"Fulness" and our Mandate:
Towards the Transformation of "All Things" Under the Christocentric Fulness Vision as Stated in Paul's *Epistle to the Ephesians*

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An exploration of the implications of Paul's view that Christ came, descending and ascending "in order to fill *panta";* with suggestions for Christocentric renewal for the Caribbean Region, emphasising small group initiatives and structures as a major component of the proposed strategy.

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Gem May 1996 - April 1998, adj. 99:08:02 [DRAFT; COMMENTS WELCOMED]

> Jesus . . . said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising . . . and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." [Matt. 28:18 - 20; NIV.]

Classically, and commendably, Evangelicals in the Commonwealth Caribbean -- and worldwide -- have emphasised preaching the gospel; but we have also been surprisingly weak when it comes to broader aspects of our mandate to disciple the nations. Thus, our outreach, follow-up, nurture, and missions ministries far too often seem isolated from -- or even irrelevant to -- day to day Caribbean life, work, aspirations and thought. In the colourful words of Barbadian History Professor and Cricket Researcher Dr. Hilary Beckles:

> There is no political movement that connects its manifesto to the idealism of the historic struggle for social change with justice. As a consequence, the region's 'labour parties' have become anti-labour, and workers everywhere are running for shelter and leadership within the walls of a revivalist evangelical christianity [*sic*] that now commands the communities' largest social gatherings.
>
> The death of social idealism, and the triumph, for example, of 'born-again religious escapism,' signal the abandonment of the youth to apolitical social engagements, and the defeat of the nationalist, regionalist projects to which cricket has been hinged since the 1950s. Within this context of failure, cricket is asked to carry the cross of a crucified political agenda whose leaders have lost all popular emotional appeal. [Beckles, 1996; p.75.]

While perhaps these words are both too sweeping and sharp, there is enough that rings true for us to face the issue they raise: our isolation from the wider Caribbean culture, and its consequences. The roots of this isolation are complex, but it is well known that they largely spring from our all too prevalent divisiveness and the West's general acceptance of the Enlightenment's secular/sacred dichotomy. In turn, this secular agenda originated as part of a strategy to minimise the damaging impact of religious persecutions and wars on the general community, by isolating "Religion" or "Faith" from real life. [Cf. Bloom, Schaeffer, Whitehead, etc.]

In short, the church's sad history of sectarianism, persecution and religiously motivated wars lent credibility to those who sought to "separate" Christ and culture; not just "church and state." Thus, western culture, gradually but ever more rapidly, has been systematically secularised over the past several centuries, leading to the church's forced withdrawal from the wider culture. As a result, we have increasingly failed to motivate and equip disciples to lead the community under Christ, or even -- given the trend to turn faith into a quiet, private hobby -- to collectively demonstrate a godly lifestyle that bears effective witness to the transforming power of Jesus through the gospel. This has further blunted our credibility.

But at the same time, secularism itself has proved to be morally bankrupt and unable to fill man's innate hunger for God. The net result has been to set the stage for those who are now feverishly working to

paganise modern culture [cf. Rom. 1:18 - 32 & Eph. 4:17 - 24], even here in the Caribbean. It also lends credibility to the strategy of the oil-funded Islamic mission to the West: projecting an idealised Islamic alternative to the West's decadence, secularism, racism, oppression and neo-paganism.

We Evangelicals have often compounded the above by our tendency to so strongly expect things to get worse and worse in "the world" (until the Heavenly cavalry rides up at the parousia), that we become fatalistic or apathetic in response to evil trends in our communities. Thus, we tend to commit the fallacy of the self-fulfilling prophecy, by giving in to an unjustifiable Last Days fatalism and abandoning the civil arena to the ungodly. [Cf. paragraphs 2.3 & 4 below.] How apt, then, is Edmund Burke's rebuke: "all that is required for evil to triumph is for good men to stand by and do nothing"!

 In sum, our divisiveness and withdrawal from the marketplace of ideas, values and visions have fed a dynamic of isolation and disintegration into the church and culture alike, and so are dangerous betrayals of the gospel and our mandate under Christ. For instance, can we honestly say that, both over time and here and now, we Christians "make *every* effort to keep the *unity* of the Spirit through the bond of *peace* . . . . speaking the *truth* in *love*"? [Eph 4:3, 15a.] What of Paul's point in Eph 2:8 - 10: "it is by grace you have been saved, through faith . . . not by works, so that no-one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus to do good works*, which God prepared in advance for us to do"? Given the immediate context: "the church . . . **is** his body, the fulness of him who **fills** *every*thing in *every* way" [1:22 - 23], can we reasonably believe that the intellectual, cultural, arts, values and public policy/political/community leadership arenas are "exceptions" to these "good works"?

The answers are clear, and sad. [Cf. Col. 1:15, 16!] Therefore, let us pause, reassess our perspectives and praxis by the light of the NT, develop a coherent, integrated operational understanding of our discipling mandate, and obey our Lord by putting it into effect, teaching "all nations . . . to obey everything [Jesus has] commanded."

1.   **Ephesians, the Fulness of Christ Vision and our Mandate**

In Ephesians, Paul summarises the Church's global mandate in sweeping cosmic and operational terms; thus stating what we may term an ***Operational Form of the Church's Discipling Mandate***, one that emphasises the overarching goal: "to fill all things — *panta* — [with Christ]." He thus outlines the integrating principle that has the power to break the modern church's gospel-betraying dynamic of divisiveness, separation, isolation and disintegration:

> . . . [God] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment -- *to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.*

> (. . . He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, *in order to fill the whole universe [*panta -- all things*].*) It was he who gave some to be apostles . . . prophets . . . evangelists . . . pastors and teachers *to* prepare God's people for works of service, *so that* the body of Christ may be built up *until* we all reach unity in the faith *and* in the knowledge of the Son of God *and* become mature, *attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ* . . . . speaking the truth in love, *we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.* From him the whole body, joined and held together [i.e. united!] by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

I pray . . . that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand . . . And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for *the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills everything in every way.* [Eph. 1:9, 10, 4:9-16, 1:18-23, NIV.]

First and foremost, Jesus is the unifying or integrating principle of the Universe; he thus moves it from demonically dominated sinful chaos, death and decay, to wholesome life and godly harmonious order, or cosmos: the Father *purposes* "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ." Therefore, Jesus came, descending, dying for our sins, rising and ascending "in order to fill the whole universe." And, the church "is his body, the fulness of him who fills *everything* in every way," the means by which Christ will fill the ordered system of reality, *panta* -- "all things." To effect this on the ground, he "*gave* . . . apostles . . . prophets . . . evangelists . . . pastors and teachers, **to** *prepare God's people* for works of service, **so that** the body of Christ *may be built up . . . attaining to* the whole measure of the fulness of Christ . . . **as** each part *does* its work." Fourthly, given the focus on discipling the nations as disciples go out into the world, this filling of "the whole universe" is an ongoing process: cumulative, progressive — cf. Eph. 3:21, NIV: "to [God] be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus *throughout all generations*" — and global.

Nationhood under Christ is therefore a key — but too often neglected — aspect of our discipling message and mandate. Paul stressed this in speaking to the leaders of Athens — the wellspring of the Western intellectual, artistic and democratic traditions — about nationhood under God: "From one man [God] made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times — *kairous* — set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us." [Acts 17:26 - 27.] In short, God created nationhood to foster godliness, and so controls critical times and places in the lives of nations that men are shaken from complacency and self-satisfaction or from apathy and hopelessness, thus are opened to the gospel. Into that ferment, he sends his people with the gospel, as his body, "the fulness of him who fills everything in every way," able to transform and bless the whole community by Christ's resurrection power!

