorily. All that can be attempted here is to identify some overarching and trans-contextual issues and suggest how theology might bring faith to bear on them. No definiteness is claimed for this effort. It is very much a search.²

The issues which will be identified in the course of an analysis of the Caribbean context will all relate to the overall concern of the Caribbean at this time, namely its viability. The Caribbean faces enormous challenges which have led many to wonder whether it will survive. It will be argued that survival and viability are possible goals, and efforts toward these objectives can be enhanced if due consideration is given to certain aspects of the Christian understanding of creation, redemption, stewardship and providence.

Strength Through Solidarity

The Caribbean region is amazingly diverse and stubbornly intricate. Its history of slavery, colonialism, and neo-colonialism has left a legacy of heterogeneity that manifests itself at every level of Caribbean life.

Culturally, it is justified to speak at least of five 'Caribbeans'. There is a French, English, Dutch, Spanish and Creole Caribbean. These cultural groupings are delineated linguistically and with the exception of

the Creole Caribbean, they relate much more comfortably with their respective extra-regional cultural counterparts than to one another.

Geographically, the long history of domination of the region by foreign powers, and their fight over the Caribbean spoils have resulted in a ridiculously truncated region. One is baffled by the further splintering of what the sea had already sliced off into thin and miniscule portions. Hence islands and islets which should naturally be grouped together by virtue of their geographical proximity are isolated one from the other because politically or culturally they fall under the aegis of different outside powers. This atomizing and isolating phenomenon manifests itself even within individual geographical units—large or small.²

Politically, the Caribbean 'represent[s] a unique and challenging experience in the history of mankind'.³ The level of political fragmentation encountered there is unmatched anywhere else. The general political configuration of the region at the moment consists of independent states, associated states, and dependencies.⁴ Naturally, the orientation, interest and perception of these groupings seldom cohere. But even within the political subgroupings, there are several factors that militate against Caribbean cross-fertilization. One thinks of the sea, divergence of cultural and linguistic traditions, size of population, level of economic development, ideological leanings, lack of trust, differing political aspirations, and so on.⁵ One consequence of this history of isolation is a region virtually closed to itself. Its thirty-one million inhabitants may be neighbours, but in reality they are by and large strangers.

But in recent years, economic realities both inside and outside the region have led to some stirrings towards regional integration. It has dawned on many persons in the region that in this age of large regional economic blocs, the Caribbean with its small mini-states and territories⁶ will be even less viable than it is now unless it comes together and presents a unified and common front to the world. Isolated from each other, and confronted with a growing erosion of support from their traditional allies, many of the region's territories are weak and vulnerable. It has become evident more than ever that Caribbean cooperation is a necessity.⁷

It need not be said that the current trend toward integration is encouraging. However, it is not pessimistic to say that in light of the prevailing culture of isolation that we have analyzed above, Caribbean unity, however much desired, will probably be a lengthy process which will take us well into the third millennium. Our claim here is that Christian faith can make a unique contribution to the fulfillment of the Caribbean people's aspiration for togetherness.

In stark contrast to the prevailing mood of individualism and the concentration on narrow self-interest, Christian faith espouses a communitarian vision of life. It is a vision which eschews indifference and callousness but instead advocates responsibility for mutual safekeeping. In the Christian perspective, we *are* our brother's keepers.

There are at least two aspects of the faith that speak to this with particular force. The first is the Christian view of creation. In a decisive departure from pagan theology, biblical revelation affirms not only the singleness of God but also his universality. The Christian God is not only not many, he is also not parochial. Everything falls within his purview. His sovereignty and judgement are all-embracing (Acts 17:24-28; Isa. 13-27). He formed the earth, adorned it, providentially and gratuitously ordered it for the dwelling of humanity (Acts 17:26; 14:16, 17). As the Lord of the earth, he allocates national boundaries (Deut. 2:5, 9, 16; 32:8), determines periods for the rise and fall of nations (Dan. 2, 7) and sovereignly deploys them for the fulfillment of his purpose (Isa. 19: 19-25; 45: 1ff; Hab. 1:5-11). The earth then is not the personal property of humankind but a common inheritance. At a time of ethnic strife and high nationalistic spirit, the implications of this concept need to be explored, although the scope of this work does not allow for this. Suffice it to say here that as beneficiaries of a common bequest, there must be a bond that binds the inhabitants of the planet—the Caribbean people included.

