

DRAFT

Why not Now?

Breaking through to Caribbean Renewal, Revival and Reformation in our Time

“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus.” [Acts 3:19 – 20.]

GORDON MULLINGS
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¹ This book has been written to work as a text for a 13 week course. Thus, it is suitable for Sunday School, a youth group, a study group, a Semester-length course, or a campus cell group.

INTRODUCTION

A Letter to the Reader

Gentle Reader

A home is far more than a house. However, a well-designed house provides a good environment to support the life of a family.

Just so, a training framework for discipleship is not discipleship itself: learning, living by, and witnessing to the truth that is in Jesus, as a part of God's family in the world. But, systematic training in a consciously designed framework for discipleship provides a vital, integrated body of knowledge and skills that will help us as we live as God's city, a beacon of hope shining on a hill in a dark world.

Thus, if we, the Church in the Caribbean, are to contribute to the sorely needed renewal and reformation of our region, we must first look to the quality of our discipleship, witness and service in the community and wider world. Especially, we must look to how we have worked to develop our youth to live out their faith through godly service in the communities of our region. To that end, this book is dedicated.

May God bless us as we serve him in our region in the Third Christian Millennium.

Gordon
Kingston
December 2000

CHAPTER ONE

Caribbean in Crisis: The Key to Breakthrough

After a generation of independence, and as we cross the threshold of the Third Christian Millennium, the Caribbean is in crisis.

Jamaica, perhaps, is the most urgent case. For example, in April 1999, Jamaica's lingering crisis again boiled over when the Finance Minister announced a thirty-percent gasoline tax, to help pay the bill for the bailout of several major financial institutions.

The next day, gas prices went up, and initial protests began. Then, for three days the following week, the island was locked down by protests, ranging from residents of upper class communities standing with placards next to their parked Pajeros, to marches, to streets blocked with rubble and burning tyres.

Transportation, education, industry, government and commerce were paralysed. Bridges were burned, and stores were looted. One hundred and fifty-two were arrested, and at least seven were shot dead, some under questionable circumstances. Sadly, there were also strong feelings that unless protests were violent, even lawless, the protesters would simply have been ignored.

Finally, on day four, a Commission was set up to investigate alternatives to the full thirty percent gas tax. That evening, also, after a small protest by church leaders, two of Jamaica's leading churchmen were interviewed on national radio about the church's failure to provide timely, effective moral leadership in the crisis. While the two were able to point to exceptions, these only

served to highlight the overall pattern: silence or shallowness.

Since that time, it has become all too plain that Jamaica's leaders, by and large, have lost their way. Corruption scandal after corruption scandal has surfaced, and the cry has gone out to a church that has seemed to be just as adrift as any other institution: provide leadership in the crisis — or else!

That cry both recognises the relevance of the church, and rebukes it for not living up to its prophetic calling. For, Caribbean people instinctively understand that God has purposed “to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.” [Eph. 1:10.]

Thus, we recognise that, through Christ, God is creating harmonious order — cosmos — out of the chaos caused by our sin. So, in crisis, we look to men and women of God for vision, leadership, refuge and renewal.

Therefore, given the chaos and crisis in the church as well as the wider culture, if the Caribbean is to break through to renewal and transformation, we must first begin with repentance and reformation of the church.

How this can be is the focus of this book.

The Challenge facing the Church

First of all, we must squarely face the leadership failure of the church. While the gas price crisis and its aftermath are specific to Jamaica, the underlying pattern is region-wide. For instance, Dr Hilary Beckles (a leading regional Historian), as he spoke to

yet another regional crisis — that of Cricket — commented:

There is no [Caribbean] 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 . . . ["Rethinking West Indies Cricket: Notes on the Third Paradigm." *Caricom Perspective*, No. 66, 1996; p.75.]

Perhaps, these words are too sweeping and sharp, but they raise concerns we must squarely face.

First, context: when the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, and then when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, socialist economics and Marxist ideology were exposed and abandoned as deceitful, destructive, futile delusions. This easily explains the wistful nostalgia of many of our region's Post-Marxist intellectuals, who are now forced to reckon with "the death of social idealism."

Then, in the early 1990's, we heard of a New World Order, an era of free trade-driven global Capitalist prosperity and peace. However, paradise did not arrive with the Internet. For instance, many of the formerly Communist nations soon fell into economic, ethnic, and military turmoil. As one sad result, "Ethnic Cleansing" has now entered our language.

Global environmental challenges and economic earthquakes soon followed. These issues are of particular concern to the

Caribbean, for we are especially vulnerable to global economic downturns, and to the intense hurricanes and rising sea level that are projected as likely consequences of global warming. This is sobering, because economic troubles and natural disasters have repeatedly caught us napping, exposing inadequate preparation and poor management.

As a direct result, Caribbean countries have, on the whole, been economic underachievers over the past thirty years, especially since the oil price shocks in 1973 and 1979. So, almost everywhere in the region, traditional agriculture — sugar, bananas, cotton, spices — is in serious decline. The competitiveness of our manufacturing industries is an open question. Nor has tourism, now our dominant industry — it accounts for a fifth of our employment and up to a third of national income in some countries — proved to be a cure-all.

Consequently, the stability of our economies and currencies is threatened, especially as the World Trade Organisation's rulings against the traditional protective European tariffs that favour our bananas begin to work out on the ground. For, competitiveness is the new global theme song, and inefficient or inferior producers — in this case, us — will simply be run down, run over and forgotten.

On the social front, our illegitimacy rates have sometimes climbed to over ninety percent, reflecting even more alarming declines in self-control, sexual morality and family life. Education, too, is a major concern, in the face of a new high-tech age. Further, crime is clearly trending upwards, accelerated by our increasing materialism, the illicit drug trade and one of our few unwelcome imports: deported criminals.

Dramatic changes are also taking place in the Caribbean's spiritual climate. While many of our educated people are still skeptical over any form of spirituality, the inner emptiness caused by modernism's

failed attempt to dismiss God as a fairy tale has created a great hunger for spiritual experience.

But since the church often seems to be just as discredited, irrelevant and outdated as Marxism, "New Age" spirituality — repackaged paganism — is rapidly spreading across the world, including in our region. Islam, too, is aggressively responding to the hunger, and is working hard to win converts and build a strong base in the Caribbean. Even Hinduism is now taking a far more assertive stance, especially in the Southern Caribbean, where it has a strong ethnic base.

In short, there is clearly a multi-dimensional regional crisis, one that is largely taking place at the expense of the church. And, thus far, we have largely been silent or shallow.

So, the challenge to the church now is whether we can be like the "men of Issachar who understood the times and knew what Israel should do." Or, will we be like the Pharisees and Sadducees: "You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times"? [1 Chronicles 12:32, vs. Matthew 16: 3b.]

For, in times of severe crisis — as we now face in the Caribbean — men lose confidence in their abilities, institutions and leaders. So, as communities and nations grope blindly, hoping for a vision of the way out of distress, they are open to new leaders and messages.

While this naturally provides a powerful opportunity for the gospel, if it is correctly and wisely applied, it also often makes us vulnerable to "blind leaders of the blind." Such misleaders will "tickle [our] itching ears" with what we want to hear, but they are only capable of leading us into the nearest ditch. [Cf. Luke 6:39, 40 and 2 Tim. 4:3, 4.]

Responding to our Times

The first step out of our crisis is to correctly understand it. For, those who fail to correctly interpret the signs of their times will follow misleaders and their pernicious myths down a path to ruin. This is precisely the lesson provided by the failure of Marxism!

The ancient Chinese provide a crucial insight for this task. For, traditional Chinese writing uses pictures to represent words and ideas. As it turns out, the word-picture for "crisis" is made up from two other symbols: "danger," joined with "opportunity."

The wisdom in this is the insight that dangers and opportunities are the key aspects of a crisis. The trick, as Jesus pointed out, is to have the discernment to tell the difference under pressure.

So, given the strong feeling across the region that the church has failed to provide adequate leadership in the face of crisis, we must ask and credibly answer some hard questions:

1. Does the gospel have anything significant to say to our region in the face of its growing, multi-dimensional crisis?
2. Or, are we simply indulging in what Dr Beckles calls "born-again religious escapism"?
3. Last, but not least, would our attempts to be relevant to national concerns be likely to deteriorate into a "right-wing" power grab?

Paul of Tarsus, Apostle to the Nations², provides a powerful answer to these questions, one that opens the gateway to

² Greek: *ethne*; people-groups, as modern Missiologists render it. See Gal.2: 8.

national renewal and reformation under Christ.

For, as Acts 17:16 - 34 records, on his Second Missionary Journey, Paul had gone to Athens to take a brief rest from his stressful Macedonian adventures. Thus, the Apostle came to visit the renowned city of the founders of Western Civilisation's intellectual, artistic and democratic traditions.

However, as he walked about, he found the shock of that city's extreme idolatry too disturbing to keep silent. So, he went to the Agora, the marketplace. There, as Socrates had done five hundred years before, he started to discuss the things of God with passersby.

Soon, a group of pagan philosophers came by, and decided to play along. So, they invited Paul to a meeting of the same council of Athens' leading citizens that had tried and condemned Socrates for being an intellectual gadfly. There, Paul addressed Athens' leaders about nationhood under God:

- He began with the critical flaw in pagan thought, by drawing the philosophers' attention to an altar dedicated: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. For, on the most important possible point of knowledge, the Athenians were forced to admit their ignorance by building a public monument!
- In fact, such man-centred systems of thinking always come to grief on this point. For, in the end, all philosophical or scientific arguments are forced to rest on assumptions that — however plausible they may seem to adherents — are inevitably open to doubt and debate. Thus, as Paul would later write: “in the wisdom of God, the world through its

wisdom³ did not know him.” [1 Cor. 1:21.]

- Instead, it is through encounter with the Living God that we may come to know Him — just like how we know any other person. And, through knowing Him, we can truly know all other things as he reveals them to us. For, “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.” [Prov. 1:7⁴.] So, the Apostle continued: “what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.”
- Thus, Paul speaks as one who had been stopped in his tracks by the risen Christ, knocked off his high horse, and been made to see the light. So, he stood before the Athenians, not as just another Philosopher full of clever arguments and speculations, but rather as a witness, one who has met the Living God and experienced his life-transforming power. As he would later say: “I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven . . . [to the Jews] and the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.” [Acts 26:19 – 20.]
- So, speaking with the authority of one who has met with, heard from, and been sent out by God, Paul spoke to the purpose of nationhood. Specifically, God created the nations from one man, and “he determined the times 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.” [Acts 17:25 - 27; emphasis added.]
- In short, *the nations were created to foster godliness*, and God therefore so controls our times that he brings us to decisive points — crises — where we

³ Philosophy, etymologically, is *philo* + *sophia*, the love of wisdom.

⁴ See John 16:12 – 15, 17:17; 1 Cor. 2:4 – 16.

must decide whether to seek or serve Him. Consequently, godliness should be the fundamental focus for national life: “Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labour in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain.” [Psalm 127:1.]

- But, this directly implies that national prestige, power and prosperity — usually the principal targets of national policy-makers — should be a secondary goal, a means to the primary end: godliness. Therefore, just like the Athenians of Paul’s day, we see the basic folly of such idolatry: substituting something else for God. For, when a community puts anything in the place of God, it walks down a road that has always led to chaos, tyranny and ruin. Thus, we see Jesus’ contrast with Satanic powers: “The thief comes only to steal, and kill and destroy; I have come that [you] may have life, and have it to the full.” [John10:10.]
- In his epistles, the Apostle expanded this theme. For, God (in judgement) will let those who rebel against him have their own way. So he “[gives them] over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity . . . since they [do] not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he [gives] them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.” [Rom. 1:21 – 24, 28, 29.] Consequently, when people reject God, they become “darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all [moral] sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.” [Eph. 4:18, 19.]
- Plainly, then, the moral chaos that so often cripples societies and frustrates progress — whether in the first century

Roman world, or in today’s Caribbean — is the direct result of putting substitutes in the place of God. So, it can only be corrected by our turning back to God, as individuals, families, communities and nations.

- Therefore, in love, Christ sends his missionaries, prophets, evangelists, pastors and people, armed with the gospel, to nations that have come to the point of crisis. For, if any nation is to truly progress, it must put God first: repentance, renewal and reformation must be put at the top of its national agenda.
- Quite logically, Paul then concluded: “now [God] commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day in which he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.” That man, of course, is Jesus.

Clearly, the Athenians got far more than they bargained for. Starting from a careful analysis of the basic error in their culture and thinking, the leaders of Athens were forced, step by logical step, to face the challenge of nationhood under Christ.

For, God created the nations and so controls our times that, through crises triggered by the sinful folly of putting substitutes in his place, we are forced to grope for him, however blindly. Finally, as the Apostle warns, we shall stand before God to account for our lives. God’s signpost for this is the resurrection of Jesus, which is God’s proof and warning to all men that we must reckon with the gospel and his command that “all people everywhere [must] repent.” [Acts 17:30; cf. 1 Cor. 15:1 - 33.]

Thus, the gospel is extremely relevant to our own regional crisis. For, it exposes our root problem — sin and the chaos and destruction that flow from it into our lives, families and communities — and provides

God's solution. Moreover, this insight therefore also underscores the relevance of the church's basic mandate: "disciple the nations."

But, equally, the proper weapons for executing our mandate are spiritual, not worldly ones. We must never turn to deceit, violence, manipulative power grabs and tyranny. For, to resort to such would be to become just what we claim to oppose.

Sadly, Christians have too often fallen to just this temptation, with predictably disastrous results. For instance, this is what happened with the Crusades, with many medieval and Renaissance Popes, and with the equally horrible excesses of the Reformation. [Cf. 2 Cor. 10:4 – 5, and John 18:36 – 38.]

Rather, the essence of the Christian way of national renewal is to apply the truth of the gospel, working it out in our own lives and bearing witness to it through discipleship. Thus, we must learn to trust God to use the power of the truth worked out in love and purity, to renew and transform individuals, families, communities, institutions and nations. So, in Paul's immortal words:

Since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly, we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. [2 Cor. 4:1 – 2.]

Now, as a rule, such a strategy is not very impressive to the powerful and learned. [Cf. 1 Cor. 1:18 – 2:8.] So, it is no great surprise to see that, apart from a few noteworthy exceptions, the leaders of Athens failed to heed and follow the truth.

But we know now who had the better case that fateful day — the future belonged to the

Missionary, not to the Philosophers and Politicians. Indeed, as Ken Prior notes:

What is important is that Paul's ministry in Athens led to the planting of a church. His aim was not only to see the salvation of individuals, but to plant churches, and with his eye for missionary strategy, to do this in a centre as important as Athens would more than compensate for the small number of converts From the small beginnings which resulted from Paul's visit, the church sooner or later grew, because by the first half of the second century it was quite flourishing. [*The Gospel in a Pagan Society*, (Ross-shire: Christian Focus publications, 1995) pp. 169 – 170.]

So, as the history of Greece records, from small and apparently insignificant beginnings, the gospel prevailed in Athens.