This speaks straight to us in the Caribbean in our time, for we are clearly passing through a time of ever-increasing crises. Of course, in "such a time as this," our nations are also vulnerable to demons and their dupes, "blind leaders of the blind," who will "tickle [our] itching ears" with what we want to hear, but who can only lead us as far as the nearest ditch. [Luke 6:39, 40; 2 Tim. 4:3, 4.] Such dupes will fight the gospel (sadly, for many, to their eternal loss), but that only means that we must prize and use discernment under God as we seek the way forward for our region. So, the overall result is rather like the rising tide on a beach: individual waves advance and retreat, but inexorably the water level rises until full tide arrives. Just so, Christ is the rising tide of history, a tide that will reach its permanent high water mark at the Parousia. [cf. Dan. 2:24 - 45.] Thus, while some communities and generations, to their loss, will reject the gospel (typically, because they are misled by their elites) — others, of course, will accept it — such a rejection is not the *ultimate* trend of history! [Cf. John 4:39 - 42; Acts 8:4 - 14, 9:35]

Therefore, let us heed Paul's "***everything***," [Eph. 1:23] and Jesus' "make disciples of ***all*** nations [*ethnoi:*

i.e. people-groups, with their characteristics: languages, histories, cultures, aspirations] . . . baptising . . . and teaching them to obey **everything** I have commanded you" [Mt. 28:19]. In short, we should view our mandate as calling us to systematically disciple the nations under Jesus' Lordship, in the power of his Spirit, evangelising, baptising, nurturing and training them to follow his commands and example, progressively filling all of life — family, individuality and sexuality, education, music, entertainment, sports, the arts, "culture," business, the media, government, politics, peoplehood/nationhood . . . EVERY-thing — with his fulness. As a direct result, we must integrate and articulate what we all too often compartmentalise and contrast -- sometimes, even dismiss -- as "Evangelism," "Discipling," "Family Ministry," "Social Action," "Issues," "Business," "The Arts," "Political Involvement," and so on.

"Political Involvement" flashes a red flag, and "the historic struggle for social change with justice" continues to be an only partially resolved issue; the Caribbean's as yet unfinished history of oppression has often made us vulnerable to the siren songs of would-be political messiahs and their agendas, "crucified" or otherwise.

Logically, this whip-scar on our backs should be our first example of how "fulness" speaks into the real world:

1. Rom. 13:1 - 7, esp. 4, is clear: since the civil authority "is God's *servant*," he will clearly be better qualified "to do you good" if he openly accepts and lives by that fact! As Prov. 29:2 observes: "When the righteous thrive, the people rejoice; when the wicked rule, the people groan." [Cf. 2 Sam. 22 and 23, and Prov. 31:1 - 9.]

2. Moreover, in Matt. 28:18 Jesus states "*All authority* in heaven and *on earth has been given to me,*" with Paul adding "He *is* the image of the invisible God, the *firstborn over all creation*. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, *whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities*; all things were created *by* him and *for* him." [Col. 1:15, 16.] Jesus' Lordship, including over the political sphere, **is** a present, ongoing reality that shall ultimately put down all rebellion and injustice: "God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above *every* name, that at the name of Jesus *every knee* should bow, in heaven and *on earth* and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." [Phil. 2:9 - 11. All emphases added.]

3. If, as we have just seen, Jesus came "in order to fill *panta* [all things]," then the real issue leaders, people, institutions and communities face is "In what way?" -- with God's healing, renewing grace as they repent, or else with the fierce fire of God's justice poured out in judgement. (Cf. Acts 17:24 - 31, Rev. 18:1 - 24, and Deut. 8:1 - 20. If we reckon with the account of the Flood and its aftermath, paganism is an advanced state of "forget[ting] God," as Rom. 1:18 - 32 highlights; the sending of the gospel is actually an act of God's mercy to men who "are without excuse.")

4. Therefore, while we should pray for rulers to so govern that "we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness" [1 Tim.2:2, cf. Titus 2:1 - 3:8] -- which implies that they should implement policies of justice, liberty and basic morality (which naturally foster an atmosphere conducive to the gospel) -- we must also follow the example set by the apostles in responding to rulers demanding disobedience to the gospel mandate: "We

must obey God rather than men!" [Acts 5:29.] While we are not to rebel, rejecting the right of legitimate authorities to rule and exact taxes to support that rule, we must observe that the civil authority "is God's servant to do [us] *good . . .* an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the *wrongdoer.*" [Rom 13:4, cf. 1 - 7.] Thus, where such a servant oversteps his proper limits, we are in order to point out the fact and appeal to our own duty as God's servants also; which is just what the apostles did.

5.	This can be difficult. Typically, worldly elites control those they lead by manipulating rewards and/or punishments, and by projecting an aura of confidence, power and prestige. They therefore often slip into decision-making and promotion based on power considerations, rather than humble, godly wisdom and servant leadership. [Cf. Mk. 10:35 - 45 & Prov. 3:1 - 10.] Soon, yes-men crowd around such leaders, and the quality of decisions falls as "the prudent man keeps quiet in such times." [Amos 5:13.] By contrast, insight, vision, initiative and the power to bond with and inspire people -- the core of leadership -- can come from anywhere and "anyone," especially since "the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets. . . [he] has spoken -- who can but prophesy?" [3:7 & 8.] Thus, we come to "the prophet's dilemma": to speak or act is to provoke jealous wrath, as David experienced at Saul's hands [1 Sam. 18:6 - 9], but to be silent in the face of evil or folly -- even in the name of "praying for leaders" -- is to fail as a watchman. [Ezekiel 33:1 - 9.] But, true courage is to do one's duty, even in the face of danger.

6.	Therefore, human authority only functions properly when it walks under true -- that is, godly-- wisdom and humility. And, while our respect and prayer are always appropriate, cowardly silence or abject surrender in the face of tyranny and folly, or pressures to disobey God, are not. Nor, should we neglect the example of choice servants of God: *prophets* such as Moses, Samuel, Nathan, Elijah and Elisha, Amos, Jeremiah, and Daniel; *statesmen/civil servants* such as Joseph, Daniel (again!), Ezra [cf. Ezra 7:11 - 26], and Nehemiah (all of whom served in pagan governments); and *kings* such as David, Hezekiah and Josiah. Christians are called to be prophetic -- not selfish, craven, servile, blind or naive -- as we live, work and serve God in *"all"* aspects of the community, clearly including the public policy arena.

7.	Finally, in all things our attitude "should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" -- the true, crucified and risen Messiah -- "[w]ho, being in very nature God . . . humbled himself and became obedient to death -- even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." [Phil 2:5 - 11; cf. Isaiah 45:18 - 24.]

Our Mandate therefore goes far beyond winning converts who mainly support "our" church meetings and programmes by attendance, praying for us and opening their wallets! Instead, we are called to walk under a vision to fill "all things" with Christ, so that a Christocentric dynamic of unity and integration will spread through both church and culture, progressively filling every activity, relationship, context and involvement in our communities -- and world -- with Christ.

2.   The Power of the Fulness of Christ Vision "on the Ground"

The Christocentric Fulness Vision directly forces us to review how we have tended to think about and work towards fulfilling our Commission, thence to a more naturally integrated and focussed approach to ministry, especially the work of winning, nurturing and sending out effective disciples into the world:

1.   **Ministry Strategy:** Our evangelistic, follow-up, discipling, nurturing/pastoral and general outreach ministries should work together to encourage, train and coordinate disciples who progressively understand and apply the above fulness of Christ agenda to every activity, relationship and involvement in their lives, communities, nations and world.