But the Christian view of God goes deeper. God's exercise of universal sovereignty is grounded in the pervasiveness of his creative activity. The Lord of heaven and earth is the creator of all that exists generally, and humankind particularly. To all he gives life, breath and all things. In him humans move, live and have their beings (Acts 17:25-27). Humanity therefore shares not only a common trust but a common origin as well. All 'descended from one common ancestor'.⁸ Creatively speaking, God is the Father of all (Eph. 3:14, 15). Now those who share a common kinship, and depend on a common source for their sustenance are usually conscious of their ties and endeavour to maintain them despite obstacles.

The second aspect of the Christian faith which is particularly relevant for the Caribbean search for togetherness is the doctrine of redemption. The unity that lies potentially in creation, redemption has sought to actualize. The purpose of God's saving act is quality living *in community*, not in isolation. Biblical revelation makes it abundantly clear that what God sought to achieve in intervening redemptively into history is the gathering of a *people* unto himself (I Pet. 2:9). In the divine purpose, this people is to constitute a well-knit family enjoying

filial relationship with God and forming a universal brotherhood among themselves. Both the old and the new covenants are agreed that although peculiar, the redeemed company is not to be an elite and exclusive group. It is to be very much cosmopolitan (Matt. 28:19ff; Rev. 7:9). Indeed, the divine intention is that the entire human race would be that redeemed people (John 3:16, 17; I Tim. 2:3-6; I John 2:2).

Within the redeemed commonwealth, there is to be a levelling of relationships (Gal. 3:28). That is why one of the objectives that God sought to accomplish through the cross is the breaking down of barriers that formerly alienated people (Eph. 2:14-19). Where redemption is experienced, then, there ought to be a transcending of man made obstacles—a transcending that clears the way for genuine human solidarity.

Solidarity is not an ideal pursued for its own sake and devoid of practical import. The praxis of the people of God throughout history has shown that when people stand together in solidarity they increase their strength and accomplish much even in the face of incredible odds. Thus, partly through unity of purpose and cooperative effort, an almost destitute people freshly delivered from slavery constructed a splendid structure as a symbol of the presence of God in their midst (Exod. 35-40). Partly through unity of intention and concentrated effort, a band of returning exiles rebuilt the broken walls of Jerusalem in the face of much discouragement, ridicule and open opposition (Neh. 4, 6, 7). Again, partly through their solidarity, the numerically insignificant and embattled first Christian church withstood intense and sustained hostility, carried out its evangelistic and missionary mandate, and provided for the material and spiritual needs of all within its ranks (Acts 2:43-47; 4:32-35).

These examples are instructive. Within the framework of a relationship characterized by solidarity, the diversity which is now seen as the Achilles heel of the Caribbean region may well become its strength.

Collective Well-Being Through Faithful Stewardship

The arrival of the Europeans in the Caribbean at the end of the 15th century drastically transformed economic life in the region. Prior to Columbus' visit the Caribbean was looking inwards and economically self-sufficient. The people who originally populated the region moved about from territory to territory and gained their livelihood exclusively from what was produced in the region. Since the 1500s, however, economic activity in the Caribbean has been ordered in a fashion that suits mainly the demands of the outside world. One consequence of this

change in orientation has been an economic dependency that has not only undermined the well-being of the region's inhabitants, but now threatens the very viability of the area itself.

'From the very outset the Europeans had defined their Caribbean possessions as places that were meant to satisfy the home demand for tropical staples.'⁹ In line with this policy, they quickly converted the region into 'their primary sphere of tropical colonial exploitation'.¹⁰ Hence, by the early 1500s the Caribbean became Europe's foremost producer of tropical goods.¹¹ As the 18th century drew to a close, 'the region reached the peak of its development as mercantilist Europe's foremost colonial sphere'.¹² In the 19th century, the Caribbean became economically and geopolitically significant to North America as well.