Nationhood under God in the Caribbean

Now, in light of Paul's counsel to the Athenians, we can see that our own crises in the Caribbean are being used by God to bring our nations to a point where we will be open to his Word, and to his Christ. This speaks straight to us as our region struggles to emerge from an oppressive colonial past and to find its own place in the Sun:

- First, we must recognise that God created nationhood to foster godliness. Godliness under Christ should therefore be the driving force of national life in the Caribbean. Thus, Christ would "fill all things" in the region: individuality, family, education, science and technology, industry and commerce, culture and arts, media and entertainment, law, public policy and politics, and so on. [Cf. Eph. 4:9, 10.]
- While, clearly, Christians must also respect the right to peacefully dissent from or reject such a consensus of godliness, we are duty-bound to point

out that to serve substitutes for God — idols — is to follow a road to ruin. For, if our nations turn their backs on our Creator, our passions will spin out of control, darkening and twisting our vaunted wisdom and understanding into evil and futility. This would lead us to follow misleaders and deceptive myths down that way “that seems right to a man, but in the end . . . leads to death.” [Prov. 14:12.]

- For instance, perhaps the most attractive deception in our region today is the temptation to worship wealth. Let us, rather, heed Moses: “You may say to yourself, ‘My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.’ But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth.”
- For, wealth, being a gift from God, is good, and a key part of national development. However, it can also tempt us into materialism, arrogance and selfishness — instead of godliness, caring and giving. Such a road leads straight to ruin: “If you ever forget the LORD . . . and follow other gods . . . you will surely be destroyed.” [Deut. 8:17 - 19. Cf. 1 - 16.]
- “The deceitfulness of riches” also points to our general duty to refute false thinking, beliefs and values. As the classic text on spiritual warfare points out: “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have power to demolish strongholds. We demolish *arguments* and every pretension that sets itself up against the *knowledge* of God, and we take captive *every thought* to make it obedient to Christ.” In so doing, of course, it should be equally clear that “by setting forth the truth plainly, we *commend* ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.” [2 Cor. 10:4 -5; 4: 2; emphases added. Cf. 2 Tim. 2:23 - 26.]

- Further, since “the church . . . is [Christ's] body, the fulness of him who fills everything in every way” [Eph. 1:22, 23], those who come to Jesus should be prepared, supported and sent out to influence and renew all aspects of life with God's power and grace. For, as Eph. 2:8 - 10 adds: “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.” [Emphasis added.]
- Clearly, then, the Caribbean church, under its discipling mandate⁵, has an especially vital role in nation-building. For, “[Christ] who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, *in order to fill all things.*” [Eph. 4:10, emphases added.] “**All things**” clearly must include the various aspects of individual, family, community and national life.
- Practical steps to godly nation-building in the Caribbean should therefore include:
 - ✓ Systematic discipleship training for all believers, to consolidate our commitment and equip us for life, service and leadership under Christ in the church, home and community. That is, we must learn how to go about the ordinary business of life, “in Christ.”
 - ✓ The developing of integrated strategies to target and renew key activities and institutions in our region: the family, the church, education, business and industry; the media, sports and entertainment;

⁵ See Matt. 28:18 – 20, Mark 16:15 – 20 [cf. Heb. 1:1 – 4& 2:1 – 4], Luke 24:45 – 48 & Acts 1:1 – 11, John 17:13 – 23, Eph. 4:9 – 24.

the arts and music; government and politics.

- ✓ Sustained, coordinated and well-supported Christian initiatives under these strategies, all across our region. (The well-proved small/cell group and ministry team structures, backed up by our churches and parachurch ministries, would be a practical way to carry this out. Internet web sites and e-mail would greatly improve our communication and operational coordination, at quite low cost.)
- ✓ Publicly, consistently and credibly speaking God's word to key issues, thus promoting renewal through the gospel's power at national and regional levels. This implies the effective use of print, radio, television, the arts (especially music and drama) and the Internet.

Therefore, far from being irrelevant, the gospel (thus, the church) can and should be in the vanguard of true national and regional renewal, development and transformation as our region crosses the threshold of the Third Christian Millennium.

How that can be is the focus of the rest of this book. Since the first step down that road is the link between revival and national transformation through reformation, to that we will now turn.

But first, a challenge: Why not now, why not here, why not us?

ACTIVITIES

(a) Questions for Group Discussion

- How have our sins and substitutes for God led to chaos and crisis in the Caribbean?
- What are the typical solutions being put forward by various leaders and groups?
- Are these proposals likely to end up as part of the answer, or as part of the problem? Why?
- How, then, could God be using our present crises and chaos to open our hearts and minds to the gospel?
- Has he sent missionaries, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers with breakthrough words, to call out and build up the people of God in your community?
- How should God's people in your community respond to the chaos, the crisis and the breakthrough word?
- How can we respond to the counter-arguments or even attacks that would be made, in the church and the wider community?
- How, then, can we begin to lead people and communities in renewal and reformation under Christ?
- When can we start, and how?

(b) Suggested Practical Exercises

- Draft and mail a letter to the Editor that responds to a major current issue, based on your discussions.
- Plan and present a public panel discussion to raise and respond to the same issue.
- Discuss the results.

(c) For Further Reading

Prior, Kenneth. *The Gospel in a Pagan Society* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 1995).

CHAPTER TWO

Crashing the Party: Revival Comes To Town

The first step down the road to national renewal in the Caribbean is for the church to break through to revival, which is the gateway to national and regional transformation through reformation. For, the alternative is ever-increasing chaos and frustration, possibly — especially for Jamaica — ending in bloody and futile revolution and/or dictatorship.

But, why do revival and reformation so often tarry, in spite of our fervent prayers?

The answer is sobering: revival comes at a steep price — it crashes the party, demands repentance, challenges our comfort zones, and threatens the powerful and respectable. So, as history repeatedly records, true revivals are always controversial, and often provoke sharp backlashes, or even outright persecution.

For, while God has promised that “In the last days . . . 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, NIV] we often back away from the steps we need to take if revival is to break through in our lives, families, churches and communities. That is, our disobedience, confusion and fear are the principal roadblocks to revival in the region.

No pain, no gain — no surprise.

So, if refreshing revival, renewal and reformation are to flow out across the Caribbean, we must first search out their roots. Then, we must undergo painful pruning so that we may bear the fruits of revival, in our homes, churches and communities. Therefore, the task of this

chapter is to help us as we go through this process of breakthrough to revival. But first, we must count the cost.

Crashing the Party: Revival comes to Town

A good place to start is with an incident recorded in Luke 7:36 – 50. Here, a notoriously “fallen” woman crashed a dinner party held for Jesus by Simon, a member of the then highly respected Pharisee — that is, “holiness” — movement.

She heard that Jesus, then a famous but increasingly controversial preacher and healer, was going to dinner at Simon's house, so she walked right in. She stood behind the guest of honour. Soon, the tears began to flow, wetting and streaking his dusty feet as he reclined at the table. She then knelt down, wiped his feet with her hair, began kissing them, and poured perfume on them.

That was too much for the host. He said to himself: "If that man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is — that she is a sinner." [v. 39.]

But that was just the point. Jesus replied: "Simon, I have something to tell you."

"Tell me, teacher."

So, he did. First, a story: if a moneylender forgives two men who can't pay back their loans, which would love him more?

"The one who had the bigger debt cancelled."

"You have judged correctly . . . Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven — for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." [Vv. 43 - 47.]

Why was there so sharp a contrast between the respectable Pharisee and the "fallen" woman? Why did Jesus rebuke the upright, respectable religious leader? And, why did he accept what clearly looked very much like attempted seduction by a notorious temptress as an expression of heartfelt repentance?

The Roots of Revival

The answers take us to the roots of true revival, and show how it works. They will also expose the sad, dirty secrets of our own hearts — secrets that block the renewing and reviving flow of God's Holy Spirit across the Caribbean and beyond it in our own time.

For, true revival begins when we admit a shameful truth: that we are empty, dry, even more corrupt inwardly than we are outwardly; a hypocritical stench in the nostrils of the Holy One. Furthermore, even when we sincerely want to do what is right and good, we find ourselves trapped in sin.

As Paul put it: "I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin . . . I have a desire to do what is good but I cannot carry it out . . . the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing." [Rom. 7:14, 19.]

If we fail to break out of such hypocrisy and bondage to sin, our fate will be like that of the Pharisees: once highly respected for their uprightness, the very name of their movement is now a synonym for

"hypocrite." Already, many people across the region — too often for good reason — view Christians in exactly this way.

So, let us hunger for God's love, truth, purity and power. Then, let us admit to and turn from our sinful bondage and hypocrisy to Jesus, through in prayerful, even tearful, **repentance**. Of course, such a turning point may be quite intense, even offensive to onlookers, but "he who has been forgiven little loves little." We must not allow our desire to look good to block us from seriously dealing with our sins!

Once we have thus faced our sins, we must go on to **renewal**. As Paul teaches: "Don't let the world squeeze you into its mould. Instead, be transformed from within by the *renewing of your mind*. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is." [Rom. 12:2, paraphrased.] In short, we must turn from "the ignorance that is in [us] due to the hardening of [our] hearts," and learn and live by "the truth that is in Jesus." [Eph. 4:18, 21.]

Thus, as we study and live by that truth, we will "put off [our] old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires . . . [and] *be made new in the attitude of [our] minds* . . . put[ting] on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." [Eph. 4:22 - 24.]

Consequently, "there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death . . . so that the righteous requirements of the law might be met fully in us, who do not live according to the [flesh] but according to the Spirit." [Rom. 8:1, 4; NIV margin for *sarx*.]

In short, renewal is the living out of repentance, through the liberating power of God's Word and Spirit. (Indeed, the Greek word for "repent" means, "to change your mind," that is, thinking and attitudes.) Thus,

as Paul goes on to say in Rom. 8:5 – 9 & 13 - 14:

Those who live according to the [flesh] have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live according to the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The [mind set on the flesh] is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace

You, however, are controlled not by the [flesh] but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ For if you live according to the [flesh], you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God.

So, the roots of revival are that we must face up to our sinfulness, repenting and learning to walk in step with the leading of the Spirit of God. This requires that we devote ourselves to studying and living by the pure light of the Word of God. For, it is the Scriptures that “are able to make [us] wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” They do so by “teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the [people] of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” [2 Tim 3:15 – 17; cf. Acts 2:42.]

Thus, making use of the concept that the people of God are the functioning parts of the body of Christ, Paul notes: “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 by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” [Eph. 4:15 – 16.]

Love is therefore the lynchpin virtue, binding together our life of faith and service into a balanced, caring whole. As a result, the key rule of righteous conduct is love at work:

[H]e who loves his fellow-man has fulfilled the law. The commandments, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not covet,’ and whatever other commandments there may be are summed up in this one rule: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law. [Rom. 13:8b – 10.]

This leads us to the basic principles of Christian liberty:

- 1) Love God with all your soul, heart, strength and mind⁶;
- 2) Love your neighbour as yourself; then,
- 3) Freely act out that love, in the power of God’s Holy Spirit, and by the light of his Word.

But, doesn’t this give license to us to do what is right in our own eyes? Not at all, for the leading of the Spirit of God by the light of the Bible provides a strong safeguard — “love does no harm.” More specifically, the Scriptures teach us the truth, correct our error and train us in righteousness, equipping us “for every good work.”

Sadly, however, “good works” have become a source of confusion; especially through the absurd conceit that we can save ourselves by doing enough good deeds to make up for our sins⁷. Instead, the Bible strikes a delicate balance: while such good works are not the *basis* for Salvation, they are its natural and intended overflow:

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

⁶ Matt. 22:34 – 40.

⁷ See Rom. 6:23, Isaiah 59:1 – 2 & James 1:12 – 15.

do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” [Eph. 2:8 – 10.]

So, as we receive God’s unmerited favour — that is, *grace* — through surrendering to and trusting him based on his word⁸, he leads us to a life of love that issues in doing good works. This means that as we repent and are renewed, we will turn from selfish, devilish, fleshly, worldly ways to loving, godly ones instead. Thus, healing renewal naturally flows out through transformed lives into our families, churches, workplaces and communities — the process of reformation.

However, many people draw benefits, profits and pleasures from deceit, sin and chaos in the community. So, as renewal begins to reform the community, it will inevitably trigger conflict and opposition. As the Apostle warns, “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.” [2 Tim. 3:12, 13.]

So, if revival is to break forth across the Caribbean, we must be determined to turn from our sin in repentance, and to trust and serve Christ by walking in the “good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do,” even in the teeth of conflict, opposition and confrontation.

Revival, and its Fruits

Obviously, we cannot meet such a stiff challenge by our will power and self-discipline. Rather, “through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.” [Rom. 8:2.] Thus, we again see the key to breakthrough: supernatural power, by God’s Holy Spirit.

So, as we reach out to God in biblical, prayerful repentance and faith, he will pour out his gracious Spirit on us. Through the Spirit, we will receive power:

- To *love* the unlovely;
- To live by the *truth*;
- To walk in *purity* of life, word and thought; and,
- To *bear witness* to the gospel, reaching out to others with the good news of salvation, healing and liberation from the bondage of the world, the flesh and the devil⁹.

That is, life in the power of the Spirit [Gal. 5:26a] is the normal state of the Christian life — it is the only way that we can consistently walk in love, truth, power and purity. Therefore, as we learn to “keep in step with the Spirit” [Gal. 5:26b], we will begin to live the Christian life the only way it can really work: supernaturally.

Thus, the third phase of God’s breakthrough is revival proper, the pouring out of God’s Spirit in love, truth, power and purity. As was promised through Joel, “In the last days, God says, I will *pour out my Spirit* on all people.” So we are called to “*Repent . . .* and turn to God, so that [our] sins may be wiped out, that *times of refreshing* may come from the Lord.” [Acts 2:17, 3:19.]

But, since walking by the power of the Spirit is the normal Christian life, such revival should not be a rarity. Instead, we should live in the Spirit’s power, day by day — special times of refreshing should simply heighten our day to day experience of God’s power.

Now, I must pause. For, while I am forced to write the above by the logic of the case, I find its implications supremely challenging. Oh, how I burn with shame as I recognise how often I have blocked the natural flow of revival! And, I am sure I am not alone.

Let us therefore join together, admit our guilt in repentance, and ask God to pour out

⁸ That is, faith. See Rom. 4:4 – 5 and 10:17.

⁹ See Acts 1:4 – 8, Rom. 5:1 – 8, 1 Cor. 13:4 – 7, and Eph. 2:1 – 10. Love, truth, power, purity and witness identify five key clusters of Christian virtues.

his Spirit on us in a powerful flow of love, truth, power and purity. Then, "sinners can catch the overflow," as rivers of living water pour out of our hearts through our deeds and words. [Cf. John 7:37 – 39.]

This is not just theory; it is the record of the early church. As Acts 2:41 - 47 summarises, those who repented and believed the word of God were baptised, a public mark of their commitment to Christ and his church. This was then lived out in the power of the Spirit as the new disciples devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to mutual caring, to worship and prayer (corporate and in their homes), and to witness.

As a result, the daily, Spirit-led and empowered teaching, lifestyle, fellowship, ministry, worship, prayers, caring and testimony of the early church practically demonstrated the impact of repentance, renewal and revival. So, it is no surprise to see that "the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

Revival therefore naturally leads to ***reformation***, the ongoing transformation of community life, culture and institutions under the impact of the Lordship of Jesus. This happens as more and more people surrender to Jesus, and by his Spirit, fill their lives and ways with his fulness, thus affecting their community. [Eph. 1:9 - 10, 22 - 23, 4:9 - 24.]