2.   **The Rising Tide:** While, clearly, it is only "when the times will have reached their fulfillment" that the filling process will be complete, even now the Kingdom incrementally advances — in the midst of a myriad tiny victories and setbacks — an ever rising tide that shall ultimately triumph over an increasingly desperate satanic chaos. Thus, we read of "the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all . . . how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him"; because, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." [Acts 10:36, 38 & 1 John 3:8; cf. John 10:10.] The defeat of slavery and the recent, almost bloodless, fall of world-threatening Communism are only two striking examples: as history shows, both of these victories were organically linked to the progress of the gospel.

3.   **Last Days Witness:** At Pentecost — fulfilling Joel's prophecy of "the last days" — the remedy to Mystery Babylon was proclaimed: "*In the last days*, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people . . . . And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." [Acts 2:17, 21 (emphasis added); cf. Joel 1 - 3, esp. 2:18 - 32; also Rev. 12:7 - 12, & Chapters 20, 21.] Properly understood, then, the Last Days — for two thousand years now — have been the era in which God is acting globally: pouring out his Spirit "on all people," offering Salvation to "everyone" who receives Jesus, and progressively "fill[ing] the whole universe[*panta*]" with Christ as the church "grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work," i.e. discipling the nations under the Lordship of Jesus.

4.   **Fatalism vs. Proactive Vision:** We are in an age of worldwide eternal hope, rather than one of despair! Instead of fretfully constructing Apocalyptic Charts and Scenarios to try to figure out "times and dates" — of which Jesus warned "It is not for you to know" — let us rather pursue our true task: "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth." So,"this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and *then* the end will come." [Cf. Acts 1:4 - 8; also, see Matt. 24:3 - 14 & 36 - 51, and Gen. 2:4 - 3:24.] Let us seize the initiative!

5.   **Developing Concrete Goals:** We have been pretty general so far. To be concrete and specific, let us take any aspect of the world, say family life and sexuality in the Caribbean, or the rum shop around the corner. Then, Bibles in hand, let us probe with prayerful questions: (1) What does this "thing" look like now? (2) If it were full of Christ's grace, glory and goodness, what would it become? (3) What should *we* do about the gap

between the two? (4) When? (5) How? (6) Why? Thus, we can focus on one "thing" in the cosmos, and highlight the tension between what it is and what it could become if filled by God's grace, setting a framework for planning, witnessing and discipling. But, what if the leaders or people involved in this "thing" reject the message and initiative of grace? In that case, they will simply have chosen to be filled with God's just wrath, rather than his gracious mercy. (Given the sad — and unfinished — history of Christians inflicting violence in the name of Christ, I must hasten to add here that it is *God* who wields the sword of judgement, not us: "for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires." [James 1:20.])

6. **Preparation for Dynamic Christian Service:** Such a fulness Bible Study highlights the truth that we are all called to serve Christ in each aspect of life. Doubtless, it will also often throw a bright light on our lack of the knowledge and skills required for effective action. Thus, we must give attention to the church's nurture and training task, and its context: the need for each of us to discover, explore, develop and fulfill his or her unique *calling*, the specific "good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." [Eph. 2:10.]

For this, our painful life experiences are a critical aspect: "God . . . comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also, through Christ, our comfort overflows." [2 Cor 1:3 - 5.] A further dimension of our preparation is our gifts: "to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." [1 Cor. 12:7.] Bible Study and its diligent application to life are critical [2 Tim 3:14 - 17], as is prayer [Acts 6:1 - 4]. We can ill-afford to neglect purity of thought and deed, and growth in love as we prepare for lifetime service in the family, church, community and world. [See 1 Cor. 13:1 - 14:1, Gal. 5:13 - 6:5.]

The programmatic aspect of such preparation and training naturally falls into three overlapping phases, each typically taking several months to several years:

> *I -- Consolidating Commitment:* helping people work through the basic decisions, changes, healings and liberations, learning, perspectives, commitments, relationships, attitudes, skills and habits involved in taking up one's cross and following Jesus. [Matt 16:24 - 27.]

> *II -- Basic Service and Leadership,* as the focus gradually shifts to basic ministry processes and skills, training can stress the church's mission, our part in it, and basic leadership and ministry in dyad (one-to-one) and in the small groups oriented to outreach, nurture or specific ministry areas (such as drama or social welfare).

> *III -- Community Service and Leadership.* The third phase stresses specific gifts and skills for lifetime service and leadership in the family, church, workplace, community and world, as we work to fill each of its aspects with Christ. This last phase therefore prepares disciples for proactive community and institutional service and leadership under Christ. And, once the cross-cultural aspect is added,

we will mobilise the whole church for missions.

[Those interested in details may wish to consult the associated ABCD -- A Basic Course in Discipleship -- proposals.]

7. **NT Paradigm:** Acts 2:37 - 47 shows how such biblical discipleship and body life work powerfully into into a community, forming a true local church (i.e. the body of Christ living in and working to fill its local community with Christ):

   1. Spirit-empowered preaching, often accompanied by signs and wonders, "publicly and from house to house" [Acts 20:20; cf. 2:46 & 5:42], cut hearts by calling "all people everywhere to repent" [17:30]. Those who "accepted [the gospel] message were baptised," a visible mark of commitment to Christ, his mission, and the church, which is his body.

   2. The church's members "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" and grew as a nurturing, training, worshipping, witnessing and serving community, with stresses on learning, outreach, mutual support and sharing (even of possessions, cf. 4:32 - 5:11), helping the poor, prayer, praise, the fellowship meal [cf. 1 Cor. 10:16, 17!], and large and small group meetings (in the temple and homes respectively).

   3. Evangelistic witness was so constant an aspect of body life that "the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved," and when "all except the apostles were scattered . . . . Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went." [8:1, 4.] Clearly, outreach in and beyond the local community was a daily aspect of the lifestyle of the *ordinary* church member.

8. **Small Groups Strategy:** By contrast with large groups, small groups are intimate, highly interactive, and flexible. (The West Indies Test Cricket Team is an excellent, topical, and ongoing regional case study!) They are thus open to spontaneity, mutual encouragement, nurture, accountability, discipline and low risk experimentation; skilled leaders will also find it easy to closely observe and coordinate activities towards group goals.

   Cells are therefore ideal contexts for sorting out the issues and commitments involved in beginning to follow Christ, and for developing, training in and carrying out team ministry. By making use of existing community infrastructure — especially homes — and voluntary/tent-making staff, cells also provide a cost-effective way to mobilise, train and organise the people of God. No wonder, then, that Jesus focussed so much time and effort on the twelve in his earthly ministry.

   In such small, highly interactive, groups for expressing body life and service on a practical scale, people will easily find the encouragement, opportunities, relationships, mutual support, counselling, discipline, training and coordination [Acts 2:41 - 47, Eph. 4:11 - 16] that undergird effective discipleship and outreach. It is these dynamics that we see at work in good families/households, circles of friends, committees, ministry groups, retreats,

etc. Thus, we need to consider and apply the strategy of a growing network of small groups of disciples backed up by strongly synergistic nurturing, outreach and special-purpose ministry teams.

9. **Group Dynamics:** Clarifying notes on dyad, small and large group dynamics are helpful:

    1. *Dyad* fosters dialogue and concentrates example down to its most effective form: one person with one other person. It is therefore ideal for counselling, close friendships and apprenticeship, but by that very concentration, cannot be sustained over a long period by any one individual working with more than a few people.