The second half of the 20th century saw a number of territories gaining their independence from their colonial masters. But even for these newly independent nations the situation has not changed significantly. Many continue to operate servant economies.¹³ And they not only continue to be closely linked to the needs of the outside world, but as in the days of old they continue to benefit a select few. As it was during the colonial era, so today, whatever prosperity there is in the region seems to be enjoyed in the main by the predominantly non-black minority while poverty keeps chasing the mainly black majority. This economic imbalance has prompted an observer of the Caribbean scene to remark that 'there is nothing with which poverty coincides so absolutely as with the colour black—small or large population, hot or cold climates, rich or poor in natural resources—poverty cuts across all of these factors in order to find black people'.¹⁴

As this century draws to a close, one of the most daunting challenges the Caribbean faces is to 'find ways to effect profound systematic changes that will lead to an improvement in the material conditions of [its] citizens'.¹⁵ This challenge takes on even greater proportions when considered in light of the fact that in recent years the powers that were largely responsible for the present shape of the region have joined forces to create a new economic order that makes little or no room for their former colonies.¹⁶ With their traditional products no longer considered coveted items by the dwellers of the metropolises, the region's independent territories are facing a real crisis.

Based on the conviction that Christian faith is not a speculative faith but one that addresses itself to matters which touch life in all its concreteness, we find it legitimate to search for insights that Christian faith might contribute to the satisfaction of the Caribbean people's longing for material well-being. My questioning of the faith leads me to suggest three lines of thought for further probing.

First, if we begin with the assumption that Christian faith does not espouse a pessimistic stance toward life, we must refrain from assessing the current predicament in totally negative terms. While adhering to a sober realism, we must search for the possibilities that are latent in it and exploit them to the fullest. It may well be that the abandonment of the region by its former masters is a *kairos* that should be seized for renewal and transformation. Inherent in it may be the opportunity to break decisively with an old and worn-out order and to begin a new dispensation with better promise for the future.

Second, if we take seriously the notion that the earth is owned by God and is bequeathed to humanity by him, we will consider whatever portion of it we occupy a sacred trust of which we are stewards. As stewards, it behooves us to appreciate the trust and to manage it faithfully and diligently (Matt. 25:14-30). To discard and mismanage the trust is to show contempt for the Giver and prove ourselves unworthy of it (Matt. 25:24, 25).

Appreciation for the trust and worthiness of it are shown by handling it in such a way that it fulfills more fully the purpose for which it was created, namely, the enhancement of human well-being. Having been made God's collaborators, our greater enjoyment of his gift is contingent upon our faithful discharge of the mandate to 'work it and to care for it' (Gen. 2:15). In a real sense our welfare depends on what we do with the gift (Matt. 25:24-30).

I am not here suggesting that the Caribbean people have been delinquent in the fulfillment of this responsibility. They have not. But due to factors that they could not control their obedience was misplaced. For centuries they have laboured in the building of other lands for the enjoyment of other people. The possibility of the present predicament consists in the opportunity that it offers them to rise and start building their own share of the bequest for their own well-being. The Caribbean was once prosperous. And the prosperity came about through the hard work of the poor and underprivileged. If its people come together, prosperity may return. There will be difficulties and even obstacles, but this undertaking is God-ordained, hence with determination, diligence, discipline, and God's help, it will succeed (Ezra 3, 4, 6; Neh. 3, 4, 5, 6).

Thirdly, more fundamental than the foregoing is faith's insistence that well-being be a collective experience. Nations can be mobilized to create and amass wealth but in the perspective of Christian faith unless such wealth results in the improvement of life for the collectivity it falls far short of the divine intention. The concern of Christian faith is not economic prosperity *per se*, but prosperity which serves human well-being. Prosperity which coexists with human wretchedness is

scandalous. For the *raison d'être* of things material is not accumulation but the satisfaction of needs.

God's ideal is a poverty free society (Gen. 2:28:31; Deut. 15:4; Rev. 7:9-17). Now this ideal may not be fully realizable at this time due to the prevailing condition of fallenness. But biblical faith refuses to settle for its total negation. Rather, it pushes for the mitigation of the reality brought about by the Fall.¹⁷ Until its full actualization, faith strives for an economic relationship driven by an equalizing vision. In the here and now, faith cries out for a social order that promotes collective well-being, not simply through the exploitation of God's gifts, but more importantly through the avoidance of extremes of wealth and poverty.