But, as we saw above, such a breaking out of the worldly mould challenges the whole community, especially the respectable and the powerful. So revival movements and their leaders are inevitably controversial. For, one man's repentance, renewal and revival will always be another man's rebuke. And if such a person makes his living or gains power from sin, he will want to discredit, dismiss, or even fight against the revival.

This is exactly what happened to Paul at the hands of the silversmiths in the city of

Ephesus. As revival bit into their idolatrous trade, they conspired against the Apostle:

"this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people . . . There is danger . . . that our trade will lose its good name"; so they stirred up the people against the apostle. [Acts 19:26 - 27.]

Selfish interest and idolatrous deception twisted these businessmen, leading them to reject the truth and fight against God. So, as dupes of the Devil, they used their power wickedly¹⁰, to stir up a riot to rid themselves of the threat to their "good name." Sadly, there are all too many echoes in our time. Conflict, opposition and persecution are just as much the fruit of revival as is reformation.

The Four R's of Revival

We can now sum up. Revival's roots lie in repentance and renewal. Likewise, its fruits are reformation and persecution. We can therefore see that revival happens in four overlapping phases, *the four R's of revival*:

R1 Repentance: True revivals start here. As we repent, we "put off [our] old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires . . . [and will] *be made new in the attitude of [our] minds . . . put[ting]* on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." [Eph. 4:18, 20 - 24.]

R2 Renewal: this is the living out of repentance as we learn and live by the light of God's word and the power of God's Spirit. "Don't let the world squeeze you into its mould. Instead, be transformed from within by the *renewing of your mind*. Then you will

¹⁰ This pattern defines evil: twisting (or, *perverting*) the good things God has given us, to serve self-centred ends.

be able to test and approve what God's will is."

R3 Revival, proper: the pouring out of God's Spirit in times of refreshing. Thus, we receive anointed power from God to walk in good works in the face of a deceived, corrupt world. "In the last days, God says, I will *pour out my Spirit* on all people," so we are called to "*Repent . . . and turn to God, so that [our] sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.*"

R4 Reformation: the transformation of a community, its institutions and culture under the impact of the Lordship of Jesus as those who surrender to him fill their lives and ways with his fulness. Of course, this threatens those who draw pleasure and power from sin (or even make their living from it), so revivals will also face persecution.

Revival, Spiritual War and Discernment

A Heaven-sent spiritual breakthrough is powerful, but threatening. For, when revival comes to town, it crashes the party — it offends "good taste," challenges the comfortable, threatens business and political interests, cuts across agendas and exposes hidden hypocrisy. So, the demons won't leave town quietly: they always fight hard and dirty, stirring up their dupes to oppose God.

The resulting intensified spiritual warfare, accompanied by ugliness, confusion and conflict, stir up further contempt for genuine revival — even among God's people. So, we tend to be like Simon the upright Pharisee, who mistook repentance for seduction, concluding that Jesus couldn't be a true prophet since he didn't put the "sinner" in her place.

But there is another side to discernment. As Solzhenitsyn the great Russian writer — and Christian — observes, "the line between good and evil does not pass between classes

and nations, but right through the human heart." As a result, renewal movements and revivals have always contained a strange mixture of truth and error, repentance and hard-heartedness, insight and blindness, holiness and hypocrisy.

Clearly, then, we must prize and use godly discernment. As the sad case of David Koresh and the Branch Davidians shows, some religious leaders, movements and members may not be sound or even genuine.

Others may be like King David: they have their hearts in the right place, but are tragically flawed. Or, saddest of all, some are like King Saul — they started right, but have lost their way, and are now lashing out jealously against those they see as threats to their agendas.

This caution holds for the evangelist pitching a tent down the road, for the TV preacher, for the Sunday School teacher or pastor, for the most venerable religious leaders in the community, and, most of all, for our own deceitful hearts. [Jeremiah 17:9 & 10.]

Let us always seek to discern and yield to "the finger of God." [Luke 11:20.]

Towards Revival in the Caribbean

Plainly, if sorely needed revival and reformation are to spread across the Caribbean, we must repent and be renewed in our thinking, speaking and living. That means swallowing our pride and respectability, prayerfully opening our minds and hearts to neglected or even rejected biblical truth, and breaking before God and man in repentance, reconciliation and restitution. We must also be prepared to face challenges, misunderstanding and even persecution.

We will also need to be involved with and committed to the people of God. We cannot go it alone:

let us draw near to God . . . let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” [Heb. 10:22 – 25. Emphases added.]

So then, let us pray together for revival, crying out before God as representatives of our nations. As we do so, let us confess our guilt, shame and helplessness and ask him to pour out his Spirit on us and our nations as he has promised, in love, truth, purity and power. On rising from our knees, let us then go out to live by and "sp[ea]k the word of God boldly," accepting the risk of ridicule, rejection and persecution. [Acts 4:31.]

Breakthrough Teachings and Strategies

One further step is necessary. Historically, reformation requires outreach, nurture and ministry strategies and teachings that pierce religious, intellectual and social or cultural barriers. For instance, the key insight of the European Reformation of five hundred years ago was the recovery of Paul’s key teaching: justification by grace, through faith, unto good works. [Eph. 2:8 – 10.]

This breakthrough teaching was coupled to a new strategy: Bibles in the language of the people, with systematic study and teaching for the masses. The resulting release of God’s word powerfully worked to liberate and renew millions, and so transformed whole nations. Thus, even though the Reformation has not been without blind spots and even horrible failings over these past five centuries, the world has been tremendously blessed by it.

Similarly, two hundred years ago, the Methodist movement stressed personal encounter with God in repentance and faith, holiness and the power of the Spirit. It also used then unconventional strategies: open-

air preaching, circuit riding preachers and the small-group class structure. Thus, the English speaking world was further transformed by the power of God, and the modern Missionary movement broke forth and has spread the gospel around the world.

The breakthrough principle is not just a matter of historical observation. It can also be seen at work in the New Testament: Jesus' encounters with the woman at the well in Samaria [John 4:1 – 42] and the early church's breakthrough to the gentiles [Acts 8 – 15] are two clear cases. These cases will well repay study.

For the Caribbean today, I believe such a **breakthrough cluster** of teachings and strategies should include:

- **The Fulness of Christ:** Eph. 1:10 and 4:10 point out that God has purposed to unite everything in heaven and on earth under one Head, Christ; and that Jesus came, descending and ascending "in order to fill all things." 1:22 & 23 add: "the church . . . is his body, the fulness of him who fills everything in every way." Our mission therefore requires us to penetrate all of life with the renewing force of the gospel: individuality, family life and sexuality, gender, the church, education, sports, art and culture, the media, institutions, business, science and technology, government and politics, justice and mercy, environment concerns, national development and the war against poverty . . .
- **Discipleship, Body Life and Service:** Eph. 4:11 - 16 can be viewed as *the operational form of our discipling mandate*. It outlines the strategy Christ has for the church: he gives leaders to the church "to prepare God's people for works of service," so that the church might grow into "the whole measure of the fulness of Christ," as each of us fulfils his/her areas of service — that is, "ministry" — in the body of Christ in the world. Thus, discipleship leads to

our call to service under Christ's purpose to fill all things, in all nations.

- **Nationhood under Christ:** In Matt. 28:19, Jesus sends us to "make disciples of all nations." Acts 17:24 - 27 adds that God created the nations and so controls our places and times that we are brought to moments of crisis and truth: opportunities to reach out to God. Thus, godliness under Christ is the key to true nation-building, and should become the focus of Caribbean life as we cross the threshold of the Third Christian Millennium.
- **Cells and Networks:** Small or cell groups, as the Methodists demonstrated over two hundred years ago, and as the Protestant Huguenots of France also showed two hundred years before Wesley, are a practical and biblical structure for renewal, training, church growth and mobilising disciples for service. To sustain their effectiveness, however, they will need to be integrated into networks that provide support, accountability and leadership. In our time, the Internet provides a further, awesomely powerful, dimension to such cells and networks.
- **The Priority and Power of Unity:** Jesus prayed for the church: "May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know you sent me and have loved them." [John 17:23.] John 3:16 points out that "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son," so our disunity, suspicion, envy, backbiting and selfish ambition work to discredit the gospel. Quite a contrast to Acts 4:32:

"All the believers were one in heart and mind." Let us repent, be reconciled, and "consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds." [Heb. 10:24.]

We will now turn to exploring and developing these ideas, proposals and strategies. But, since the demons "won't leave town quietly," let us devote ourselves to intense, sustained prayers as we seek to open a door to godly renewal and revival across our region and beyond.

May we be privileged to witness *times of refreshing* in our day: Why not now? Why not here? Why not us?

Suggested Assignments

- (a) Questions for Group Discussion
 - Read Matt. 7:1 – 5. In its light, how should the people of God approach the issue of reformation in the community?
 - Given the common charge that we are all a bunch of self-righteous hypocrites, have we?
 - How can we correct our ways, balancing love, truth, power and purity in our lives, work and communities?
 - How, then, should we work towards renewal, revival and reformation in the Caribbean?
 - Where should we start?

(b) Suggested Practical Exercises

(c) For Further Reading

CHAPTER THREE

Man Shall Not Live by Bread Alone: Christ-Centred Renewal in the Emerging Global Age

The beginning of the 1990's was the real end of the twentieth century — the calendar has just taken ten years to catch up with events¹¹. For, as the Berlin Wall was knocked down, the world entered a new global age — with Reggae liberation songs providing some of the background music for the grand party.

Communism soon fell apart, aside from a few isolated pockets, and the Capitalist West was the clear victor in the Cold War. But the global party was over almost as soon as it had begun. For, while there has been prosperity in many quarters, there are large pockets of "persistent poverty," and clear marks of moral and spiritual exhaustion and accelerated decay in the West, including the Caribbean. The swirling crises that have marked the 1990's have seen to that.

Thus, secularist, materialistic philosophies, science and technology — both Marxist and Capitalist — have proved themselves to be spiritually barren, and too often environmentally devastating, economically impotent, corrupt, unjust and morally bankrupt. Further, as the current fears over environmental degradation, global warming and genetically modified foods and organisms show, science and technology have now lost their heroic stature in the popular mind.

The blight even affects the Information Technology revolution. For example, it is commonly reported that one of the biggest

uses of the Internet is to download pornography. And, in the view of many, the Information Age may be more accurately called the Age of Surveillance — current and emerging technologies make the scenario of Revelations 13:17 all too familiar: “no-one could buy or sell unless he had the mark [of the Beast].”

In short, we have now entered a post-modern, global age of doubt, cynical manipulation and, too often, despair — the age of “the grand ‘Sez who?’”¹² For, many people now think there is nothing more to truth and morality than “this seems true or right to me.” Therefore, they mistakenly challenge any asserted truth or moral claim that does not suit their fancy: “Who are you to impose *your* standards and views on me?”

So, having dulled their senses by turning away from the voice of God, relativists demand the “right” to do what is right in their own eyes¹³. But, rights and duties are two sides of the same coin. For, your right always implies my duty — to life, liberty, property, reputation, or whatever.

So, relativists inevitably fall into a glaring inconsistency: how can relativists insist that truth, rights and morality are relative to individuals and cultures, then expect others to accept the moral obligation that they *should not* “impose their views on others”?

To such a moral inconsistency, of course, the proper reply is: “Who are you to impose

¹¹ This aptly illustrates the difference between *chronos* time, as marked by the calendar; and *kairos* time, as marked by seasons, crises or events.

¹² From a lecture by Yale Law School professor Arthur Leff. See Philip Johnson's *Reason in the Balance* (IVP, 1995), p. 147 ff.

¹³ See Judges 21:25.

your intolerant standard, i.e. relativism, on us?¹⁴ For, since relativism is forced to assert at least one binding moral standard, it fails its own test of “tolerance.”

But, to accept that at least one moral principle is binding is a sign that all is not lost. So, our second question to moral relativists is: “Why, then, do you wish to object to other moral principles that have long stood the hard test of time?” For example: respect for and thankfulness towards our Creator and Lord; respect for marriage and the family, for life, for property, for truth; and, respect for the reputation and achievements of others.¹⁵

There is a third, even more important concern: “every man does what is right in his own eyes” is the classic recipe for social breakdown. Such chaos opens the gate for tyrants to gain power by promising to restore or maintain order and prosperity¹⁶. However, once they gain power, the “cure” imposed by such tyrants typically turns out to be worse than the disease.

We need only note a few names from recent history to underscore this point: Hitler, Lenin and Stalin, Mussolini, Mao, Pol Pot, Pinochet, Idi Amin, perhaps even Castro. As Lord Acton observed, wisely but sadly: “power tends to corrupt; absolute power¹⁷ corrupts absolutely.”

Thus, we come to the Caribbean’s stark choice: repentance and reformation under

the power of the gospel¹⁸; or, ever-increasing chaos leading to bloody revolution and/or tyranny. For, as the Bible so clearly teaches, and as experience has repeatedly shown, godliness is the only proven way for a nation to enjoy both liberty and order.

With such a stark choice, our duty is clear. But, how can the gospel gain a hearing in such a time as this?

Man Shall Not Live by Bread Alone

First and foremost, our witness must start with Jesus’ challenge to our time: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” [Matt 4:4:4, 16:26, KJV.]

There is a spiritual hunger in man, one that simply cannot be fed by worldly lusts for pleasures, prestige or power. It can only be satisfied through the Word of God, for that word “is truth.” [John 17:17.] In short, the gospel is tailor-made for such a time as this!

However, we Christians have often been shaken by the secularist idea that God is simply a fairy tale, and so have been swept away in the flood of worldly substitutes for God and his word. As a direct result, we have become slaves to our possessions, our ambitions, our greed, our lusts and our passions.

Such a lukewarm condition¹⁹ has robbed us of vigour in exposing and responding to secularism’s bankruptcy, and to the resulting wave of spiritual hunger that swept the globe in the 1990’s. That is why repackaged paganism tied to do-it-yourself spirituality (New Age-ism), Islam, Hinduism, Afrocentrism and other similar movements

¹⁴ Lest I seem to exaggerate: I have in hand a letter from a UWI Law Lecturer who espouses relativism, and on that basis threatened legal action against students for preaching the gospel on campus.

¹⁵ Exodus 20:2 – 17. Cf. Matt 22:34 – 40 and Rom. 13:8 – 10.

¹⁶ See Judges 21:25, in the context of that book of the Bible, and compare the cry for a king in 1 Sam. 8:1 – 22, especially Samuel’s warning: “you yourselves will become [the king’s] slaves.”

¹⁷ That is, as history repeatedly records, power without accountability and effective restraint leads to tyranny. This is why the American Founding Fathers insisted on so many “checks and balances” in their Constitution. For, as students of Moses and Paul, they knew full well the fallen nature of man.

¹⁸ It is this openness to reformation — not power, nor prosperity, nor artistic achievements — that is the true mark of national greatness.

¹⁹ Revelations 3:16

have often been able to seize the spiritual initiative, even here in the Caribbean.

Yet, Paul of Tarsus, Apostle to the Nations, points out that the gospel is a message for such times:

From one man [God] made every nation . . . and he determined the times 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 . . . now he commands all men everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead." [Acts 17:26 - 31, NIV; emphases added.]

God, who made the nations, so controls our times that the chaos caused by turning our backs on God and devoting ourselves to substitutes for Himself will naturally lead to crisis. Such crises are used by God to shake our confidence in our selves and our idols, opening us up to the voice of his Christ.