    2. *The large group* multiplies the reach of its leader by broadcasting spoke-like communications to the group as a whole, a process which can be extended without limit by mass media; in so multiplying numbers, however, we are forced to sacrifice interaction, except on a sampling basis. (And, such sampling can be highly misleading.)

    3.   *The small group* integrates the two: since it is small and intimate, it fosters multiple dyad interactions, leading to a network of close relationships. When it meets, it is easy for each member in turn to "broadcast" to the whole group [cf. 1 Cor 14:26]; but success requires a growing willingness to take the risks of trust and participation, and a leadership style that values and encourages -- especially by habitual example, invitation and affirmation -- the perspectives and contributions of *all* members. (Where these are lacking, small groups rapidly deteriorate into undersized large groups, as too often happens with, say, Sunday School classes.)

10. **The Bible and Cells:** Cells, however, are often viewed as an optional, or even undesirable, extra; I believe this is a sub-biblical view. God himself exists as Trinity; he created man in family; Jesus and the Apostles based their work on small ministry teams; the early church often met in homes; and Paul, in describing a typical church service, expects that all of those present can individually and significantly contribute — which is *only* possible in a small group. [1 Cor. 14:23 - 26.]

Moreover, the NT view is that each disciple is called and gifted for ministry as a member of the body of Christ, which therefore suffers when its members are handicapped by lack of opportunity, training, encouragement, support and coordination. [Eph. 2:8 - 10, 4:11 - 16, etc.] Of course, Jethro's advice to Moses that he break down the task of judging Israel into small groups of ten families each [Exodus 18:5 - 26] models how cell structures can be used to delegate nurturing, training, coordinating and decision-making leadership/pastoral responsibilities. [Church Growth Movement observations suggest that this can then open the way for unlimited growth for, for instance, a congregation. The Korean and Argentine experience provide helpful models.]

In light of the above known potential of small group structures, the importance of gifts and

body ministry, and Paul's comments on "typical" first century church services, do we need to look any further for an explanation of the breakdown of effective body life and service in the church in our region?

11. **Networking, Synergy and "the-Already-and-Not-Yet" Factor:** As we use ***win-, nurture- and send-*** focused cells*,* then, small *outreach groups* (eg. office prayer groups, evangelistic Bible study and discussion groups), *nurture-focussed cells* (eg. cottage/house groups, campus cell groups), and *ministry teams* (eg. music groups, Dorcas circles, committees, presbyteries [cf. *The New Bible Dictionary*], Christian professional teams/enterprises, missionary teams) will greatly multiply opportunities for — and involvement in — outreach, nurture, training and effective ministry.

    "Christian professional teams/enterprises" in the above requires clarification. Such teams — by participating in the professional (and/or artisanal) services markets and providing training and/or internship programmes in an explicitly Christian framework — can open career opportunities for disciples and can serve as vehicles for filling the business culture with Christ. As such, they can be viewed as ministry teams with a mission to the market place, and are a significant aspect of the proposed renewal strategy.

    We must also note that the effective coordination, thus synergy, of the various small groups depends on their integration into larger scale church structures: congregations, campus outreach fellowships, parachurch organisations and other wider ministry organisations, networks and federations, of which the Missionary Society is an excellent example. Such wider organisations or networks provide a sense of community and vision, support infrastructure, accountability, doctrinal stability, leadership training, consultation for difficult cases [cf. Exodus 18:13 - 26] and other similar necessary facilities. When they are lacking, small group initiatives often falter, become sidetracked or even slide into heresy or abusive behaviour.

    Thus, in the life of the church, there is a need to emphasise the small group (especially the family), dyad and one's individual relationship with God; but these structures can only safely function when they are integrated into the wider church in the community and world. Using such balanced structural elements, we can work to build and scale up large-scale body-life based <u>networks</u> of disciples and ministry-facilitating structures, forming powerful (but not perfect!) working models — shining cities "set upon a hill" in a world of "night and fog" — of what shall be in perfect fulness at the Parousia. This brings out the "already-and-not-yet" aspect of the fulness vision.

12. **Divisiveness:** We dare not ignore the poison of divisiveness. Eph. 4:14 -16 stresses our mutual responsibility to strengthen and unite the Church in love, and to guard against deception and divisiveness, thus moderating and constructively harnessing conflict to help us grow and serve together in love. (Once it is so harnessed, conflict becomes the fuel that motivates and stimulates progress. Otherwise, it will be the explosive that drives us apart into disintegration.) This balance is vital as we seek to avoid sectarian divisiveness [cf. John 17:20 - 23, 1 Cor. 3:1 - 23, Gal. 5:19 - 21, 26], and as we strive to guard and contend for "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" [Jude 3] in the emerging global marketplace of ideas.

3.   Responding to the Sectarian Dynamic in the Caribbean

Sadly, the above framework sharply contrasts with the modern church in the Caribbean, which in any typical community is splintered into dozens of competing -- often quarrelling -- sects and parachurch groups, and is largely organised around the Theatre Principle: stage, Ministers/participants, and the ministered-to/audience.

 The party-spiritedness must be dealt with first, as it is tantamount to *treason* against our Mandate. Specifically, if "God so loved the world" that he sent his Son, and the unity and love of those who receive the Son is a strong proof of that loving and sending, then our divisiveness directly undercuts the gospel! [Cf. John 17:20 - 23; Acts 20:17 - 35, esp. 26 - 31, 1 Cor. 3:1 - 17, James 3:1 - 4:2, & Eph. 4: 14 - 16.] It is thus vital for us to pause and respond to disunity.

For this purpose, the OT history of disobedience, divisiveness and apostasy among the Jewish people is instructive, especially in light of Paul's remark: "these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did." [1 Cor. 10:6.] While his specific context relates to incidents during the forty years of wandering in the desert, the principle of learning from a bad example is plain.

God raised up Moses and many other Prophet-Statesmen-Deliverers to lead Israel, culminating in Samuel. "When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as judges . . . But his sons did not walk in his ways," prompting the elders of Israel to say "You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have." [1 Samuel 8:1 - 5; cf. Deut. 17:14 - 20, which anticipated and regulated just this situation.]

Samuel was displeased with the request for a king, but God's response was: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do." [vv. 7 - 9.]

Samuel duly warned that kings would become oppressive. Saul, the first king, came to a sad end and the kingdom passed to David. By the time Solomon's son Rehoboam ascended to the throne, the people, weary under the weight of a superficial prosperity that stood on a foundation of forced labour and burdensome taxes, begged him: "Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labour and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you." [1 Kings 12:4.]

His infamous reply, "My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier. My father scouraged you with whips; I will scourage you with scorpions," [v. 14] provoked rebellion under Jeroboam, son of Nebat, leading to the split into Israel and Judah, "to fulfil the word that the LORD had spoken to Jeroboam . . . through Ahijah the Shilonite." [2 Chronicles 10:15, cf. 1 Kings 11:1 - 13, 26 - 39.]

 As Jeroboam sought to consolidate his power, he considered: "If these people go up to offer sacrifices at the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem . . . They will kill me and return to King Rehoboam." [1 Kings 12: 27.] So, he disobeyed God's word to him: "If you . . . walk in my ways . . . I will build you a dynasty as enduring as the one I built for David." [1 Kings 11:38.] He therefore erected altars and idols at Bethel and

Dan, built shrines on high places and "appointed priests from all sorts of people, even though they were not Levites" [1 Kings 12:31], then set up a new festival on a day of his own choosing and "went up to the altar to make offerings." [v. 33; cf. God's judgement of Saul when he usurped the role of a priest in 1 Sam. 15; also see 1 Kings 13 and 2 Kings 23 for God's later response through Josiah: destruction of the apostate system.]