Critical to the realization of this vision is a commitment to social justice and the practice of economic sharing. As Ronald Sider has shown, taken together, these virtues ensure a more equitable distribution of wealth, guard against marginalization, and in so doing maintain dignity and humanity. Where they are lacking, inequity prevails, suffering and despoliation abound, God is offended, and intervenes in judgement.¹⁸

Personhood Grounded in the Divine Yes

Racially and demographically the transformation and the divide created by the past in the Caribbean are no less striking. As a consequence of Columbus' visit, the Caribbean ceased being a uni-racial society and became a multi-racial one. Now there is nothing wrong with multi-racialism, but the manner in which it was introduced in the region was meant to foster divisiveness, strife and a poor sense of self.

Having destroyed most of the Amerindian population through hard labour and unfamiliar diseases only fifty years after their arrival the colonizers quickly replaced the decimated population with black slaves shipped mainly from the West Coast of Africa through the infamous slave trade. When that traffic in people came to an end centuries later, indentured workers were brought into the region from India, China and several other places to meet the labour shortage created in the aftermath of emancipation. But in the mind of the colonizers the newcomers were to provide more than labour. They were to be the means whereby white domination would be perpetuated. The hope was that 'the division of race, religion, language and culture could prevent the people from ever effectively uniting against white control'.¹⁹ Hence utilizing the tactic of divide and rule, the planters kept the dominated groups at odds with one another, doing 'what they could to discourage cooperation between the races'.²⁰

The social consequences of this practice has been a racial and ethnic eclecticism devoid of any cementing ethos. The region accommodates a

vast array of races, ethnicities and various shades of pigmentation resulting from centuries of continuous biological mixture. Knight and Palmer rightly assert that the Caribbean is 'an unusual collection of societies with a population that is different from any other region in the world'.²¹ Harboured virtually all the major ethnic groups in the world, the Caribbean has become a real microcosm.

The manoeuvre employed by the colonizers was very successful. The seed of mistrust they sowed did result in an ethnically fractured region. Rather than a relatively homogeneous group the Caribbean, in the main, has become a complex form of overlapping division of class and race.²² And the practice has done even greater damage. It is at the root of a crisis of identity which manifests itself at both the personal and collective level.

At the personal level those who were subjected to centuries of racial and cultural devaluation have found it difficult to shake off the feelings of self doubt, self depreciation and even self-hate they have come to accept as normal. As long as this mindset persists a positive self-concept cannot be formed. But who can move forward without this basic asset?

At the collective level, the forging of a regional consciousness is no less formidable. During this century there has been a serious search for authentic Caribbeaness. But in this amazingly plural society consensus has so far proved elusive. There are those who advocate Eurocentricity as the cultural ideal toward which we should strive. Others, contending that this would amount to a prolongation of the colonial past, propose *mulatez* as an alternative.²³ But while *mulatez* may appear appealing due to its transracial character, it is no more representative than Eurocentricity. Ethnically it is a minority and culturally it can be as detached from mainstream Caribbean life as Eurocentricity.

In a region with a predominantly black population, it is not surprising that blackness, in its various formulations, has been proposed as an index of identity. Ideologically, whether presented in the form of *Negrismo*, Black Power, Rastafarianism, or *Negritude*, the emphasis falls on a call for an appreciation of, and sensitivity to, black cultural uniqueness, including a recovery and a defence of African roots. Certainly black consciousness has many virtues, but as an index of regional identity, blackness is not without its problems. As has been pointed out by many Caribbean thinkers, the understanding of black culture and the retrieval and defence of African ancestry that are advocated often display a generalizing tendency which is idealistic.²⁴ Often one finds an appeal 'to a transhistorical negro essence, which tends to overlook "national particularity" and "historical

concreteness”²⁵ Further, although blackness is more representative than the other concepts, it still falls short of being inclusive.

The difficulties inherent in these ethnically specific proposals have led many thinkers to call for something more culturally syncretic and regionally comprehensive. Caribbeaness they rightly maintain must be socio-ethnically inclusive.²⁶ But herein lies the challenge. How are we to arrive at a conceptuality that accommodates *both* national specificity *and* pan-Caribbean resonance, both ethnic particularity *and* cultural manifoldness? This question is yet to be answered. Surely the ideal is one that is worth pursuing, but probably it will be some time before it is reached—if ever.