But, this is exactly what has happened in our day. For, God is shaking rebellious men, institutions, and communities — the whole world: time to seek him. Time to repent, turning from the sawdust and ashes of worldly lusts, brittle prosperity, fading prestige and false hopes and gods to the true Living Bread from heaven. Time to turn to the one who was schemed into an unjust death, but who rose in triumph. Time to turn to Jesus!

Jesus, the Only Way

Jesus, on the night in which he was betrayed, said: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me." [John 14:6.]

Later, the Apostle Peter, standing on trial before the Jewish High Council, added: "It

is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this [formerly crippled] man *stands* before you healed. He is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.' Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." [Acts 4:10 - 12; cf. v. 14 and Isaiah 43:10 - 13! Emphasis added.]

Paul, quoting an early church hymn, concludes:

Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant . . . he 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, 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: 5b - 11; cf. Isaiah 45:22 - 24!]

However, this historic Christian contention that Jesus is Lord, the only Saviour, the only way to the Father, has always been controversial. In our time, this disinclination to take Jesus seriously has been strongly reinforced by the idea that all religions are equally roads to "God." Thus, "tolerance" is now often redefined from *respect for diversity* to the notion that one must never assert or imply that another person's faith may be in error.

But, on closer inspection, it turns out that this apparently appealing and open-minded idea is often simply *atheism in disguise!* For, it quietly assumes that religious beliefs are only true in the sense that those who believe feel that they are true. Granting such cynical relativism, then of course it follows that all religions are equally roads to

god: "god" being simply a fairy tale that props up weak hearts and minds.

In the end, though, this cynical materialism has failed. For, it is unable to even face up to the basic fact of our obvious human frailty — much less provide hope, courage and guidance in a world that so often overwhelms us. Worse than that, it also fails to show us why we should trust the conclusions of human minds.

For, if all things are “nothing but” the product of random chance acting on matter across time through purposeless natural laws; then obviously our minds and thoughts are wholly caused and controlled by irrational forces.

In short, materialist theories typically present “objective” and “rational” arguments that undermine (or even deny) even their own objectivity and rationality. Such thinking saws off the branch on which it sits²⁰. Thus, it defeats itself, and is a dead end.

So, gently, but firmly, we must ask such evolutionary materialists: why should we accept the musings of an overgrown monkey brain — one controlled by its potty training and class conditioning — that can only lead to the recommendations of just another puzzled rat in the cosmic maze?

To many other people, the idea that "all roads equally lead to God" means that there is a common truth in all religious traditions. This leads them to reinterpret — “*wrench*” is often a more accurate, though less polite, word — the world's major religious traditions in light of their assumed “common

thread of truth.” However, this concept usually forces them to ignore, distort or dismiss the many claims in these traditions that run counter to such “common truths.”

For instance, one guru has attempted to take "Be still and know that I am God" out of its context of quiet worship before our Creator, the LORD, into the utterly different Hindu context that *Atman is Brahman* (roughly, "each of us is a little spark of god"). Far from being "tolerant," such sloppy thinking actually arrogantly disrespects the fact of diversity in those traditions. So, this too is a dead-end.

Similarly, some are now attempting to rewrite the Caribbean's religious history. For instance, it is claimed that under the Spanish, Jamaica was largely settled by Islamic Moors, who — as the Maroons — resisted the British invaders, just as Saladin opposed the Crusaders in the Middle East. Further, in the teeth of the overwhelming evidence that most slaves imported by the British were animists, they argue that the slave population was largely Islamic. So, even the 1831 “Baptist War” slave uprising — led by Sam Sharpe, a Baptist Deacon and National Hero of Jamaica — has been reinterpreted as an Islamic Jihad²¹.

The underlying point? That we are to “return” to our Islamic roots. The bloody 1990 radical Islamic coup attempt in Trinidad, the sad fate of women under the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, or the ongoing enslavement of black southern Sudanese at the hands of their Islamic compatriots from the north should provide sufficient warning that this is yet another dead end.

Instead, let us return to our true roots: in God. For, there is a mountain of solid

²⁰ C. S. Lewis, *Miracles*, Ch. 1. For a more formal discussion of why naturalism is self-refuting, see Ronald Nash, *Faith and Reason* (Zondervan, 1988), pp. 52 – 55. Also, see 1 Cor. 1:18 – 2:5. For the moment, think about the fact that we all accept that error exists. As Elton Trueblood pointed out, in his *General Philosophy*, this means that we all implicitly accept that there is something to be in error about: the truth.

²¹ Cf. Afroz, Sultana. “From Moors to Marronage: The Islamic Heritage of Maroons in Jamaica,” *Jamaica Observer Sun Day*, Dec. 3, 2000, pp. 28 – 29. Also, further details from a display on Jamaica's Islamic Heritage, Main Library, Mona Campus UWI, summer 2000.

evidence — let us just open our eyes and look around us at the wonders of Creation — that the Living God is our Creator; that he has given us our intelligence and planted a conscience in our hearts; and that he loves us enough that Jesus came, brought healing and deliverance, died for our sins and rose from the dead as victorious Lord, with over five hundred eyewitnesses! [John 1:1 - 18, 3:12 - 21; Rom. 1:18 - 32; 1 Cor. 15:1 - 8; Eph. 4:9 - 24.]

Moreover, "[God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given *proof* of this to all men by raising him from the dead." [Acts 17:31, emphasis added.]

Now, some of us — like most of Athens' leaders in the First Century — are unwilling to accept the report of over five hundred eyewitnesses to the resurrection (most of whom were still alive when the record was made). Likewise, too many of us simply dismiss without serious consideration the consistent testimony of millions through the ages who have *personally* met the risen Christ in his life-renewing power²².

However, such responses say more about the strength of our prejudices than they do about the state of the case on facts, evidence and logic. [1 Cor. 15:1 - 20; 2 Peter 1:12 - 16; 1 John 1:1 - 10.]

Let us thank God, then, that the global wave of unsatisfied spiritual hunger has unlocked the door of opportunity for true, Christ-centred renewal, revival and reformation across the Caribbean, and beyond. That is, our time of crises presents us with a major strategic opportunity for global evangelization.

²² Paul's encounter with the risen Christ in Acts 9:1 - 19 is only a more spectacular form of what millions experience as they repent and receive Jesus as Lord and Saviour, or for that matter in their daily worship and prayers. For instance, the great Seventeenth Century Mathematician, Scientist and Christian, Pascal, in his *Pensees*, records a similar encounter with God.

A Major Strategic Opportunity

Twenty three hundred years ago, Aristotle observed that *strategy is the science of opportunity*. [*The Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I Ch. vi: 4.] Historians also commonly say that those who refuse to learn from history are condemned to repeat it. Times of opportunity, however, are also times of danger. For, if we fail to understand and respond to our times by making the most of our opportunities, we must suffer damaging consequences.

Therefore, let us consider the historical parallel of 628 AD, when the Eastern Roman Empire defeated the Persians, but was exhausted. Soon, Islamic armies swept out of Arabia in an arc of conquest and gradual conversion that helped create today's Islamic heartland, especially in Egypt, Palestine, Syria and North Africa.

Such conversions were often due to the cumulative pressure of discriminatory *dhimmi*²³ laws. For instance, Christians under Islamic rule in the Balkans could not securely own land, build churches, propagate their Faith or even give credible evidence in court. [British Consul James Zohrab's *July 22nd 1860 Report*²⁴.] As Ye'or goes on to note, Jihad and the imposition of Islamic law, *Sharia*, logically lead to such a subjected people status, as happened to "all the populations around the Mediterranean, [that had been] vanquished by Jihad."

So, for nearly a thousand years, the church was largely confined to a backward, hemmed-in region that reacted to the Islamic Jihad by repeatedly launching cruel military Crusades "blessed" by the church's leaders. No wonder so many hearts are shut to the gospel in what we now call "the 10/40 Window." For, that window is largely the

²³ "Protected person," i.e. Jews and Christians under Islamic rule.

²⁴ Bat Ye'or's address to the Lord Byron Foundation for Balkan Studies - Symposium on the Balkan War, Chicago Illinois, 31 August 1995.

block of nations established by the equally cruel Islamic Jihads from the 630's on.

Nor have the past five hundred years been much of an improvement. Starting with Columbus' voyages of exploration, the slaughter of the Arawaks and the enslavement of blacks (a practice first learned by Europeans from the Islamic Moors of North Africa²⁵), the history of the Caribbean is the strongest proof of this sad fact.

Consequently, we must view the global wave of spiritual emptiness, and that of post-Cold War exhaustion and decadence, as signs of a critical turning-point in history, a *kairos*²⁶. This is what the neopagans, Islamics, Afrocentrists and others are seeking to exploit. So, if we are to "[make] the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil" [Eph. 5:16], we must work towards a breakthrough to godly renewal in — and eventually beyond — the Caribbean:

- We must **seize the initiative**. Surely, Caribbean history is proof enough of what happens when we don't. Paul shows us the way: under Christ, he fused the best in Jewish, Greek and Roman heritage, laying the foundation for the modern world. And he did it in the midst of an era of wrenching change as the multi-cultural, oppressive Roman Empire emerged from the ashes of a Roman Republic ruined by vicious power plays triggered by the envy and selfish ambition of its own leading citizens²⁷. [Cf. James 3:13 - 4:2, 5:1 - 6.]

²⁵ Sadly, there is credible evidence that enslavement of blacks by Islamic peoples continues until today in North Africa, especially in Mauritania and Sudan. A recent "slave ship" incident suggests that it continues in *West Africa* as well.

²⁶ See the Greek text of Acts 17:26 and 3:20.

²⁷ While Shakespeare's play, *Julius Caesar*, is not a detailed, accurate history, it captures the envious, selfishly ambitious spirit of those times very well.

- We must **seize the initiative in the battle of ideas**. In spiritual warfare we "demolish [deceptive] arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." [2 Cor. 10: 5.] Let us take the Christian case to the campus, the school, the media, the Internet, business, institutions, the man in the street and people in their homes. The recent issue in Barbados over a proposal to use the Sai Baba *Book of Human Values* for School Assemblies is only the tip of the iceberg.
- This demands that we must work out a credible, **Christ-centred vision for the Caribbean**. In particular, we must address major social, economic, political and environmental needs, in light of the Fulness of Christ. This will require a major consultation, perhaps using a CONECAR, to think through such a godly, *Christocentric*²⁸ strategy for Caribbean renewal.
- We have to **demonstrate that our vision works**. Pilot projects in discipleship, family renewal, education, development, media, arts, environment, issues groups, etc. should be very helpful for this. Then, reformation under Christ can spread to our region, and beyond.
- Finally, we must take advantage of the **global, information age**. For example, packages such as *WebCT* can help us to develop and deliver "any-distance" Theological Education, support for discipleship training, and "second chance" initiatives for those who lack the spiritual, academic and technical education base needed for the days ahead.

As Mordecai once challenged a Queen:
"who knows but that you have come to . . .

²⁸ As opposed to Euro- or Afro- centric, etc.

position for such a time as this?" [Esther 4:14.] The conclusion is therefore quite simple: *why not now, why not here, why not us?*

Suggested Assignments

(a) Questions for Group Discussion

- Discuss the claim: "If error exists, then it means that there is something to be mistaken about — truth." Does this make sense? Why or why not?
- How should we understand the words: "tolerance" and "intolerance"? Why?
- In Acts 4:1 – 22, and 5:17 – 41, we see the Apostles having to deal with diversity of opinion. Were they intolerant? Were the Jewish leaders?
- This incident underscores the importance of basic freedoms: of conscience, of expression, and of assembly. Has the church always accepted these rights? What are the consequences of freedom and of suppressing it?
- If freedom of expression carries with it the price tag that many errors and deceptions will abound in a community, how should the church prepare us for such a situation? [See Eph. 4:14 – 15 and 1 Peter 3:15.]

- Can freedom, justice, truth, prosperity and good order be sustained in a society, apart from godliness? Why or why not?
- In light of your discussions, how can discipleship, affect national development in the Caribbean?
- How should this help to shape our witness, outreach and discipling ministries?

(b) Practical Exercises

- Host a "Dialogue of Faiths" with representatives of several faiths in your community (including atheism, of course). Focus on the themes raised in this chapter. How should what you learn help to shape your ongoing witness, life and service in the community?

(c) For Further Reading

Ronald Nash's *Worldviews in Conflict* is helpful.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Fulness Vision: Towards Caribbean Renewal under Christ

Gem 99:09:05 CC Renewal Series #2

Odd as it may sound to us — we tend to view the Caribbean's development issues mainly in terms of politics, social issues and economics — it is the spiritual aspect of our regional crisis that is vital.

In the words of Solomon the great king and builder of Israel: "Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labour in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain." [Psalm 127:1.]

Paul, speaking to the Athenians, adds: "The God who made the world and everything in it . . . gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times 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 . . . now he commands all people everywhere to repent." [Acts 17:24 -30.]

God created the nations of the Caribbean and controls our times and places. Why? "So that [we] would seek him . . . and perhaps find him." That is, our nationhood and circumstances are designed by God to lead us towards godliness. Specifically, our Creator so controls our times that, through the crises triggered by our sin and folly we are forced to grope for him.

Therefore, let us heed the prophets:

My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water. [Jeremiah 2:13.]

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend your money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? [Isaiah 55:1 & 2.]

In short, godliness under Christ is the key to sound nation building in the Caribbean.

Those who ignore this fact and try to build our region without God "labour in vain," however skillful they may be in rhetoric, politics, social science, business enterprise, science and technology or economics. This is why the Caribbean is at a critical — that is, "decisive" — moment today.

Fulness in Christ: Towards the Renewal of the Nations

How, then, may we move forward?

Previously, we noted: " if we want revival and reformation to spread across the Caribbean, we must be prepared to repent and be renewed in our thinking, values and ways." Further, "historically, reformation requires a further step: breakthrough teachings coupled to outreach, nurture and ministry strategies that pierce religious, intellectual and social or cultural barriers."

The first point of that breakthrough is *the Fulness of Christ*:

[Jesus] who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the

heavens, *in order to fill all things*. [Eph. 4:10.]

[B]y 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*. He is before all things, and *in him all things hold together*. . .

God was pleased to have his fulness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things . . . by making peace through his blood God has chosen to make known among the nations the glorious riches of [the word of God in its fulness], which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." [Colossians 1:15 - 27.]

[God] made known to us the mystery of his will . . . 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*

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*. [Ephesians 1: 9 - 10, 22 - 23.]

Therefore, Christ "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 that happens, we will no longer be vulnerable to "every wind of teaching and . . . the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ."

So, each of us must reckon that "it is by grace [we] have been saved, through faith . . . not by works, so that no-one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ to do good works, which God has laid out in advance for us to do." [Eph. 4:11 - 15, 2:8 - 10.]

Thus, everything was created by Christ, and for Christ. He is the Centre who holds all things together in an orderly whole: Cosmos. In loving response to our sin and its resulting chaos and crises, he came: descending, dying for our sin, rising and ascending "in order to fill all things."

In saving us, he calls and equips us to do "good works . . . laid out in advance for us to do." As we walk in this call to service, the church, which is the body of Christ, matures and fills all things with his glory and grace. Thus, in the fulness of time, God will "bring all things together under one head, even Christ."

In this light, the way forward is obvious: the chaos and frustration we face in the Caribbean flow from our sinful neglect or even rejection of Christ, the source of wholesome order and blessing for "all things." Christ therefore commands us to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptising . . . and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." [Matt 28:19 - 20.]