A pattern emerges: as the people of God felt the consequences of their disobedience, they cast about for a king (other than God) to unite and lead them, copying the surrounding pagan nations. The grass turned out to be no greener on the other side of the fence. Further dissatisfactions in the face of increasing oppression built up, giving an opening for the seriously flawed but clearly capable and ambitious Jeroboam to champion the oppressed people, trigger a split and rise to power over the juicier chunk. Then, to consolidate his power, Jeroboam took the one step too far: in defiance of God's promises and warnings, he set up apostate institutions for fear that loyalty would soon revert to Rehoboam.

The amazing thing is how democratically God acted towards his disobedient people in the process, giving them very real choices, up to the limit of apostasy. Though he pointed out that the true cause of their troubles was disobedience and that by asking for a man to be king they were both rejecting God as king and opening the door to oppression, he gave them a king. When kings became disobedient, first the dynasty was changed, then the kingdom was divided, both with significant popular involvement. It is only when Jeroboam defiantly set up apostate structures that destructive judgement was pronounced, and ultimately carried out: the divided, complacent [cf. Amos 6:1-7], apostate covenant people proved to be no match for the wiles, idols -- and ultimately, armies -- of the surrounding pagan nations. Sadly, long after the exile in Babylon, Jesus had to observe: "You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men." [Mark 7:8; cf. Deut. 8:17ff.]

One does not have to look far to find parallels in the history of the church. Time and again, we have disobeyed God, set up abuse-prone leadership structures, and followed wolves in shepherd's clothing. Such (mis-) leaders work to "distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them," being men (and women) who love "to be first." Characteristically, they then cut their followers off from -- and attack, discredit, or persecute -- true Christian disciples and leaders outside of their circles of power, "refus[ing] to welcome the brothers . . . stop[ping] those who want to do so and put[ting] them out of the church." [Acts 20:30, 3 John 9, 10.] Thus, selfishly ambitious leaders have often exploited ignorance, fear and unmet needs to create splinter groups, which they then domineer and isolate from the rest of the church; once this happens, the door to full apostasy yawns open.

In the Caribbean, our history of plantation-based slavery haunts and poisons our self-concept, family life, relationships, thinking, institutions and initiatives; intensifying the above. Old Pirate's Plantation was based on the health-breaking forced labour of field hands, which went to support debt-ridden opulence among domestic slaves (who were often sexually exploited) in his Great House. To reduce the risk of revolt, positive leadership was crushed, and slaves were set against one another over colour, type of work, access, sex, and status: "divide, and rule."

Thus, racially-based self-rejection and mutual abuse; ruthless secretive power, greedy exploitation, resistance to positive change, financial imprudence and dependency; suspicion, backbiting and talebearing servility; family breakdown, sexual abuse, manipulation and immorality; lies, fear, injustice, tyranny, rebellion and violence were planted deep in Caribbean soil. And for the approximately four generations since chattel slavery was formally abolished, we have continued to reap the ratoons. Even our "liberation"

movements have too often only managed to create new overlords and circles of "yesmen," and "yardfowls" or "facecards" [sycophants], rather than breaking the plantation paradigm. (Paul's "you are God's field" [1 Cor 3:9] is a telling contrast: the church is God's fertile field, sowed, watered and nurtured by wise, caring stewards; who will account to him for the quality of their service! [Cf. Luke 12:35 - 48 & Col. 3:18 - 4:1; also 1 Cor. 7:17 - 24, esp. 21, 23. Also, the *New Bible Dictionary*, on "Slave, Slavery."])

Sadly, but understandably, after centuries of disobedience, quarrelling, rebellion, splintering, selfish leadership, and other sub- or even anti- biblical practices, there is much confusion, mistrust and dissention in and around the church in the Caribbean (and, world) today. We have suffered dozens, even hundreds, of cycles of the splintering dynamic; it would thus be naive (or, presumptuous) to simply assume that any given structure, teaching or practice, regardless of its age or respectability -- or, its novelty! -- within our various traditions, denominations, congregations and ministries, is as God intended it. Clearly, we must give priority to careful biblical and historical study, with an eye to *repentance* from apostasy, sin and error; *renewal* to restore truly godly -- that is, biblical -- structures; and *reconciliation* among the leaders and members of the one true body of Christ, if we are to fulfil rather than betray our mandate.

Jesus' high priestly prayer must have the last word on this mission-critical matter: "I pray for those who will believe on me through [the disciples'] message, that all of them may be one Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. *May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me*." [John 17:20 - 23, italics added.]

4.   Renewing the Church's Structures, Strategies and Systems Under our Mandate

God's purpose is to integrate the universe under Christ's headship, filling it with his glory through the church. Unfortunately, we have too often allowed ourselves to be isolated from positively impacting the world's cultures, and instead have been pervaded by its divisiveness, disintegration, selfish ambition, envy and corruption. [Cf. James 3:13 - 4:12.] Therefore, if we are to fulfil rather than continue to betray our Mandate, repentance, reconciliation and renewal must take priority on our agenda.

Repentance and reconciliation are more or less personal, so it is appropriate for us to focus on the renewal that must break the sub-biblical assumptions and systems implicit in our prevalent Theatre-based model of church life, and return us to the NT's family-centred, body-life oriented framework [cf. Eph. 4:17 - 6:9], within which repentance and reconciliation may -- in the providence of God -- lead to sorely needed revival, triggering reformation of our region.

Such renewal must first analyse the key institution of the church in our day: the denominationally affiliated local assembly or "church," led by "the Minister" or "the Priest" [originally, short for *presbyter,* "elder"], focused on large group-based worship services and smaller "auxiliaries" -- a telling word -- such as the Sunday School, mostly meeting in "the church" building, the expenses of which dominate finances. Sadly, all too often, leadership is "onstage," centralised and autocratic; rather than following Jesus' servantly, exemplary and collegial model. [cf. John 13:1 - 17; Luke 6:39, 40 & 1 Peter 5:1 - 4; Mk. 3:13 - 19; Titus 1:5 - 16 (nb. the multiplicity of leadership, v. 5; cf. Acts 13:1 -5, 15:1 - 35, 20:17 ff., etc.).]

Such an assembly is usually tied to a network of other congregations, under the doctrinal (and often,

administrative) control of its Denomination, typically with headquarters in a metropolitan country (often the United States) -- but "the local church" may have little to do with members of "a different church" down the street.

In turn, the Denomination (a structure which grew out of our history of splintering) relates to the various Bible Schools, publishing and media houses, other parachuch ministries and intra- and inter-denominational ministries and movements such as music bands, student and youth ministries, various charismatic and other "renewal" groups, and the ecumenical movement in varying ways, ranging from cordiality to outright hostility. Hovering in the background are other Denominations, the cults and traditional and novel non-Christian religions, with the State's legal and administrative frameworks exerting subtle, but powerful and potentially devastating constraints, as can be seen from the ongoing uneasy church-state situation in the United States (which often sets the pattern for the Caribbean).

Thus, while our cultural milieu has many significant parallels to that of the first century Roman Empire -- even to our rising tide of decadence, flood of eastern cults, inefficient and often corrupt or even tyrannical governments, and unstable economies -- it is too often hard to draw similar parallels from New Testament era church structures and strategies to our own. This should give us pause, as the record shows that the NT's balanced, body-life/family-life oriented systems were robust enough to thrive and grow explosively, even under the pressure of periodic persecution. And, persecution was and is only to be expected in a context where the powerful are increasingly hostile to Christ.