Our purpose here is not to offer yet another proposal for Caribbean identity. Rather, the argument of this section is that in the perspective of Christian faith, neither the racial and cultural devaluation that many inhabitants of the region have suffered, nor the deficit of corporate consciousness which is felt at regional level needs result in an inhibiting crisis of identity. Although Christian faith acknowledges the appropriateness of a sense of racial and cultural belonging (Rom. 9:11), it assigns to it only a penultimate place in the definition of human identity (Matt. 12:46ff). For Christian faith the ultimate locus of identity is the divine affirmation extended to every human being irrespective of race and culture.

God's unqualified yes to us is loudly expressed in creation and redemption. Earlier we attempted to spell out the significance of these doctrines for Caribbean solidarity. Here we would like to maintain that this twin theological concept shows God as being particularly significant for human existence. Rightly understood, the Christian concepts of creation and redemption provide a sufficient ground and an adequate anchorage for the formation of a positive self-concept.

Christian faith is emphatic in its assertion that the human person is a creature endowed with intrinsic value and worth. Worth is an innate attribute which is in no way related to the accidents of birth, level of intelligence, and record of achievements. It is a gift granted to all who qualify to bear the epithet “human”. The gift is shared by the learned and the unschooled, the ‘savage’ and the civilized, the wealthy and the poor, the religious and the profane, the child and the adult, the bed-ridden sick and the healthy, the black, the brown, the yellow, the red and the white.

In the history of humankind, there is no one who upheld the dignity of human beings better than Jesus himself—the ideal Man. His very taking on of human flesh was an eloquent statement of the value of human nature. ‘The incarnation of the Son of God is the great and ultimate proof of the importance of man...[It] confirms the value of man

in God's eyes...'²⁷ He was emphatic that nothing in the world can compete with the value of human beings. For to gain the world and forfeit oneself is nothing short of a real disaster. Our materialistic culture may not appreciate the import and weight of this stance, but underlying it, is a solid and irrevocable ontological assumption: in *essence* the human being knows no superior except God himself.

Jesus said that the reason for his coming into the world was to serve the world. He gave substance to this claim by the vast array of service he rendered to humanity. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, taught the ignorant, lifted the spirit of the brokenhearted, defended the victimized and, most importantly, died for humanity.

To say that God Incarnate died for humanity is to say a great deal about the value that he places on it. Would he die for worthless nobodies? But God's redemptive act was not merely a grandiose statement designed to provide a psychological lift to depressed humans. No. Redemption is meant to impact fundamentally the ontological status of human beings. To experience it is to become a new creation (II Cor. 5:17). To respond positively to God's overture of love is to be automatically elevated to a status hitherto unknown: sons and daughters of God (Gal. 4:4ff). This is no trivial matter. The mere thought of it prompted John the apostle to exclaim, 'How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God' (I John 3:1).

But on what basis can the dignity of humanity be affirmed? On one thing only: God's assessment of humankind. It is God himself who through creation endowed humanity with dignity. He made human beings the apex of the whole created order by sharing with them something of his own nature, his image and likeness. In the order of creation, humanity is second only to God (Psa. 8:5).²⁸ Small wonder then that God has made human beings his vice-regents, thus granting them a measure of sovereignty (Gen. 1:27ff).

Significant as this is, it is the divine image we bear which gives us our distinctive value. William Temple expressed it well when he wrote, 'My worth is what I am worth to God, and that is a marvellous great deal, for Christ died for me.'²⁹ The truth that Temple expressed from the perspective of redemption, a young black American enunciated colourfully and enthusiastically from the standpoint of creation. In protest against the feelings of inferiority that were being inculcated in him by white racists, he posted a banner in his room with the words: 'I'm me and I'm good 'cause God don't make no junk.'³⁰ He couldn't be more correct theologically.

Through creation and redemption God affirms *all*. He issued an identity card to all, acknowledging them as his descendants and himself

as their common Originator. He further confirms their intrinsic worth by refusing to confirm them in their fallenness and by seeking them redemptively in Christ and inviting them to enter into an intimate relationship with him.

This removes all justification for the belief in ethnic prejudice. F. F. Bruce has said, 'Neither in nature nor in grace—neither in the old creation nor in the new—is there any room for ideas of racial superiority'.³¹ Bruce is certainly right. But I would add that there is here no room for a feeling of racial inferiority or a sense of "nobodiness".