So, the road to nationwide renewal — that is, reformation — is the path of repentance, discipleship and service under the gospel in our families, communities and institutions: the church, education and the media, the professions, culture and the arts, industry, commerce, government and politics, and so on — "all things."

If, instead, the Caribbean chooses to turn from Christ, we cannot evade his agenda of fulness; for, "all things were created by him and for him." We will simply have chosen to fall into that disorderly chaos and decay that result from violating the very structure

of the universe. So, the harder we push against Christ's fulness, the harder it will push back., ultimately breaking us. [Rom. 1:18 - 32.]

If we don't want to continue to "build in vain," the Caribbean must turn back to Christ.

The Road to Fulness in the Caribbean

How can we carry fulness in Christ into "all things" in the Caribbean? Jesus' answer is that "he . . . gave" leaders to the church, "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." His strategy for renewal is an organic one. He creates, builds and equips his body, the church. As his body lives, loves, evangelises, disciples and serves in — and beyond — the local community, his fulness naturally, often invisibly and imperceptibly, spreads through "all things."

Sadly, this description highlights the weakest areas of the church's ministry in the Caribbean: discipleship. For instance, thinking back to my student days, I remember all too vividly the shock of seeing how unprepared our bright young people from our churches across the whole region were for living, studying and serving on campus, much less in the wider community and workplace beyond.

I would sometimes ask students to briefly explain what "faith" meant in the Bible, since it says: "the just shall live by faith." Hundreds of conversations over a ten-year span yielded less than a handful of clear, sensible, biblical answers!

If so many intelligent young people, after hundreds of hours spent in Sunday School, youth meetings, church services and evangelistic events, could not explain basic vocabulary, is it any wonder that many dismiss the church as ineffective and irrelevant? How sad, and how unnecessary.

Instead, let us renew, re-organise and integrate the Caribbean church's ministry towards its proper goal; discipling the nations across and beyond our region, towards Christ's fulness:

- First, let us teach: Christ is the source, sustainer and destiny of "all things," including our individuality, family life, community and nationhood. Our choice is to be filled with his grace and glory, or else be broken by our foolish rebellion against the very purpose of existence. Wisdom instructs us to build our lives and nations on God's Rock that stands the storms of life!
- Second, we must renew our ministries: Christ, in love, came, descending and ascending "in order to fill all things." Therefore he calls and sends leaders to the church and the nations, "to equip God's people for works of service," to build up the body of Christ, which fills all things with his glory. The contrast with what happens on the ground in the Caribbean is stark. So, let us evaluate and renew our evangelism, discipleship, missionary and service ministries to cost-effectively prepare, send and support God's people to serve in all aspects of life in the community.
- Specifically, nurture, education and training ministries should prepare us for Christ-centred life, work and service in the community. To that end, we should help our people consolidate their commitment to Christ and his mission, undergo preparation to live, serve and lead in families, small groups, institutions and the wider community, and go out to serve in their specific calling, gifting and anointing from God.

As we do these things, the opportunity for renewal and reformation will come to our nations, in God's timing. If we the people of the Caribbean do not wish to continue to "build in vain," we must repent and be

reformed by Christ, as his fulness flows out to our nations through the church. If our region turns away from him, it will be broken. There is no third alternative.

Fulness on the Ground

Clearly, the Christocentric Fulness Vision 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. This speaks to several aspects of our life and work as the body of Christ in the world:

1. **The Rising Tide:** Clearly, it is only "when the times will have reached their fulfillment" that the filling process will be complete. But, 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. This should be our underlying perspective.
2. **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." The essence of that work is discipling the nations under the Lordship of Jesus.

4. **Fatalism vs. Proactive Vision:** We are therefore in an age of worldwide eternal hope, rather than one of despair! We should not be 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." Instead, let us 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.]
4. **Developing Concrete Strategies:** To be concrete and specific about discipling the nations, let us think about any one 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 strategic framework for planning, witnessing and discipling.
5. **Rejecting the Gospel:** 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. **Discipleship Training:** The above 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.]
7. **Preparation for Service:** Our painful life experiences are the first step to such training. For, "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.] Spiritual gifts are also important²⁹: "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.]
8. **Cell Groups Strategy:** Cells are ideal contexts for such training for, and the carrying out of, ministry. They 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. The Apostles also 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.]

11. **Coordination:** the effective coordination of 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.
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.

Clearly, the vision of Christ's fulness has solemn implications for the Caribbean. Let us pray, that our nations will open their eyes, ears and hearts to receive the grace and glory of Christ as his fulness flows out — in

²⁹ Though unfortunately, sometimes controversial.

love, truth, purity and power — to our region and the whole world.

Suggested Assignments

(a) Questions for Group Discussion

- This chapter starts from the concept that God created the nations and so controls our times that we are led to grope for him, however blindly. [Acts 17:24 – 26.] In this light, is God using crisis in the Caribbean to draw our attention to our need for renewal, revival and reformation under Christ? Why or why not?
- In Ephesians, Paul argues that God’s strategy is to bring all things in heaven and on Earth together under Christ, who therefore descended and ascended “in order to fill all things.” How should this “fulness vision” shape how we carry out the church’s mandate to disciple the nations?
- Equally clearly, individuals, institutions and communities often reject the gospel and ridicule or even attack those who bear

witness to it. What happens as a result, why?

- How, then, should we approach living, working, witnessing, discipling and serving in the Caribbean?
- Should the church therefore change its approach to serving Christ in the Caribbean? Why or why not?
- How?
- How would such a renewal tie into our approach to Missions?
- How could we promote such a renewal of the church and reformation of the region?

(b) Practical Exercises

- Develop a project for a practical application of the fulness theme to a situation in your community: how can you go about bringing Christ into the situation, to bless and transform it for good?

(c) For Further Reading

CHAPTER FIVE

A Framework for Discipleship: Transforming the Caribbean through the Fulness of Christ

GEM 99:09:23(a) CC Renewal series #3

Our Commission is to "make disciples," which as we have seen is the key to renewing and transforming the region through the fulness of Christ. It is thus quite in order to ask how we, as the people of God in the Caribbean, may fulfill the church's basic mandate.

First of all, a biblical, balanced, practical framework for being and making disciples must start from the Lordship of Christ. For, his mandate starts: "*All authority* in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations . . ." [Matt. 28:18, 19a, italics added.] More than that, he is the Creator of "all things," and the Centre who holds all things together through his powerful word. [Col. 1:15 - 27.]

Flowing out from that, in love he came to us, descending, serving, healing, liberating, dying for our sins, rising and ascending "*in order to fill all things.*" And, "the church . . . is his body, the fulness of him who fills everything in every way." [Eph. 4:10, 1:22 - 23.]

Plainly then, our discipling ministries should seek to win people to Christ, and so nurture, equip, send out and support them that they progressively fill all of life with Christ's grace and glory. But, how?

The First Point of Discipleship

Jesus' standard for discipleship is stark: "if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his

life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? If anyone is ashamed of me and my works, the Son of man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels." [Luke 9:23 - 26; cf. Matt. 16:13 - 28.]

Now, in first century Palestine, one would too often see a man under guard, struggling to carry a beam across his shoulders. Such a man was carrying his cross, on the way to his execution-place. There, he would be nailed to the beam, hoisted onto the waiting upright pole, and stretched out to die a public, lingering, shameful death.

Soon, this would happen to Jesus himself as the leaders of Judea schemed to get rid of a threat to their power and privilege: one who lived and led by "the truth in love." Thank God, as Tony Campolo so often says, "that was Friday, but Sunday was coming."

In short, the first point of discipleship is commitment to love, serve and follow the One whose steps, in the words of a popular chorus, led "from heaven to earth . . . from the earth to the cross . . . the grave . . . the skies." Therefore, we must expect rejection, misunderstanding, ridicule, suffering — even martyrdom — but must determine to deny ourselves, take up our crosses daily and follow our Lord, confessing and living by "the truth in love."

Balance: the Second Point of Discipleship

Clearly, as disciples of Christ, we must turn our backs on worldly ambitions, sensuality and values, for "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?" [Matt. 16:26.]

Unfortunately, such a commitment is quite easy to wrench out of a godly balance of love, truth, purity and power. Bitter experience also shows that naïve disciples are vulnerable to abuse at the hands of unscrupulous leaders. Peter helps us set the matter straight: "it is commendable if a man bears up under . . . unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. *To this you were called*, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." [1 Peter 2:19 - 21.]

Suffering "for doing good" — that is, for living by "the truth in love" — is not just a matter of one's feelings and wishes: it may be objectively verified in light of scripture and evidence. Likewise, it can be objectively shown that some specific spiritual leaders are false, "wolves in sheep's clothing." [Matt. 7:15, cf. 16 - 23 and Acts 20:28 - 35.] Moreover, if Christ came "to fill *all* things" through us, then we must be involved in meeting the needs and concerns of society in all its aspects — family, church, education, business, institutions, arts and culture, media, entertainment, government and politics, law enforcement and defense, environment, etc.

Nor is wealth — though it is potentially distracting and deceitful — inherently sinful, for we read: "remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant." [Deuteronomy 8:18, cf. 1 Timothy 6:6 - 10, in light of 3 - 21.] In fact, the creation of wealth — through creativity, careful investment, diligent work and sound

management — is a critical part of national development, which benefits everyone in the community. As we read in Jeremiah's prophetic letter to the exiles in Babylon: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce . . . seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I [the LORD] have carried you away in exile. Pray . . . for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper For I know the plans I have for you . . . plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." [Jeremiah 29:4 - 7, 11.]

In short, a well-rounded life — one marked by balance and discernment in light of "the whole counsel of God" — is as critical to true discipleship as is the commitment to deny self, take up one's cross and follow Jesus.

Discipleship in the Community

The story of the early church, summarised in Acts 2:36 - 47, outlines how such a well-rounded framework for Christian discipleship works out on the ground:

1. Spirit-empowered preaching, "publicly and from house to house" [Acts 20:20; cf. 2:46 & 5:42], called "all people everywhere to repent," pointing out that the risen Christ is Lord, Saviour and Judge. [17:30-31, cf. 3:13 - 21 & 4:8 - 12.] Those who "accepted [the gospel] message were baptised," a visible mark of their commitment to Christ, his mission, and "the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills everything in every way." [Eph. 1:22 - 23.]
2. The church's members "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" and grew as a nurturing, learning, worshipping, witnessing and serving community. There was a focus on study, outreach, mutual support and sharing (even of possessions, cf. Acts 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.

We may thus see a clear cycle of discipleship:

- (1) Winning people to Christ through evangelism and missions;
- (2) Nurturing them in Christ through the life of the church: teaching, fellowship, worship, witness and service;
- (3) Sending out and supporting equipped disciples in further outreach and service, in all aspects of life.

We may thus suggest three main phases for the required training:

- I Consolidating commitment to Christ, his church and mission in light of the fulness theme, leading to a life that balances love, truth, purity and power under Christ in the home, church, community and world. The six Foundation Teachings of Heb. 6:1 -2 are vital here:

- ◆ Learning to trust and serve God through *repentance*: changing our hearts and minds in surrender to God, and *faith*: trusting God based on his Word. [Isaiah 55:1 - 9; Rom. 1:1 - 4, 16 - 17; 4:4 - 8 & 10:17; Heb. 11:6.]
- ◆ Celebrating death to sin, new life in Christ, eternal hope and the

indwelling and empowering Spirit, through water *baptism* — a symbolic burial and resurrection. [Rom. 6:3 - 7, cf. 1 - 14; Acts 1:4 - 8 & 2:32 - 39; Rom 8:9 - 17; 1 Cor 12:1 - 13 & Eph. 5:15 - 21.]

- ◆ Learning the principle of service from *the laying on of hands*: our hands, but God's initiative, control and power. [Acts 8:14 - 23, 2 Cor 4:1 - 11.]
- ◆ Living life from an eternal point of view: Jesus rose, validating the gospel and giving us an eternal hope of *resurrection*; but this also means that God "has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed," Christ. Accordingly, we must live as stewards who shall give an account for our lives and service, before the bar of *eternal judgement*. [Acts 17:30 - 31; 1 Cor 3:10 - 17, 4:1 - 5, 15:1 - 8; Matt. 6:19 - 24; 2 Cor 4:17 - 5:10.]

- II Preparing for life and service through an emphasis on relating, learning, serving and leading in small, or "cell" groups and teams, as a practically-scaled focus for body life and service. [Cf. 1 Cor 14:26, Eph. 4:15 - 16, Heb. 10:24 & 25.] The above nurturing framework: teaching, fellowship, worship, witness and service, provides a clear focus for such groups and teams.

- III Training, sending and supporting disciples as they go out to serve and lead in the wider community, under Christ (and in cross-cultural missionary service). This will require specific preparation for serving Christ in the different aspects of community life, such as family, education, arts, media, business, government and politics, etc.

A Challenge to the Caribbean Church

Sadly, too often even the brightest, most zealous young people from our churches — after hundreds of hours of exposure to our various ministries — generally only have a vague grasp of basic vocabulary, much less the skills required for effective service in the home, community and world. For instance, few of our young people are effective in Personal Evangelism, Bible Study, or responding to typical intellectual challenges to the Faith. [Luke 24:45 - 48, 2 Tim. 2:15 & 3:10 - 17, 1 Peter 3:15.] Obviously, we have not implemented effective discipling strategies.

Clearly, we must renew our nurturing, training, sending and supporting ministries across the Caribbean, as a matter of extreme urgency. To do so, I suggest:

- We need to evaluate the effectiveness of our present outreach and discipling strategies, in light of the requirements of the Fulness and Lordship of Christ, towards pruning ineffective approaches and building on points of strength. Perhaps, a forum on renewal and discipleship in light of the fulness vision may be a good point to start with. This could be done as a part of a major conference, such as CONECAR, and/or by using the Internet, so that people across the region can participate.
- We need to develop effective programmes, resource materials and a network of resource people and ministry teams available to the church across the Caribbean. An effective way to do this would be to first identify successful efforts across the region, and build on them, thus developing an integrated network of resource people and materials under the fulness theme.
- Specifically, such existing efforts could be used as ongoing pilot projects, and key ideas, resource people and resource materials could then be made available to the whole region. The use of the Internet, especially web sites, e-mail and online conferencing, would be vital to cost-effectiveness.
- For other areas, we will need to develop new initiatives. We will therefore need to set up RED Teams (Renewal, Exploration and Development) and sponsor specific pilot projects "on the ground," perhaps requiring several years of work.
- These efforts should be regionally coordinated, perhaps through one or more of our existing regional bodies, or through a secretariat growing out of the proposed conference/forum. Such a body could integrate the overall strategy, develop a regional discipleship training network with key resource people and appropriate training materials, and mobilise financial support from the region and partner agencies around the world.

Thus, over the next several years, we can work to renew the church's discipling ministry across the Caribbean. Then, our regional effort could become a pilot project for global renewal; towards the uniting of "all things" under the Lordship and Fulness of Christ.

Clearly then, it is appropriate for us to now target decisive strategic points in our region. Towards this end, our focus for the next several chapters will address specific strategic issues in renewal and reformation:

- The cell/small group strategy
- Bible Study in Renewal
- Prayer in renewal
- Renewal in the marketplace

- Renewal in the civil service, professions, education, arts and entertainment.
- Community leadership

Suggested Assignments

(a) Questions for Group Discussion

- Does the above suggest a workable, biblically sound process for working out discipleship in your own lives?
- In your church?
- In your workplace?
- In your community?
- Nationally?