Indeed, Jesus, speaking of the end of the age, warns: "Watch out that no one deceives you . . . . you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." [Matt. 24:4, 9 - 14.]

Whether we are facing the end of the age in our time, or simply the decline and fall of Western Culture in its present form, the NT example and Jesus' warning are all too pertinent. Building-centred structures are by that fact hostage to the fate of the facilities and the meetings they accomodate. Unbalanced -- and therefore unbiblically passive -- large group structures, typically with tiny cores of high profile leaders, are easily manipulated or scattered by the simple tactic of targetting the leaders, as was attempted by the authorities in Jerusalem. [cf. Acts 4:1- 21, 5:12 - 42, 6:8 - 8:4.] The early church's opponents were probably amazed to see the result: the scattered *ordinary* members spearheaded the church's first missionary thrust!

This contrasts tellingly with the lack of involvement of today's average church member in evangelism, nurture, financing, prayer and such like, which we so often complain about; but such are simply the logical outcomes of the comfortable but unbalanced systems we have built. In the NT, though large groups and even crowds are important, they are not primary; the activity, commitment and initiative exerted by the ordinary member is thus a natural outcome: what we *do* is what we are being trained to do.

Could it be that the persecutions Jesus predicted will act as God's disruptive judgement, designed by him to drive us out of our comfort zones so we will then obediently get out into the matrix of the day to day world of the nations with the gospel? Certainly, as Acts 8:1 - 4 observes: "a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered . . . . Those who had been scattered

preached the word wherever they went."

5.   Towards a Cell-Based, Body-Life Oriented Strategy for Renewal

Balanced cell-based, body life-oriented structures are clearly better adapted for our present situation and future prospects than the predominant ones we just examined. And, the prospect that if we do not change by choice, our Lord may have to change us by force is particularly sobering. Change, obviously, must be a priority. But, how can we change?

Renewal starts with vision. As long as we remain satisfied with a superficial understanding of our Mandate, change will be a frustrating challenge. Therefore, we must first stress Paul's body of Christ-based, Christocentric Fulness Vision, and work out its implications for our structures, systems and strategies. Thus, we need to summarise a biblical and practical framework for renewal, tying the above elements together into a regional strategy for renewal.

First, we need to accept that we are the body of Christ, "the fulness of him who fills everything in every way," recognising that each disciple is called to significant areas of ministry "so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ . . . . as each part does its work." Thus, the door to renewal swings open:

1.   **Unity:** Paul's intimate link between "unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God" and the maturation of the church is vital. The dynamics of sectarianism, as we saw above, must be exposed; and we must confess our own guilt, repent and be reconciled with our brothers who are also in the faith. In our present, far less than ideal, situation, this calls for personal contact and friendship across organisational lines. Let us admit and turn from our history of selfish divisiveness, envy and hostility, opening our minds to correction of our own errors and ungodly traditions [cf. Matt. 7:1 - 5]. Active and open cooperation, liasing and networking with other churches and/or parachurch groups (with an active policy to express unity institutionally by federating or uniting our various organisations) will also be important. Let us never forget that the credibility of the gospel itself is at stake!

2.   **Body:** Paul views each believer as being called to significant ministry in the church; often instead we split the church into "the Ministers" and "the ministered to," participants and audience, which undermines the intent of the doctrine of the church as the body of Christ. This is reinforced by the further error of equating buildings with "the house of God," in the teeth of NT teaching: "As you come to him, the living Stone -- rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him -- you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ," and "you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit." [1 Pet. 2:4, 5; cf. 1 Cor. 3:1 - 17 and Eph. 2:19 - 22.]

     Clearly, the NT focusses on the people of God -- the church -- as the interdependent, synergistic members of the ***Body of Christ***, God's house indwelt and empowered by his Spirit, and accordingly describes a network of mutually supporting believers who

penetrate communities; typically meet for mutual nurture and worship as small groups in homes (and assemble in large groups as facilities permit, cf. Acts 2:46; 3:11, 5:12, 20, 42 vs. 8:3; 19:9; Rom 16:5; Philemon 2); are led locally by *ministry teams* -- presbyteries -- comprising teaching and ruling elders working with practical welfare-oriented deacons [Titus 1:5 - 2:15 & 1 Tim. 2:12 - 3:16, with Rom. 16:1 - 7, cf. Acts 2:37 - 47, 6:1 - 7, 13:1 - 5, and 20:17 - 35; cf. "Bishop," "Presbytery," "Deacon[ess]," "Ministry," "Church [Government]" in *The New Bible Dictionary*]; and whose outreach thrusts are largely based on the witnessing of the average church member, but also make use of trans-local *missionary teams* such as Paul's.

 Therefore, let us break out of the mentality of sitting in pews and passively receiving from the few "Ministers" within the four walls of "the House of God." Instead, let us follow the NT: penetrate and disciple our communities as the Spirit-energised and gifted body of Christ, coached and coordinated by teams of leaders given by Christ to the church for its maturation, as we work to fill "all things" with Christ.

Concretely, our thinking and practice need to move away from an overemphasis on the large group, balancing it with dyad (pair) and other small groups -- including families -- designed around the win, nurture, send cycle of discipleship, as we noted above. (We must also stress the critical need for each disciple to build his own relationship with God by cultivating the Quiet Time for devotional Bible study, prayer, self-evaluation and thoughtful application of godly insights to life.)

A small-group oriented scenario, based on NT examples, personal experience and observations, bearing in mind the work of modern Missiologists, could be:

❑   Ideally, a congregation should be planted by a missionary team, operating as a trans-local ministry group sent out by a base church and/or Missions Agency.

❑   Perhaps, host families and/or businesses, such as Lydia's or Aquilla and Priscilla's, may provide a natural base in the outreach community, or one or more enterprises may be initiated as both a means of support and as a context for community contacts, including the business and government elites.

❑   People in the community can be reached through natural links: family, friends, workplace; the street, mall, market or other places where people come together; institutions, homes and neighbourhoods, interests, and needs.

❑   Early inquirers, such as the woman at the well in Sychar, even if alienated, are members of the community with their own networks of contacts, and can become partners in outreach. [Cf. 1 Thess. 1:2 - 10, esp. 8.] . (Steve Skeete, of Street Gospel Ministries in Barbados, has proposed that the natural family links women have to men in their lives may be a key way to reach men in the Caribbean.)

❑   Home Bible studies and prayer circles almost suggest themselves for this, and provide a context for teaching the gospel "from house to house." (Missiologists, such as McGavran, advise that decisions to follow Christ may be in a "multiple-individual, mutually interdependent" context, and if backed up with adequate nurture, are often at

least as effective as the more familiar western-style individual decisions.)

❑ Those who commit themselves to Christ can then be further trained in nurture cells, with the first baptisms preferably being of a mutually supportive group.

❑ As the number of cells grows, it would then be natural to assemble for worship, teaching and ministry in larger group meetings, on a regular basis. At this point, we have a functioning congregation.

❑ By this time, potential leaders should be emerging, and training/ministry teams can be formed, leading to the development of a presbytery, and opening the way for a new Missionary team to move on to the next planting. Such a team may well include some of the leaders from the young church, especially if they may aid further contacts.

❑ Business initiatives; drama groups and other arts & culture initiatives; professional support circles for educators, nurses, journalists etc.; public policy, intercession and prophetic teams, and similar initiatives can also now begin to study and take the fulness agenda to the wider community.