Hope Sustained By Faith in Divine Providence

As we stand on the threshold of the third millennium, hope is not the prevailing mood of the Caribbean people. Living in a context characterized by material scarcity and deprivation, many lose confidence in the capacity of the region to contribute meaningfully to the actualization of their potential, and the fulfillment of their being. Considering the limitations of the opportunities it offers, they rule out summarily its ability to facilitate the realization of human aspirations, and to convert dreams into reality. The prevailing outlook considers the negativity of the present too formidable to be conquered by any positivity that might arise in the future. There is a strong skepticism as to whether the darkness that now prevails can be dissipated by the light that may shine from the future.

In the view of many influential Caribbean writers, the unfitness of the Caribbean context to promote human fulfillment is rooted in the nature of the Caribbean experience itself. Put succinctly, the Caribbean experience is that of a disparate band dislodged from its original habitat, transplanted and scattered into a new, hostile and incoherently constituted environment, divested of the assets of peoplehood, and abandoned to fashion a future. For many, this experience, characterized as it is by violation of self and divestment of being, is devoid of any historical basis. It has no positive content and thus cannot constitute the basis for any new departure. Void is the only starting point. But what can result from emptiness except nothingness?

Vidia S. Naipaul, for example, is emphatic that 'Nothing' was created in the West Indies, so Nothing is all that can ever be created there.³² Obviously, an existence which is historyless throughout and hemmed in by nothingness is purposeless, directionless and futile. Orlando Patterson makes this plain in his *An Absence of Ruins*. In that work Patterson puts on the lips of curious Londoners questions of identity, origin and destiny for a Caribbean man whom they saw

wandering about their city. In his answer, the wanderer could not be more forthright about the rootlessness, absurdity and futility of his life:

I came from nowhere worth mentioning. I have no past except the haunting recollection of each passing moment which comes to me always as something having been lost. My ancestors, if they existed, left no record of themselves...I cannot say whether I am civilized or savage, standing as I do outside of race, outside of culture, outside of history, outside of any value that could make your question meaningful. I am busy going nowhere, but I must keep up the appearance of going in order to forget that I am not, so if you'll excuse me, I will be on my way.³³

Derek Walcott, the 1993 Nobel Prize Winner for literature, is much less pessimistic than both Naipaul and Patterson about the capacity of the Caribbean to create, but he is no less certain about the historical deficit and the rootlessness of the region's inhabitants:

Slaves, the children of slaves, colonials, then pathetic, unpunctual nationalists, what have we to celebrate? First we have not wholly sunk into our own landscapes, as one gets the feeling at funerals that our bodies make only light, unlasting impressions on our earth. It is not on earth that has been fed long with the mulch of cultures, with the cycles of tribalisms, feudalism, monarchy, democracy, industrialization. Death, which fosters us to the earth, remains pastoral or brutish, because no simple corpse contributes to some tiered concept of a past.³⁴

If by history one means only a positive past then it may be correct to speak of the Caribbean people as historyless. Admittedly, most of our past is negative. But that deficiency would not be the plight of the Caribbean alone. To some extent being without a history would apply to all people since none can claim a totally positive past. But it is not correct to view history in such a reductionist fashion. History is more inclusive than that. It encompasses the positive, the ambiguous and the negative. While the positive elements lend themselves more readily for the project of peoplehood, the negative features should not be summarily dismissed as useless to the process. Identity and character are formed and fashioned by the impact of both positive and negative emulation.

And in any case while the Caribbean's past may be disproportionately negative, it is not totally bereft of positive elements.

However few they may be, these form a base for a new departure. As intimated earlier, Walcott parted company with many of his contemporaries in affirming the possibility of a new departure. For him historylessness need not lead to futurelessness. Renewal is not only possible, it is a unique opportunity for the Caribbean people.³⁵ We agree with Walcott here, but as will be argued below, providentially even the negative past that he and others disown, may be used constructively in the fashioning of the positive future for which he yearns.

Additionally, if any significance is attached to the fact of God's appointment of humanity as his coregent in the administration of the affairs of this world, it is not farfetched to say that wherever human beings are there is potential for progress and betterment. As Walcott himself wrote in his *Another Life*: 'We were blessed with a virginal, unpainted world/with Adam's task of giving things their names'.³⁶

These considerations by themselves should suffice to temper the prevailing mood of crippling despair and paralyzing hopelessness. But, as hinted at above, an even firmer ground for the anchoring of hope is the Christian notion of divine providence. Providence is a multifaceted, and at points, controversial doctrine. Hence no attempt will be made here to offer a full treatment of it, or to enter the perennial debate.³⁷ Rather, one facet of the doctrine which has particular relevance for our purpose will be chosen for special focus, namely, God's redemptive superintendence.