- In the region?
- Globally?
- What would these steps require in terms of repentance, renewal, revival and reformation?
- How could the reformation process begin?
- Reflect: “Why not here; why not now; why not us?”

(b) Practical Exercises

- Develop a draft outline plan for a fulness vision oriented discipling ministry in your church, and present it to leaders. (Make sure to factor in the different age groups and their life-stage challenges.)

(c) For Further Reading

CHAPTER SIX

Cells and Renewal: Small Groups, the Fulness Vision and Renewal

GEM 99:12:16 CC Renewal Series # 5

The West Indies Cricket Team has long been a chief topic of conversation across the Caribbean. It is also an excellent case study of a cell — that is, small group — at work. We watch new faces (rising stars?) come in as old ones go out. We see the impact of its members and how well they relate and work together on the performance of the whole team. Sometimes, we are concerned over conflicts within the team, or with the media, or even with the West Indies Cricket Board.

Thus, across time, the team passes through the typical phases of a group's life. It was *formed* decades ago, to play Cricket at Test level. As new situations have come up, change typically provoked conflict. The resulting *storms* have led to new patterns, or *norms*, for how the team should work. When the team settles down, we usually see it *working* as the best there is in the world. Then, after a match or series, usually its members separate — *adjourn* — but contact is kept up across a *network* of relationships.

The resulting list of phases: "forming, storming, norming, working, adjourning and networking" sums up the phases of a typical group's life cycle. We can easily see these same patterns in families, circles of friends, classes at school, committees, work groups, etc. Indeed, work groups are now a major management strategy as organisations try to be more flexible and innovative in the face of a rapidly changing world.

Cells: a Key to Renewal?

Small Groups are now also a hot topic in church circles, because some propose a

church renewal strategy based on a growing network of cells. Such groups are viewed as ideal for sorting out the issues and commitments involved in beginning to follow Christ, for ministry training, and for carrying out church ministry in teams. It is also argued that, by making use of existing community infrastructure, cells provide a cost-effective way to train, organise and support the people of God as they serve him in the community.

Others, however, view such a cell strategy as simply another novelty borrowed from worldly management thinking: an unworkable half-baked fad that will soon pass.

But, small groups are not new to the church: Jesus and the twelve clearly were a ministry team. Paul worked in missionary teams with Barnabas, Mark, Silas, Timothy, Luke and many others. Most importantly, as we look at typical snapshots of the New Testament church, we see networks of believers who mainly met for nurture and worship as groups in homes (and assembled in large groups as facilities and circumstances permitted). These groups were small enough that "everyone" was expected to actively participate — impossible in a large group. [1 Cor 14:26; cf. Acts 2:46; 3:11, 5:12, 20, 42 vs. 8:3; 19:9; Rom 16:5; Philemon 2.]

Similar structures have continued to be used down through the years. For instance, over the past two hundred years, the Methodists' Classes and similar small groups have been a vehicle for wave after wave of revivals

that have swept the whole world. Church-planting missionaries usually work in teams. And, in our own day, the megachurches we see as massive televised celebrations are actually based on networks of cells.

In short, to go back to a stress on small groups is to go back to biblical patterns that have a proven track record of success, right down to today.

Cells in Renewal

Renewal starts with vision. Specifically, Paul views each believer as being called to significant ministry in the church. Too often instead, we split the church into "the Ministers" and "the ministered to," participants and audience. Then, we wonder why Christians are so often passive about their faith!

So, let us first 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." Let us penetrate and disciple our communities as the Spirit-empowered 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. [Cf. Eph. 4:9 - 16.]

Cells are ideal for this, as the following church-planting scenario shows:

- ❑ Church-planting teams are sent out to a target community and are supported by base churches and Missions Agencies. Perhaps, host families and/or businesses will provide a natural base for outreach, 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 then can be reached through natural links: family and friends; schools, workplaces, the street, mall, market or other places

where people come together; institutions, homes and neighbourhoods; interests, and welfare needs.

- ❑ Early contacts, even if alienated (similar to the woman at the well in Sychar), are members of the community with their own networks of contacts, and can become partners in outreach.
- ❑ Home or Office Bible Studies, discussion groups and prayer circles — *outreach/enquiry cells* — are ideal for such evangelistic ministry.
- ❑ 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 also assemble for worship, teaching and ministry in larger group meetings. At this point, we have a functioning congregation.
- ❑ Leaders should now 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.
- ❑ Business initiatives; drama groups and other arts & culture initiatives; professional support circles for educators, nurses, journalists, etc., and similar efforts can also now begin to take the fulness of Christ to the wider community.

In short, a small group-based church-planting strategy starts with personal evangelism and outreach/inquiry cells. As people respond to the gospel, nurture cells form, leading to networks of cells and larger meetings. Ministry teams then emerge as coordinating structures, but are also keys to further outreach and service in and beyond the local community. [See Greg Livingstone's *Planting Churches in Muslim*

Cities: a Team Approach (Baker, 1993), for more details.]

Clearly, cells fit in well with the win-nurture-send cycle of discipleship. Further, because cells are manageable and grow easily, they open the way to unlimited church growth.

In existing congregations and similar structures, short-term ministry projects — such as evangelistic Bible Studies, a dramatic production, a concert, etc. — may be used to introduce small groups. This will naturally reduce resistance to change, due to the value of the project in view and the obvious usefulness of the small groups. Then, once there is a framework of positive experience, teaching and training, it will build a consensus for wider structural renewal. It would then be feasible to integrate small group concepts and structures into the wider organisation.

Working in Cells

Some specifics on working in cells are helpful. Acts 2:42 - 47 sets a framework:

[The disciples] devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, . . . to prayer . . . they gave to anyone as he had need . . . they continued to meet together [in large and small group settings] . . . praising God . . . the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

Thus, cell life should stress four key elements: (1) biblical teaching and study, (2) fellowship and mutual support, (3) worship and prayer, and (4) outreach in and beyond their local community.

The balance of the four elements depends on the main purpose of the cell. For instance, an evangelistic Bible Study group would focus on exploring the life, claims and relevance of Jesus through discussion and study of the Gospels as historical documents. In nurture cells, Bible Study,

fellowship, worship and prayer would be dominant, but members would be encouraged in personal witness. A ministry team, for instance a drama group, clearly should focus on its area of service and/or outreach, but also needs to nurture its members, and will probably have a strong training aspect as well. (It is worth noting that the leadership cores of outreach and nurture cells should function as ministry teams).

The leaders of such cells should use their knowledge of group phases to guide their work. I have, for instance, found that it is wise to spend time in the first meeting(s) to focus on the group's goals, members, roles and tasks, in light of Acts 2:42 - 47. It helps to point out the "forming, storming, norming, working adjourning" phases, as this helps to harness conflict power for progress.

"Harness conflict power for progress"? At first this may seem strange, but it is actually conflict that moves groups forward. Ideally, the focus of conflict should be a problem we come together to tackle, but disagreements are also likely. As parliaments and courts of law have long known, where there is disagreement, people will be motivated to bring out both sides of an issue; the trick is to disagree without being disagreeable. Then, the group can take the best aspects of both sides and build a better solution than one side alone would provide. [See Acts 15:1 - 35 and 36 - 40 for two good case studies.]

Once disagreements have been decided, the group will have a framework of norms for action, and can work together towards the goal. Of course, as the work progresses, there will usually be further episodes of conflict and decision-making.

Then, at some point, most groups come to an end. It is wise to have a celebration, with some evaluation, and to help members keep in touch as they move on. At this point, it is wise to refresh the vision: Christ came in

love, descending, serving, dying and rising "in order to fill all things." [Eph 4:10.]

We should also note that the effective coordination of small groups depends on their integration into larger scale church structures: congregations, parachurch ministries, agencies and fellowships, etc. Such wider 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.

Thus, we can see how cell strategies can help us build growing networks of disciples across and beyond our region, forming powerful (but not perfect!) working models — shining cities "set upon a hill" — illuminating what shall be in perfect fulness when our Lord returns for His Bride.

Suggested Assignments

(a) Questions for Group Discussion

- Are cells a biblically sound tool for evangelism, nurture, service and missions? Why or why not?
- Is it correct to view such cells as practically scaled structures for body life, fellowship, gifts and service in the church and wider community?
- Cells are viewed as a context for spiritual growth through living the truth in love, and for training in service. In light of Jesus' experiences with the twelve, is this a workable idea? Why/why not?

- Similarly, Paul's missionary team is used as a model for team based ministries today. Is this workable? Why/why not?
- Could cell principles be applied to typical church structures:
 - sunday school
 - youth fellowships
 - men's fellowships
 - women's fellowship
 - prayer circles
 - Dorcas circles
 - special ministries such as the choir,
 - the board of elders and deacons
- More broadly, how could cell concepts and strategies be used to project the witness and service of the church into the school, workplace, campus, and wider community across the Caribbean?
- Could such initiatives fit in with existing structures in your church, or would they require that the existing structures undergo renewal?
-

(b) Practical Exercises

- Revise the discipleship plan in light of the cell concept.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Bible in Renewal: Discovering and Living By God's Wisdom

GEM 99:12:29a [article # 6, renewal series]

"Did God really say . . .?"

From Eden on, Satan has always first questioned the Word of God, then tried to replace it with a lie. As Jesus put it: "there is no truth in [the Devil]. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is . . . the father of lies." [John 8:44.]

Sadly, Jesus had to continue: "Yet *because* I tell you the truth, you do not believe me." For, "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." [John 3:19 - 21.]

Indeed, we can all too easily observe that calculated evil, deceit and "a bodyguard of lies" intended to fend off the truth are characteristic marks of wrongdoers: "You belong to your father, the Devil, and you want to carry out [his] desire."

The end result is equally predictable: "My people have committed two sins: they have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water." [Jeremiah 2:13] As Solomon put it: "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." [Proverbs 16:25]

In short, to live by lies and lusts is, in the end, to destroy oneself: "each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin,

when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." [James 1:14 - 15.]

Thy Word is Truth

Clearly, we must face, seek, discern and live by the truth, or else we perish. But, how?

Paul answers:

[I]n the last days . . . evil men and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But . . . you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. [2 Timothy 3: 1, &13 - 17.]

Paul therefore issues a crisp charge:

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry." [2 Tim.. 4:1 - 5.]

Plainly, we have a duty to seek, to heed, to live by, and to bear witness to and teach the truth; truth that will cut right across our

natural desires, comforts, prosperity and even safety.

Luke therefore outlines the life and service of the early church: "Those who accepted [the gospel] were baptised They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer . . . they continued to meet together . . . praising God . . . And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." [Acts 2:41 - 47.]

In the words of Hebrews 10:19 - 25: "since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus . . . let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith . . . Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

In support of these tasks of Bible study, fellowship, prayer and witness, we have Jesus' great prayer on the night of his betrayal: "Father . . . I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer for them is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one . . . *Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.* As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world." [John 17:14 – 18, emphasis added.]

Bible Study, Fellowship and Prayer

Manifestly, we need to devote ourselves to Bible study, to fellowship and mutual support, and to worship and prayer. These good habits set the context for effective witness and service in the family, the church, the community and world as we "do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do," towards "attaining the whole measure of the fulness of Christ." [Eph. 2:10, 4:13.]

It is thus no accident that Luke highlights study: "[the early believers] devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching." For, this is the first step to heeding Paul: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will." [Rom. 12:2.]

Obviously, this requires that we seek out and devote ourselves to sound teaching and preaching. Thus, we see the value of a solid "church home," one that teaches, submits to and lives by the Word of God.

It also calls for daily reflection on the Scripture. As God counselled Joshua: "Do not let this Book . . . depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful." [Joshua 1:8; cf. Psalm 1:1 - 6, Proverbs 2:1 - 22.]

This leads to the need to set aside daily Quiet Times for systematic Bible reading, praise, thanksgiving to God, prayer, and changing our thinking and attitudes towards doing God's truth each day. Good devotional materials, such as Scripture Union's *Daily Bread* or Radio Bible Class's *Our Daily Bread* are quite helpful here.

Group Bible study using interactive inductive techniques is also very helpful. Whether we study in a Sunday School class, or a cell group, a neighbourhood circle, or an Office or Campus fellowship group, we need to "consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds . . . as [we] see the Day approaching."

Inductive Bible Study

"Inductive" is a bit of a big word; some explanation is appropriate. The basic idea is the way a good Detective works: he or she explores and confirm the specific evidence in hand, seeks further clues and draws out underlying patterns and relevant

implications. This is also the basic technique of science.

Typically, we are exploring a Bible passage, in its context. Thus, our principal tools are the famous "Who, what, where when, why, how" questions, to help us OBSERVE the facts, INTERPRET (understand) what the facts mean, and APPLY the results to our lives:

OBSERVE:

- What does the text say? Who are involved, where, when?
- What happens -- events, issues, challenges, conflicts, outcomes?
- How is language -- original and translated -- used?

INTERPRET:

- What does the text intend to communicate?
- What is *the story*: How do people interact with God and with each other? How do events, issues & situations unfold? Why?
- What is God doing or saying, why?
- What is emphasised, and why?
- What is implied — how — by what happens or is said?
- How does *context* affect the meaning?

APPLY:

- How does the text speak from its original setting into our lives today?
- How should we respond?
 - truths to learn and live.
 - sins, errors, deceptions to avoid or turn from.
 - corrections, confessions, restitutions & reconciliations to make.
 - truths and ways to practice, good skills and habits to build.
 - promises to claim & conditions to meet [2 Peter 1:2 - 4].
- How? Where, when, with whom?

Bible Study: Renewing the Mind and Life

The first issue in Bible Study is self- (or, flesh-) mastery by the power of the Word of God to renew our minds under the leading

and empowering of the Spirit. For, as Romans 8:5 – 14 points out:

Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with what the Spirit desires. The mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the mind set on the flesh is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the flesh cannot please God.

You, however, are controlled not by the flesh but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ

Brothers, we have an obligation — but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For *if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God*³⁰. [Emphases added.]

Clearly, it is by the power of the Spirit who lives in those who put their trust in Christ³¹ that we can live according to God's will. But, this means that we face a struggle, as our minds, naturally focussed on our feelings, fears, passions and all-too-limited human perceptions, conflict with the leading of the Spirit.

Thus, a key insight is the importance of the focus of our minds: "Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with what the Spirit desires." This is compounded by a key subtlety: one can focus on the flesh by lustfully giving ourselves over to power, pleasure, prestige — that is obvious. But equally, we can be sucked into a whirlpool of despair and

³⁰ NIV marginal readings for *sarx*, the flesh.

Emphases added.

³¹ Rom. 5:1 – 5.

bondage to sin as we struggle in vain to resist sensual, painful, angry or self-condemning thoughts, feelings and impulses.

For, as we struggle to resist such sinful or destructive thoughts and urges, our focus is still on them. And so, they retain their power to suck us down into despair and sinful bondage.

Instead, we must learn to switch our thoughts to those given to us by the Spirit, and focus on these instead, so that we can learn to “keep in step with the Spirit.” [Gal. 5:26b.] This brings the Scriptures to the fore, for they are the secret to renewing our minds and lives — they “are able to make [us] wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the [people of God] may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” [2 Tim. 3:15 – 17.].

Consequently, Paul urges:

offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will. [Rom. 12:1, 2.]