❑ In the long term, a network of relationships, training and consultancy support, mutual accountability, conferences etc. can give expression to wider organisational structures.

Thus, a small group strategy seems feasible. Greg Livingstone's *Planting Churches in Muslim Cities: a Team Approach*, [Baker, 1994] has many useful further details. The strategy is also so flexible that it may easily be adapted to specific situations, such as a Campus Fellowship network. Renewal contexts, such as those faced by the church in our region, though, will require a more detailed focus on groups in body life, gifts and training issues and networks.

3. **Small Groups, Unity and Body Life:** First, the fact that Jesus chose *twelve* potential leaders for training by "be[ing] with him . . . that he might send them out" [Mark 3:14] as apostles is significant: a dozen or so members is a reasonable upper limit for *strong* small group dynamics, as the number of pair interactions in a group is $1/2[n].[n - 1]$, an n-square law; it yields 78 for Jesus and the twelve. As numbers rise to about 30 - 40, interaction breaks down, informal circles or "cliques" tend to form, and the leadership core is forced to increasingly rely on broadcasting information to the group as a whole. (By the way, it is no accident that this size range is the first church growth "sticking point.")

Since conflicts are inevitable in any group, such cliques rapidly become factions, and conflict resolution strategies have to be based on negotiation with their leaders. Unfortunately, if these informal leaders have risen by force of personality, talent and ambition, rather than biblical wisdom, service and maturity, positive conflict resolution may be impossible. [Cf. James 3:1 - 4:12 (NIV); 1 Tim. 3:1 - 12 (nb. *gunaikas* (11), lit. "women," may well mean "deaconesses," cf. Rom. 16:1, marg., *The New Bible Dictionary*, and Banks, pp. 118 ff.); 2 Tim 2:20 - 26.] The implications for disintegration hardly require elaboration. Clearly, church leaders should harness the small group dynamic, but how?

Families logically come first -- right from Creation -- as God's designated primary small group context for life: committed heterosexual unions, the walled gardens within which conception, birth, nurture, education, training, and wider community involvement naturally spring forth. [cf. Gen. 18: 18, 19; Prov. 1:1 - 9; Eph. 4:17 - 6:9, esp. 5:15 - 6:4.] (It is telling to note in passing that antichristian agendas typically target the family, its members and their sexuality: if they alienate us from godly, family- and church- based community structures, as atomised individuals we will be far more vulnerable to artful deceit, manipulation and tyranny. [cf. Eph 4:14.])

So, in a congregation -- though other foci, such as outreach or missions project teams, or drama groups, etc. can be quite effective -- it is natural to start with family life: courtship, covenant, parenting, nurturing, leadership, discipline and conflict management. Given Caribbean culture, it will also be vital to comfort the pains of childhood and set a healthy framework for sexual, social, intellectual and spiritual maturity. As we thus focus on the family, we will tap what are perhaps the strongest wellsprings of human motivation, address the key issues in discipleship, and lay an excellent foundation for service in outreach, nurture and ministry groups.

This family focus thus builds bridges to emerging leaders in the church, trains them in biblical principles for leadership and service, and lays a good foundation for selection, promotion and handling conflict or crisis. (Indeed, it is no accident that Paul often views the church as God's family, habitually using terms such as "son," "father," "brother," "sister" and "mother." Cf. Mark 10:28 - 31 and Malachi 2:14 - 16 & 4:5, 6.) Thus, when we go on to set up special outreach, nurture and ministry groups designed to address needs and service opportunities in the church and community, leadership selection, training and coordination will be far easier; the cooperative, servantly attitudes that lead to positive conflict management will have been nurtured and integrated into habitual life and thought patterns. Could this be part of the reason that Paul insists that church leaders should be good family leaders? [Cf. 1 Tim. 3:1 - 13, Titus 1:5 - 16.]

Once these issues have been effectively addressed, small *outreach groups* (eg. office prayer groups, evangelistic Bible study and discussion groups), *nurture-focussed cells* (eg. cottage/house groups, campus cell groups), and *ministry teams* (eg. music groups, Dorcas circles, committees, presbyteries [cf. *The New Bible Dictionary*], Christian professional partnerships, missionary teams) will greatly multiply opportunities for -- and involvement in -- outreach, nurture, training and effective ministry. We must also foster the effective coordination of the various small groups by integrating them into larger scale church structures, such as we noted above.

Resistance to small-group involvement may occur, especially in contexts where people are in pain, fear authority or accountability, and tend to mistrust and manipulate those they relate to. Typically, this reflects deeply dysfunctional family experiences, as is so common in the Caribbean, underscoring the family focus above. Common expressions of resistance or fear include "forgetting" to come to "agreed-to" meetings, reluctance to open up and express oneself, passivity as opposed to spontaneity [which makes the meeting feel "dead"], or even direct clashes and challenges to leaders.

In such cases, the example set by small group leaders is critical: we must model trust and trustworthiness, openness and mutual accountability, commitment, caring, integrity, and humility. Another key strategy is to use plurality of leadership in cells, so that there is mutual support, balancing of gifts and perspectives, variety, and opportunity for leadership development. In mixed-sex contexts, such a leadership core should be mixed as well.

At an organisational level, short-term ministry projects — such as evangelistic Bible Studies, a dramatic production, a concert, etc. — may be used to introduce the actual use of small groups/teams, reducing resistance due to the value of the project in view and the subordinate character of the group structure being used. Then, once there is a framework of positive experience, teaching and training can extend initial briefings and orientation exercises, helping to build a consensus for structural renewal. It would then be natural to integrate the small group concepts and structures into the work of the wider organisation, changing structures that hinder body life as we go.

Of course, this will not eliminate conflict, but it should minimise it and give focus to why there is a need for change towards body life and ministry oriented structures. A good foundation in inductive Bible study techniques will also be helpful, as will the careful preparation for body life and service pointed out above. Exposure to the concept that each disciple is called to ministry in the church and community, and is gifted by — and accountable to — God for such ministry is a critical issue.

4. **Gifts and (Small Group) Ministry:** Unfortunately, much controversy has swirled around the NT teaching on spiritual gifts, often obscuring their critical role in the proper functioning of the church as the body of Christ, especially in small groups. It is therefore necessary to specifically address this topic.

Paul strikes a complex balance in 1 Cor. 12 - 14: "about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant . . . . to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good . . . All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines . . . . God has arranged the parts of the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. . . . you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first . . . apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. . . eagerly desire the greater gifts. . . Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. . . . Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church. . . . When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. . . . be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way."

Gifts, then, are diverse manifestations of the Spirit, some of which are given to each disciple as tools to help him in his specific service in evangelism and building up the body of Christ, towards filling "all things." (So broad and diverse is the range listed in the NT,

from celibacy [1 Cor. 7:7], leadership, showing mercy and giving [Rom. 12:8]; to healing and miraculous powers [1 Cor. 12:9, 10; cf. Acts 8:4 - 8], that it is evident that the listings are illustrative rather than exhaustive.) As we work together to build up the body, it is strengthened and united as it matures in the image of Christ. By contrast, love is a "way," a life-transforming passion produced in us by the Spirit as he sanctifies us in Christ. [Cf. Rom. 5:1 - 8, & Acts 24: 14, 22.] It is therefore no surprise to see that gifts manifested without love are futile [13:1 - 7]; that gifts are to be exercised with wisdom, discipline, discernment and restraint; and that the most controversial, tongues, is neither universal nor to be used indiscriminately, nor to be forbidden.   [See 12:30 - 13:1, nb. 14:5; 14:1 - 28 (esp. 12 - 19), & 39 - 40.]