Redemptive superintendence refers to God's providential working whereby evil happenings are countervailed and prevented from producing their destructive ends. It speaks of God's activity in controlling, counteracting and reorienting the doings of human beings so that they may issue in nobler ends than intended by their authors. It underscores God's ability to astonishingly produce salutary results out of acts which are meant to bring about destructive outcomes.

Redemptive superintendence affirms both God's respect for the free will of people, and his sovereign control over their affairs. God persuades and lures us to behave in accordance with his purpose, but he does not coerce us into obedience. He allows persons to act in ways which oppose his plan but he does not permit evil deeds, however heinous, to produce an outcome which nullifies his ultimate design. Rather, he is at work redirecting the effects of mischievous acts to worthy ends unintended by their perpetrators. Sovereign, 'He overrules for good [even] the crimes of His enemies'.³⁸

Caribbean theologian William Watty has suggested that God was not asleep during the Middle Passage.³⁹ He is correct. But it should be added that he was not asleep during the subsequent dark moments of the Caribbean experience. Nor is he asleep now. And as long as the

superintending God has not left us, there is ground for genuine hope. For in the perspective of Christian faith, imperceptible though it may be, God is always at work countervailing the present negativities so that his purpose may prevail—and his purpose is always good.

Conclusion

As the twenty-first century is about to dawn, the Caribbean region faces enormous challenges. Here and now it must address issues of abiding significance. And the way it handles them will impact its future for ill or good. Surely as Peter Johnson has said, 'the Caribbean is at the Crossroads'.⁴⁰

Our contention throughout this paper is that although the issues are deep-seated and daunting, the region need not crumble under the weight of its problems. Not only can it achieve survival, but viability as well. In this quest for a better future, Christian faith, if allowed, can function as an ally. For example, rightly understood, its concepts of creation and redemption can generate a pull toward togetherness which can be an important source of strength in a region which is known for its weakness. Also, because these notions provide a sufficient basis for the formation of a healthy sense of self, if appropriated, they can help Caribbean people to by-pass their multiracialism and forge an identity 'that goes beyond race'.⁴¹ United, sure of who they are in God's sight, and understanding their role as stewards of God's gift, they are better equipped to set about the task of managing God's trust faithfully for the well-being of all. In the discharge of this God-given mandate, the knowledge that not even a negative past can stand in the way of the fulfillment of God's purpose provides a confidence and a hope that no circumstance can dash.

NOTES

1. Samuel Escobar, *Le Fe Evangelica Y Las Teologias de la Liberacion* (El Paso, Texas: Casa Bautista de Publicaciones, 1987), 24.
2. For example, the island of Hispaniola is divided between French and Creole speaking Haiti, and the Spanish speaking Dominican Republic. The tiny island of St. Maarten is split into a French and Dutch speaking side.
3. Franklin Knight and Colin Palmer, 'The Caribbean' in *The Modern Caribbean*, Franklin Knight and Colin Palmer, eds. (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 1.
4. Franklin Knight, "The Societies of the Caribbean Since Independence" in *Democracy In The Caribbean*, Jorge Dominiquez, Robert Pastor and R.

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Delisle Worrell, eds. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 31.

5. Take the dependent territories for example. There is a strong force in Puerto Rico pushing for the independence of the island, but Grand Cayman and Bermuda seem quite content with their status. Haiti, Jamaica, Cuba and the Dominican Republic are all independent nations sharing the same geographical area. But that does not mean closeness of relationship. Haiti and the Dominican Republic have had a history of political conflict, which continues to impact adversely relations between the two countries. Due to the sea and divergent linguistic traditions interaction between Jamaica, Haiti and the Dominican Republic is minimal. For ideological reasons, interaction with Cuba is at a low ebb.