Specifically:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. [Colossians 3:16, 17.]

Finally:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus . . . whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things. [Philippians 4:6 – 8.]

Godly Truth as Salt and Light

Plainly, the cutting edge of Bible Study is application, whether to our thought lives, or to our relationships and activities, or to the communities where we study, work and live.

Equally plainly, given a world full of people whose minds are set on the flesh, it is also its most controversial aspect. For, salt stings when it touches our open sores and light exposes the hidden evil of our ever so deceitful hearts. It is thus no wonder that God's Word will always face resistance in the community: "one man's renewal will always be another man's rebuke."

However, it is our duty to face, live by and apply "the truth in love" as individuals, in our families and collectively in our communities.

Of course, this cannot justify oppression or violence to others in the name of truth. Of this, there has been a long, sad, and as yet unfinished history. (On this point, it must *also* be said that there has also been a long, equally unfinished history of communities rejecting godly truth and persecuting their prophets, to their own ruin.)

But also, “thy word is truth” seems to be nonsense to many of our educated elites in the Caribbean. To such people, the firing off of a Bible quote has all the impact of breaking wind in public. For, they believe that the Bible is nothing more than an ancient collection of fables and oppressive rules, outmoded by the advance of Science and culture.

Consequently, they believe that those who want to use the Bible as a guide to life, family, community, governance, law and public policy are a menace to modern society. For, in their eyes, any attempt to raise questions of biblical morality in the community is actually an attempt to impose a right wing, “fundamentalist” power grab.

Such a power grab, in their opinion, would force gays back into the closet, chain women to the kitchen, impose utterly unacceptable restraints on private and public sexual expression, and fill the minds of school children with discredited, destructive rubbish. They therefore view and respond to biblical Christian faith as a threat.

Such thinking hinges on two key, but quite problematic, assumptions: (1) the validity of relativism, and (2) the mythical character of the God of the Bible. For, if there is nothing more to truth, rights and morality than what people and communities are willing to accept as true, fair and good, then of course those who think they have a cosmic, God-given standard to judge thinking and behaviour are both deluded and dangerous.

The problem with such thinking, though, is exactly these same assumptions. First, as we saw above, relativism asserts the self-contradictory principle that it is wrong to assert binding moral obligations. Thus, relativist morality saws off the branch on which it sits, and falls of its own weight.

Second, evolutionary materialism leads to the logical conclusion that all human thinking is the product, without residue, of accidents of evolution and psycho-social conditioning, undermining the validity of thought itself. That, of course, includes the thoughts that lead to relativism and evolutionary materialism. So, why should we trust the musings of an overgrown monkey brain — one shaped and controlled by its potty training and class conditioning — that can only lead to the recommendations of just another puzzled rat in the cosmic maze?

In short, relativistic, materialistic thinking is riddled with theoretical and practical inconsistencies. For instance, how can one protest the binding nature of moral principles and in the next breath object to the claim that some races are more highly evolved than others and so may freely exert their power over lesser mortals?

In fact, there is considerable positive evidence for the God of the Bible. To start with, the highly ordered, complex molecular biology of the so-called “simple” cell strongly demonstrates the sophisticated, mind-bogglingly intelligent design of all living systems. So, while there is room to debate interpretations of how creation has been done and how long it took, it is those who assert that “the Lord Chance made them all” who have yet to advance a sound proof for their claims. That is, belief in an intelligent Creator is eminently reasonable.

Then, there is considerable evidence that many millions of people across the ages have encountered and thus have come to know just such a Creator, personally. Such encounters have transformed lives and civilisations. Indeed, the Old Testament is the written record of a culture that was based on such encounters with God.

In turn, the Gospels record how the Messiah promised in the Old Testament came to his people. He loved, taught and did many miraculous wonders among them — only to be betrayed and unjustly put to death by scheming religious leaders and politicians. But, it did not end there, for, with over five hundred eyewitnesses, God raised Jesus from the dead and sent out his disciples to bear witness to the Messiah in the entire world.

The rest of the New Testament is the record of the first generation of those disciples, as they went out into the world with the gospel, in miracle-working power. Especially important is the record of Saul of Tarsus, who we first encounter as the man who laid waste to the church. But, on the road to Damascus, the Risen and Glorified Christ

arrested his man, in person, and sent him out as his chosen messenger.

As Paul would later say, he “was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,” and so as Apostle to the Nations, he launched on perhaps the most remarkable second career in recorded history. He paid with his life for his work, of course, but he transformed western culture and through his impact on Europe, the whole world.

However, in our time, many have rejected the foundation on which the modern world was built, and have turned their backs on God. So, they assume that the existence of natural laws proves that miracles are impossible, and on the strength of that assumption dismiss any record that includes the miraculous. In particular, they reject the Bible as a collection of pious myths, and so feel free to deny that the God who speaks through the Bible has any claim on their lives today.

But, the existence of natural laws proves no such claim, nor could it conceivably do so. For, what Scientists do is to investigate the general operations of the natural world through experiment, observation, modelling, theorising and calculation, and then try to interpret their findings based on their philosophical assumptions about the world. So, Scientific reasoning makes inferences from particular cases to provisional general conclusions, in light of the paradigms held by the Scientists in question. That is, the process is one of open-ended discovery of patterns in the world, rather than one of proof beyond reasonable doubt.

But, such a reasoning process simply cannot address events that, by definition, take their significance from the very fact that they stand out from the common course of nature³². In short, Biblical supernaturalism *expects* to find a world in which there is order and predictability. In fact, it is this Biblical worldview that led to an intellectual climate that, believing in a nature governed

by laws, provided the basis for the Scientific Revolution.

Further, as C. S. Lewis points out, what makes miracles more or less probable is the existence of a Creator who has an interest in his creatures. If such a Creator does not exist, then of course miracles are highly improbable or impossible; but that is to be established based on the evidence, not smuggled in as an assumed criterion used to assess the evidence. In short, it is not appropriate to beg the question as a basis for investigating it.

There is another, less polite, word for such question begging: prejudice. So, let us rather open our minds and hearts to the facts of the case, and to the voice of the millions down through the ages and today who have met God in his miracle-working power and glory. And, through the record of their witness, let us listen to the God “who is there and is not silent.”³³

As Paul pointed out to the Athenians, God’s message is to all nations:

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation . . . and he determined the times 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 . . . since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone — an image made by man’s design and skill. In the past, god overlooked such ignorance, but *now he commands all people everywhere to repent*. For he has set a day when he shall judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him

³² As C. S. Lewis pointed out in his *Miracles*.

³³ Francis Schaeffer.

from the dead. [Acts 17:24 – 31. Emphasis added.]

Thus, through Bible Study, we return to the *four R's of revival*: (1) **repentance** as we surrender to the truth; (2) transformation of our lives through "the **renewing** of [our] minds"; (3) **revival** as God pours out "times of refreshing"; and, (4) **reformation** as repentance, renewal and revival spread through and fill communities and nations with the light of God's glory in Christ.

Thus, this chapter on Bible Study sets the context for the rest of this book, in which we will explore several strategic breakthrough teachings, relating to:

- Prayer in revival
- Revival in business, the professions, arts, media and education
- Revival and community leadership

May we be blessed with seasons of refreshing from God in our time, across the Caribbean, and beyond as we apply these truths to our lives and communities.

Suggested Assignments

(a) Questions for Group Discussion

- Eph. 4:14 – 16 indicates that as we learn and live the truth in love, we will be able to resist deceptions and build up the body of

Christ through our loving service. What role should Bible study play in this process?

- How then can we set about balancing truth and love in our lives, families, churches, workplaces and communities?
- Would cells be a useful structure for doing this?
- In the chapter, the OIA inductive approach to Bible study is emphasised. Is it sound? Practicable? Balanced?
- Read Joshua 1:1 – 9, and reflect on the importance of daily reflection on and obedience to the Word of God in the life of a successful disciple. How could we develop such habits in our lives, families and churches?
- Given the hostility which now so often greets the Bible in the wider community, how can we go about applying biblical insights to life, work and service in the wider community?
- How, then should we go about responding to major intellectual challenges and secularist, heretical or even pagan agendas in our region?
- How would this contribute to renewal and reformation?

(b) Practical Exercises

- Develop a Bible Study training plan for your church, as an aspect of the Discipleship Plan.

(c) For Further Reading

CHAPTER EIGHT

Prayer in Renewal: Challenge, Commitment and Impact

GEM 2000:02:07 CC Renewal Series # 6

Prayer is a challenge.

So often, we hear that “prayer is the Christian’s vital breath,” or “prayer changes things,” or even: “prayer moves mountains.” Yet, almost as often, we are frustrated, or even bored by what actually happens as we try to pray. There is a serious gap between our prayer talk and our prayer walk.

When we turn to Scripture for guidance, we soon see:

. . . if anyone says to this mountain, “Go, throw yourself into the sea,” and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins. [Mark 11:22 – 25.]

Is prayer, then, a type of magic, a power that an inner circle of “adepts” can use to manipulate the supernatural to their own ends?

Prayer and Power: Faith vs. Magic

James gives a direct answer: “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think that he will receive anything from the Lord You do not have, because you do

not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with the wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” [James 1:5 – 7 & 4:2 – 3.]

Clearly, prayer only has power in the context of our relationship with God: if we doubt God, or turn our backs on his providence, or ask for selfish reasons, we will get nowhere. Thus, the key difference between prayer and magic is *faith*: “without faith, it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” [Heb. 11:6.]

John sums up: “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us — whatever we ask — we know that we have what we asked of him.” [1 John 5:14 – 15.]

In short, the key to power in prayer is that we must trust and seek God, based on his Word. Then, we can have confidence that what we ask for is grounded in his will for us in our situation, and will be done. Indeed, Jesus’ words in Mark 11:22 begin: “Have faith in God”

But, what is faith? On this, the scriptures are clear: “faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ”; and “to the man who . . . trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.” [Rom.10:17, 4:5.] Faith starts when we turn back to our Eternal Father, in surrender and trust through Christ, based on his Word.

Thus, *faith is trust in God through Christ, based on his Word.*

Prayer, Power & Revival

Once we see the faith link, the connection between prayer, power and revival immediately becomes clear.

First, true prayer is based on repentance and faith in God, guided by his Word. But, *repentance* and *renewal* of our minds and lives are the first two steps to revival. So, if we were to truly pray, it would automatically prepare us for revival and reformation. Thus, as God once spoke to Solomon:

When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. [2 Chron. 7:13 – 14.]

Here, God indicates that he allows and uses environmental and economic breakdown to bring our attention to our sins. For, the same greed and lusts that lead us to forget God and righteousness, in a mad pursuit of power, wealth and pleasures, cause us to neglect our stewardship over the land and its people, exposing us to plagues and disasters.

For instance, as is often said, “earthquakes don’t kill people, poorly built buildings do.” Similarly, why have we insisted on building towns and housing estates in places that we know are vulnerable to floods, hurricane storm surges, tidal waves, and fast-moving hot ash flows from volcanoes?

Why do we neglect deteriorating drainage, deforestation and soil erosion? The widespread promiscuity that is a root cause of the AIDS epidemic? In short, there is a clear, unbreakable link between the

blessings of God (thus, the issue of righteousness) and enduring prosperity.

So, when our economy and environment spin out of control, we should pause, reflect, and seek the face of God, in prayerful repentance.

More than that, we have a specific, glittering promise:

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that **times of refreshing** may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you — even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. [Acts 3:19 – 21.]

In short, as we repent and turn to God in faith through Christ, God will pour out his Spirit in times of refreshing revival. For, “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people . . . everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” [Acts 2:17 – 21.]

Further, such times of revival build towards the ultimate restoration of all things at the Second Coming. In the meanwhile, God sends his word and his church (in the power of his Spirit and under the Lordship of his Christ) to the nations with the message of *repentance, renewal, revival and reformation* — the “four R’s” of revival.

Therefore, as we receive the Word of God, repenting and reaching out to God in prayer, the process of revival has already begun. It will naturally progress to seasons of refreshing as God pours out his Spirit in power, as he has promised. Then, the process leads on to the reformation of communities and nations under Christ, providing that we will open our ears and hearts to what God has to say to us.

Closing the Power Gap

True faith — which requires turning from our own ways and turning to God: repentance — is the critical link between prayer and power.

It is also a major challenge: we *like* to have things our own way. We are comfortable with our pleasures and secret sins. We cling to our traditions and customs, in the teeth of Jesus' warning: "You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men." [Mark 7:8.] We "harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in [our] hearts," and forget that "where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice." [James 3:14, 16.]

Sometimes, we have "hoarded wealth in the last days . . . [and] lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence," perhaps even "fattened [ourselves] in the day of slaughter." Sometimes, we have "failed to pay the workmen who mowed [our] fields." Some, perhaps, have even "condemned and murdered innocent men." [James 5:1 – 5.]

Therefore, we must repent. Only then will we have true power in prayer. And, we will see times of refreshing poured out from God across our region.

Towards Times of Refreshing

So far, we have marked the distinction between prayer and magic, and have highlighted the link between prayer and revival. The remaining issue is simple: how do we break through?

First, our quiet times. Our daily quiet times before God need to focus on sound Bible study, setting the context for yielding to God in prayer. Then, as we rise from our knees, we need to determine to practice the renewal of our minds and lives under the Lordship of Christ in the power of his Spirit.

This will immediately bring us into confrontation with the power of evil in our lives, families, communities, workplaces and schools. But then, Christ came, descending and ascending "in order to fill all things," and God has purposed "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ." In that context, we have been saved "by grace . . . through faith . . . not by works, so that no-one can boast," and we "are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." [Eph. 2:8 – 10.]

So, to seek to fill our lives with Christ is in plainly accordance with God's will; he has promised to answer such prayers.

But, we lack wisdom: "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." [James 1:5.] So, let us carefully study God's Word and ask for his step-by-step guidance in applying it to our lives, day by day, activity by activity, relationship by relationship.

Next, let us focus on our families. "The Family Altar" sounds a bit old-fashioned, but the concept is dead on target: our families need to regularly consult with God in prayer and Bible study, leading into a renewal of how we live, relate and work.

The church comes next. As we come together as circles of people and families that recognise the Lordship of Christ, we can seek God in prayer and Bible study, towards renewing our lives and reaching out to — and beyond — our communities.

Then, "times of refreshing," revival and reformation can flow out across the Caribbean, and beyond it, to the glory of God. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Suggested Assignments

(a) Questions for Group Discussion

- Discuss the contrast between prayer as an expression of faith and prayer as magic.
- Read 1 John 5:14 – 15. How can we develop confidence and power in our prayer lives? (Especially, how can we be confident that we pray according to God's will?)
- If prayer is a key to revival and reformation, how can we revitalise prayer in our own lives?
- In our families?

- In our church?
- In the wider community?
- In the region and world?

(b) Practical Exercises

- Develop a prayer plan as an aspect of your discipling plan.

(c) For Further Reading

-END-

CHAPTER NINE

Renewal in the Marketplace: Work and the Creation and Right Use of Wealth

GEM 2000:02:08 (CC Renewal Series, #8:June 2000?)

As Christians in the Caribbean, we are often in two minds about wealth: as we look around us, we plainly see that poverty is a major burden; but it is equally clear that riches can pull one away from God into greed, self-indulgence and the arrogance of power.

This tension is not new. As Paul warns:

Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. [1 Tim. 6:6 – 10.]