As tools for building up the church, gifts will have fulfilled their purpose "when perfection comes . . . Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." [13:10, 12; cf. 1 John 3:1 - 3.] "Then," biblically, historically and logically -- see the record, from Irenaeus' *Against Heresies* [Bk. II Ch. 32.4, V Ch. 6.1] to Augustine's *City of God* [Bk.XXII, Ch. 8], and Bede's *History of the English Church and People* [cf. Contents, Penguin Ed]. -- seems to be best understood as denoting the Parousia. [cf. 1 John 2:28 - 3:3.]

In our teaching, training and working, the call to serve Christ lovingly as a member of the body must come first. This call speaks into each sphere of life: in family, church, community and world. Gifts are manifested as we serve Christ (often so quietly that they may not be explicitly recognised), working as a supernatural inspiration or empowering that transforms the quality of our loving service beyond merely human skill, wisdom, dedication or good intentions. [Cf. 2 Sam. 23:1 - 4, in context.]

 Sometimes, the manifestations appear without explicit request. At other times, they are imparted in response to the laying on of hands with prophetic guidance. Paul encourages disciples to "eagerly desire" (thus, pray for) specific gifts, especially prophecy; and, judging by Paul's reminder to "fan into flame the gift," they may require regular practice to develop fully. [Acts 10:44 - 46, 1 Tim. 4:14, 2 Tim 1:6.]

 A balanced focus on gifts, then, would be to desire appropriate gifts in light of ministry (service) needs and one's calling, reaching out in prayer and the faith that "every good and perfect gift is from above" [Jas. 1:17, cf. Luke 11:5 - 13 & 1 John 5:14 - 15], then taking the risk of acting in that faith [Rom. 12:6 & Heb. 11:6], in the expectation that a gracious God desires to work through us to bless his people and fill the world with Christ.

 Thus, one's specific call to serve in the various spheres and stages of life leads to a moving out in service, asking and expecting that God will manifest his power and wisdom in one's ministry, transcending merely human energy and insight. In turn, since calling, painful experiences [2 Cor. 1:3, 4] and gifting are Divine initiatives [1 Cor. 12:11], and are clearly unique to the individual [Eph. 4:16], our church and parachurch organisation, roles/offices, plans and other structures must be biblically based, highly participative, and flexible enough to "not put out the Spirit's fire," while allowing us to "[t]est everything," "[h]old on to the good" and "[a]void every kind of evil." [1 Thess. 5:19, 21, 22.]

Small groups seem to provide the best opportunities for this to happen [cf. 1 Cor. 14:26], which underscores their value in church renewal.

5.   **Training Issues:** Training, especially of small group and ministry team leaders, is a critical input for successful discipling: "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A student [KJV: disciple] is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher." [Luke 6:39, 40.]

The power of example drives the training dynamic, shaping **k**nowledge, **c**ommitments, **a**ttitudes, **s**kills and **h**abits (K-CASH) along a learning experience spiral, for good or -- as Jesus pointed out -- ill. Such spirals should start with the student where he or she is [including preferred learning and cognitive styles], visiting and revisiting learning experiences, facts, concepts, principles, problems, issues, applications, etc.; on each loop, knowledge, attitudes and behaviour are reinforced, expanded and linked into a growing network until the student is "fully equipped." [cf. 2 Tim. 3:14 - 17.]

Content is critical. In the *win* phase of the discipling cycle, the truth of the gospel and how to respond to it by receiving Jesus as Lord and Saviour are the central issues. In the *nurture* phase, first the consolidation of commitment and then basic service and leadership should be emphasised -- for *all* Christians, with a small group/team focus. [Cf. Heb. 5:11, 12 & 2 Tim. 2:2.] As disciples begin to grow in spirituality and service, the question of calling and *sending* out in service in family, church and community naturally leads to a lifetime focus on general leadership and specific areas of service, ranging from family life, church auxiliary and artform-based team ministry to serving in business, education, the professions and prophetic/intercessory involvement in the public policy/political arena, including serving in missionary teams or other full time Christian service. In particular, major intellectual, ethical, apologetics, media and public policy issues must be systematically and vigorously tackled, to multiply the effectiveness of disciples in the battle to fill the culture with Christ.

6.   **Regional Training Network/ "The School Without Walls":** The proposed renewal strategy requires systematic, integrated training in discipleship for the whole church, with a special emphasis on the small group dynamic. This is only to be expected, as our Mandate is to "disciple the nations . . . teaching them to obey [Christ]." Unfortunately, training is precisely the weakest single area of the Church's ministry in the Caribbean.

To remedy this, I propose the gradual formation of a regional training network integrating development and consultancy teams, churches, parachurch ministries, people in small discipleship-oriented groups, and support resources. The teams would first develop an overall framework and pilot training modules and resources for the win-nurture-send discipleship phases, including curriculum development strategies and standards. These would then be tested, upgraded, standardised and diffused across the region. As a reasonable estimate, this would take several years of effort and a significant, but not unreasonable, quantum of resources.

Then, over time, systematically targeting age- and life- stage groups, cultures and languages, we could extend the system. Thus, gradually, we would develop a "School

Without Walls" discipling network, first across our region, then perhaps globally [with the aid of the Internet], especially in the two-thirds world.

The power and cost-effectiveness of modern microelectronics, microcomputers and communications networks are vital to this process. Powerful print, audio- and video-tape, and CD-ROM/multimedia resources are now relatively inexpensive to develop, especially if voluntarism and sharing philosophies -- perhaps, adapting the shareware software marketing strategy -- dominate the ethos. The hosting of a website and the use of fax and E-mail facilities would, very rapidly, tap the global potential of the strategy: nor should we neglect the capability to do radio and television on the Internet (though we should also be aware of the potential for hostile surveillance).

6.   Concluding Remarks

The fulness view of our discipling Mandate, as drawn from Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, outlines an effective biblical integrated operational strategy for the church's mission in the Caribbean, and world.

Our point of departure is the insight that the church "is [Christ's] body, the fulness of him who fills everything in every way." Indeed, Jesus came, descending, serving, dying for our sins, rising and ascending "higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe." Accordingly, he has given us leaders -- apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up . . . attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ. . . . as each part does its work." Thus, Christ, working through the church, is an inexorably rising tide in history, overwhelming an increasingly desperate satanic chaos. Sadly, this picture too often must rebuke present praxis, which is Theatre-like -- performers, stage and audience, suffers from our history of divisiveness and isolation from positively impacting "real-world" culture, and tends to slip into Apocalyptic speculation, fatalism and escapism. Therefore there is significant need for repentance, reconciliation and renewal as we seek to obey our Lord and Saviour.

Operationally, small outreach, nurture and ministry groups, ideally starting with the family (the paradigm), will facilitate mobilisation, training and coordination as we seek to win, nurture and send out effective disciples to fill the world with Christ. Such groups work best when they are balanced by being integrated into larger scale church networks, in a context emphasising the unity of the church and repenting from our all too pervasive sectarian betrayal of the gospel. Given the lack of systematic, biblical, non-abusive discipleship training systems and networks, a need for training development and consultancy teams is recognised, as is the power of modern technology to accelerate and amplify our efforts, though these technologies also heighten the threat of hostile surveillance.

 Thus, the Fulness Vision leads to a powerful biblical integrated strategy for renewing the church and obeying our mandate to disciple the nations. May we, by God's grace, receive wisdom and strength to fulfil it.

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