6. Some of the states and territories have populations of fewer than one hundred people.

7. Attempts at forging a Caribbean unity go back to the late fifties when some of the countries that are part of the Caribbean Commonwealth joined forces to form a federation. The effort was short-lived however; by the early '60s the federation was dissolved. In the early years of the '70s, efforts toward integration resumed and led to the formation of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). Composed almost exclusively of former British colonies, CARICOM is basically a Commonwealth body, although it has recently approved the membership of a former Dutch colony. Other non-English speaking islands are knocking at the door for membership but unsuccessfully thus far. They are only granted observer status.

Recently at the urging of the West Indian Commission, the Association of Caribbean states has been formed. It comprises all of the Caribbean countries and the adjoining South and Central American nations. See The West Indian Commission, *Time For Action* (Kingston, JA.: The Press-University of the West Indies, 1993).

8. F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), 258.

9. Francisco Scarano, 'Labour and Society In The Nineteenth Century' in Franklin Knight and Colin Palmer, *The Modern Caribbean*, 53.

10. *ibid.*

11. *ibid.*

12. *ibid.*, 51.

13. By servant economies I mean economies that exist mainly to supply agricultural goods, raw materials and labour to industrial nations.

14. Walter Rodney cited by Colin Palmer, 'Identity, Race and Black Power in Independent Jamaica' in *Modern Caribbean*, 117-118.
15. Franklin Knight and Colin Palmer, 'The Caribbean' in *The Modern Caribbean*, 18.
16. I am thinking particularly of the formation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the European Single Market. These large trading blocs pose a serious challenge to the competitiveness of the Caribbean by forcing the removal of special concessions the region enjoyed in the past.
17. Ronald Sider makes this point with great force in his *Rich Christians in An Age of Hunger* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984). Sider argues that the point of Old Testament social legislation regarding the Year of Jubilee, the Sabbatical Year, tithing and gleaning was to reduce the economic imbalance that normally results in a system that does not represent God's ideal.
18. *ibid.*
19. Brigitte Brereton, 'Society and Culture in the Caribbean', *The Modern Caribbean*, 96.
20. *ibid.* 97.
21. Knight and Palmer, *The Modern Caribbean*, 1, 2.
22. *ibid.* 7.
23. 'Mulatez' describes the ethnic characteristic resulting from the miscegenation of a Caucasian and a Black.
24. Roberto Marquez, 'Nationalism, Nation and Ideology: Trends in the Emergence of a Caribbean Literature' in *The Modern Caribbean*, 317.
25. *ibid.*
26. Among the proponents of this view mention can be made of Luis Palés Matos of Puerto Rico, Jacques Roumain of Haiti, Walcott of St. Lucia and Edouard Glissant of Martinique. Walcott would like the ethnic melange that is present in the Caribbean to be refashioned in a new humanity that transcends race. For his part Glissant is convinced that the concept of *Antillanité* is the preferred option he calls on the Antilleans to create out of their complex inheritance.
27. Phillip E. Hughes, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 85.

28. In his *The Majesty of Man* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1984), 72, Ronald Allen argues that a more literal rendering of Ps 8:5 is: 'You have made him [man] a little lower than God'.
29. Cited by John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), 282.
30. Related in Stott, *The Cross of Christ.*, 281.
31. F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 358.
32. Cited by Gordon Rohlehr. 'Man's Spiritual Search in the Caribbean Through Literature' in *Troubling of the Waters*, Idris Hamid, ed. (San Fernando: Rahaman, 1973), 188.
33. Orlando Patterson, *An Absence of Ruins* (London: Hutchinson 1967), 159.
34. Derek Walcott. 'What the Twilight Says: An Overture', *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays* (New York: Straus and Giroux, 1970), 20, 21.
35. Pat Ismond, 'Walcott's Caribbean Odyssey' *Caribbean Beat*. No. 5 (Spring 1993): 54-57.
36. *ibid.* 57.
37. For a recent treatment of the doctrine of providence see Paul Helm, *The Providence of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994).
38. Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest. *Integrative Theology*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 1990), 78.
39. William Watty. *From Shore to Shore: Soundings In Caribbean Theology* (Kingston, Jamaica), 14, 15; and 'the De-Colonisation of Theology.' In Idris Hamid, ed., *Troubling of the waters*, 73-75.
40. Peter Johnson. 'Caribbean at the Crossroads', *Caribbean Beat*, No. 4 (Winter 1994): 71-74.
41. Pat Ismond, *Walcott's Caribbean Odyssey*, 57. Ismond is here providing an interpretation of Walcott's view on race.