Clearly, we must aim for godliness with contentment, and must turn away from that lust for money that sprouts up into all kinds of evil. But at the same time, the Apostle highlights the fact that we have basic material needs: “food,” “clothing,” and — we may safely add — shelter.

If we are to meet our own needs, support the spreading of the gospel, pay reasonable taxes to support good governance in our communities [cf. Rom. 13:1 – 7!], and help the destitute, we must *work*, diligently and productively, to produce adequate resources. This requires the creation of wealth, so we also read: “[h]e who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that

he might have something to share with those in need.” [Eph. 4:28.]

In short, work, diligence, honesty, productivity, good citizenship, compassion and generosity form a chain linked to godliness and contentment. They thus form a major part of the “good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do,” as we stretch towards “the whole measure of the fulness of Christ,” the one who came in redeeming love — “in order to fill all things.” [Eph. 2:10, and 4:13 & 10.]

Therefore, as we continue our exploration of Christocentric renewal of the Caribbean, we must respond to the issues of godliness, wealth and poverty.

Blessing and the Creation of Wealth

Moses, in his farewell address to Israel, pointed out that it is God who blesses us by giving us the ability and resources to work productively, creating wealth:

God . . . humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna . . . to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD Observe the commands of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and revering him. For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land — a land with streams and pools of water . . . where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you . . . Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when . . . all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery . . .

You may say to yourself, “my power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” ***But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth . . .***

If you ever forget the LORD your God . . . I testify to you today that you will surely be destroyed. Like the nations the LORD destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the LORD your God. [Deuteronomy 8:2 – 20, emphasis added.]

Clearly, we must be diligent, honest and productive workers, under God. In doing this, we must also cultivate heartfelt gratitude to the LORD our God, who delivered us from slavery and indentureship; has given us liberty in a blessed, fruitful chain of islands and coastlands washed by the Caribbean Sea; and has given us abundant strength, skill, talent, resources and valuable ideas to create wealth.

For, if we fail to give heartfelt thanks to God, we will surely fall into greed, envy, and the deceitful arrogance of wealth. As Solomon, twice, aptly sums up: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.” [Proverbs 14:12/16:25.]

So, the problem is not with wealth itself, but that when we sever productivity from godliness, gratitude to our Creator, and compassion for the needy, we walk a road to self-indulgence, greed, deception, arrogance, exploitation of the poor, and national ruin. But, there is still a major question: how can

we unleash our God-given potential to create wealth?

Creating Wealth

As we just saw, Moses calls us to “remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth.” [Deuteronomy 8:18.] Thus, if we are to escape the poverty trap, we must turn to God for guidance and wisdom.

Proverbs 31:10 – 31 is an excellent case study³⁴:

[C]onsider . . . the virtuous woman — let’s call her “Ruby”:

“She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands . . . She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies the merchants with sashes . . .” “She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard. She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks. She sees that her trading is profitable . . . She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.” [Prov. 31: 13 & 24; 16 - 18a, 26, 27.]

Ruby starts small, and matches her skills and efforts to market opportunities. She saves, invests astutely, diversifies and feeds growth. She watches profitability [thus, cash flow], and manages the people and processes under her care with wisdom. No wonder she achieves success.

We may therefore summarise how to “follow Ruby”:

- (1) ***Envision the enterprise*** — opportunities and resources, goals and *strategy*: how

³⁴ Mullings, G. E. “Vision and Enterprise,” *Business & You* (Bridgetown, Barbados, 1999). Vol. 1 Issue 1), pp. 20 – 21; adapted.

to reach the goals, step by step, starting from where we are now. Ask: "why not now; why not here; why not us?"

- (2) **Develop it** — is it *technically* achievable, *commercially* profitable, and *morally* beneficial? Do we have — or, can we train — the *people* to carry it out successfully? How can we *finance* it? What are the *risks*, and how can we manage them?
- (3) **Produce, promote, price and distribute** — who are the customers? What are their needs? What products and services can we profitably offer that will help to fulfill these needs?
- (4) **Reap, save & invest**; rest, reflect, give and celebrate. [Prov. 31:20 - 31.]

The Link to our Missionary Mandate

Plainly, diligent, productive, honest, clean work is a key component of those “good works” that God has laid out in advance for us to do. But also, as Paul’s mission to Greece shows us, business initiatives can make a major contribution to the church’s missionary outreach.

First, when the Apostle arrived in Philippi, he met “Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth.” [Acts 16:14.] As soon as she and her household were baptised, she invited the missionary company into her home, thus becoming a *local sponsor* for the mission.

Similarly, when Paul reached Corinth, he met “Aquila . . . with his wife Priscilla . . . and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.” This couple not only sponsored but also soon became an active part of the missionary team, going on to pioneer the work in Ephesus. As this happened, Paul’s missionary pattern sharply shifted from a somewhat rushed tour that spent a few weeks in each town, to a more settled one, in which he spent eighteen months to two years in key centres, building bases from which

the mission reached out to surrounding areas. It is reasonable to infer that the partnership he formed with Aquila and Priscilla provided a resource base for him to make this shift. [Acts 18:2 – 3, 11, 18 – 21, 24 - 26 & 19:1 – 10.]

Thus, their example shows how businesses can sponsor a ministry team, or can even be a part of its work, giving it stability, natural contacts and credibility in the community.³⁵

Business initiatives can also energise an existing congregation. Ministry projects can be funded through short projects done by, say, the men’s or women’s or youth fellowship. Successful projects can also serve as pilots for launching businesses. Specifically:

- Idle lands and idle hands can be brought together, producing cash crops and developing skills and business opportunities at the same time.
- Through a construction skills project, housing can be refurbished or even built, and furniture can be restored or even manufactured.
- Light manufacturing, such as of clothing, accessories and footwear, ceramics, simple construction supplies such as tiles or blocks, or even electronics equipment and computers, can be undertaken.
- Information Technology based services, especially web site and E-Commerce support, can be offered.
- Second-chance education for school-leavers, “extra lesson” services and even further and higher studies are possibilities. (An

³⁵ Cf. Livingstone’s *Planting Churches in Muslim Cities*, Baker, or the previous article in this series, on “Cells in Renewal,” [March 2000 issue?] for more details.

accredited regional “Community College Without Walls” that makes use of the Internet and the vast network of churches, people and facilities that are already in place across the region, could support such education and training.)

- Young people in the church and wider community can be mentored, or do workplace-based internships or modern apprenticeships.
- To support these initiatives, a *business development cooperative* or *business incubator* can be launched, if the churches in a community have people with the skills and can attract funding.

Such initiatives empower people in the congregation, providing opportunities for people to build their lives and make a good livelihood. They move our charitable outreach from “giving a man a fish,” to “teaching him how to fish.” They lead to many natural contacts in the community, and in the Government and donor agency communities. They convincingly demonstrate the relevance of the church and the gospel. They can be a springboard for missions. Most of all, they set Christian discipleship in real-world contexts towards filling “all things” with Christ’s glory.

Again, we ask: “Why not now? Why not here? Why not us?”

Suggested Assignments

(a) Questions for Group Discussion

- Is it true that the market place is inevitably dominated by greed and selfishness, so Christians should not try to achieve great success in the world of business? Why or why not?
- On the other hand, there is often a preoccupation with money, prosperity and abundant material possessions in some sectors of the church. Sometimes, not being wealthy is viewed as a sign that one is not really in line with God’s plans for our lives. Is this balanced? Why or why not?
- What about the issue of “tithing,” especially given the relationship of the Christian to the Old Testament Law?
- How can we move from greed, selfish use of wealth and poverty to stewardship of the potential that God has put in our people and region?
- How can this be turned into a practical, balanced plan for our churches?

(b) Practical Exercises

- Develop a business renewal plan as an aspect of the discipleship plan.

(c) For Further Reading

CHAPTER TEN

The Arts, Media, and Education in Renewal

CC RENEWAL SERIES, # 9 [July 2000?]

GEM 2000:03:08

Caribbean sports, Reggae and Calypso stars have carried our region's culture to the world. For instance, when the Berlin Wall fell, Reggae liberation songs were a key part of the background to the grand party. Likewise, Reggae was there when Apartheid fell in South Africa. So, it was no surprise that at the turn of the year 2000, the BBC celebrated Bob Marley's music as a high point of cultural achievement for the millennium.

At home, as we walk our streets, ride in buses or visit homes, Caribbean music — piped in through the radio or played on a tape recorder — is a steady, though sometimes controversial, rhythmic backdrop to our lives. Thus, we can easily see the link between the arts and the media in our culture.

The link to education is a bit subtler: our educators have often been at odds with native and imported popular culture and with its promotion in the media. But, education, media, entertainment and the arts all involve the creation and communication of skillfully crafted messages to an audience, one which often does not understand the nuances, issues and assumptions that are embedded in the message.

Therefore, as we continue to explore the power of the vision that Christ, in love, came, descending, serving, dying for sin, rising and ascending “in order to fill all things” [Eph. 4:9 – 10], we need to focus on the arts, media, education and culture in renewal.

The Arts and Cultural Renewal in the Bible

David's career is a biblical model for the power of the arts in cultural renewal. Centuries before, there had been a cultural high point for Israel, under Moses: liberation and independence, law and government, music, poetry, worship, the creation of the wonderful Tabernacle. The arts were intimately involved. As we read:

The LORD said to Moses, “See, I have chosen Bezalel . . . and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts — to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship . . . I have given skill to all the craftsmen to make everything I have commanded you.” [Exodus 31:1 – 6, cf. 7 – 11.]

But, by the time of David, those days had long passed. When he came on the scene, his nation was desperately trying to cling to its land in the face of invasion and hardship. Then, almost out of nowhere, he leaps onto the stage of history, first as a young musician soothing the troubled mind of a sad king; then as an anointed warrior defeating Goliath and leading the armies of Israel to victory; then as a rising, but controversial, national leader; finally as the greatest king — but One — of Israel. At each step of the way, he wrote songs, which, as the Psalms have become the whole world's heritage:

These are the last words of David:

“The oracle of David son of Jesse,

the oracle of the man exalted by the Most High, the man anointed by the God of Jacob, Israel's singer of songs.

“The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me;
his word was on my tongue . . .”
[2 Samuel 23:1 – 2; cf. vv. 3 – 7.]

Clearly, David's power in art grew out of a living, growing, loving relationship with God. Thus, he poured out his feelings, experiences and ideas in song, by the light of a God-inspired, prophetic vision.

So, as the prophetic word gushed forth in song, David shaped Hebrew artistic forms, styles, and principles of composition to skillfully project God's power to comfort, clarify, redeem and renew. Therefore, we see him manifesting a gritty, determined integrity, as he confesses and repents from sin, then turns from despair to hope as he begins to see things God's way. As a result, tragic sinful disintegration and chaos become redemption and renewal, through the liberating and healing power of God.

But that renewal was not just personal; as an anointed prophet-artist-warrior-king, David carried his whole nation with him, triggering a vital cultural renewal that has shaped world history right down to our own time. In short, cultural renewal inspired by a true artistic vision and godly anointed leadership can transform a nation and bring it into great blessing under God.

Oh, that God would so visit us in the Caribbean our own time!

Education and the Media in Cultural Renewal

Now, if we are to help trigger a similar cultural renewal in the Caribbean, we must understand and apply the links that tie the arts and culture to education and the media. For, *culture* first speaks to “the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement,” and secondly to “the customs,

civilization, and achievements of a particular time or people.” [Oxford English Dictionary.]

Clearly, then, education systems and the media have great power to shape how our people think, feel, value, work and live — that is they *educate* — by exposing us to knowledge, skills, art-forms and artistic works, ideas, issues and points of view. Therefore, as we work towards renewal, Christians must become involved in, and seek to transform, education, the arts and the media across the Caribbean. For instance, many of us need to go into the classroom as teachers, into the arts as artists, and into the media as journalists, or commentators or even entertainers. Others are called by God to become academics or policy makers. For, our mandate calls us to “disciple [thus, teach] the nations,” and we are “the church, which is [Christ's] body, the fulness of him who fills everything in every way.” [Eph. 1:22 – 23 & Matt. 28:19.]

This “filling” is vital, as education and the media in the Caribbean may have at least as much influence on our people as our families and churches. That is a sobering thought, for, in Genesis 18:18 – 19, we may read about the influence of family:

The LORD said, “. . . Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just . . .” [Cf. Prov. 1:1 – 4:27.]

Paul adds, highlighting the impact of the church on culture:

You must no longer live as the [nations] do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all [moral] sensitivity, they have

given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you . . . were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” [Ephesians 4:17 – 24.]

That is, godly families and churches have a critical responsibility for moral education, and thus for shaping and renewing cultures under God through the power of the gospel. However, this also poses a cultural challenge: it is easy to reject that which is valid in a culture, thus imposing an alien culture in the name of evangelism. This was a major problem faced by First Century Jewish missionaries, who were often tempted to try to turn Gentiles into Jews. Paul, as the New Testament records, stoutly opposed this tendency.

In our own time, as Christians in the Caribbean, we still need to clarify the difference between imposing European or American culture and leading our nations in authentic Christ-centred renewal. For instance, there is nothing inherently ungodly in the drum, or in Reggae or Calypso rhythms, though ungodly men have often taken these art forms to lead our people astray through greed, sensuality and idolatry. But, how?

Breakthrough to Caribbean Cultural Renewal

I believe the drama movement pioneered by Kwame Dawes, Faith Hamer, Jennifer Campbell and many others on the Mona Campus of the University of the West Indies in the 1980's points to a way for the arts to lead a breakthrough to Christocentric renewal in the Caribbean.

First, the movement began as students sought an authentic way to reach out to the campus community with the message of the gospel. Drama, which appeals to our aural and visual culture, seemed natural; for, it brings literature to life, putting character, challenges, relationships, actions and consequences, step by step, on the stage. Thus, it can lay bare the secrets of the human heart, becoming a powerful vehicle for the prophetic voice of God to speak, through the eye and the ear, to the heart: “if an unbeliever . . . comes in while everybody is prophesying . . . the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming ‘God is really among you!’” [1 Cor. 14:24 – 25.]

Soon, there was a grappling with issues: should Christians try to “become” sinful characters, as Method Acting proposes? What of St. Augustine’s powerful rebuke to the pagan drama of his time — it taught people the techniques of vice? [*City of God*, Book 2, Chapter 26.] That is, how could we expose vice, without unintentionally teaching it, or even being corrupted by it? What about striking a balance under Christ in one’s life, so that what one projected from the stage and how one lived and worked on campus and in the wider community became increasingly consistent and exemplary?

From these struggles, we gradually saw the power of *redemptive, prophetic empathy*:

Praise be to . . . the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. [2 Cor. 1:3 – 4.]

That is, the power to understand, to feel — that is, *empathise* —with, then dramatically represent, reach out to and help others actually grows out of our own process of struggle and pain, under the impact of God’s comfort and redemption!

So, when this power of empathy is coupled with the principle that Christ came, descending and ascending “in order to fill all things,” and to the insight that “we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do,” it sets a dynamic framework for discipleship, service and general cultural renewal. [Cf. Eph. 2:10.]

While, as with any real-world process, the drama movement was not a perfect model, it did demonstrate the relevance of the gospel to Caribbean culture, and that it works to renew, rather than to replace our culture. (Indeed, much of the thinking that underlies this series of articles grew out of my interaction with this movement; creating an intellectual debt which I gratefully acknowledge.)

Therefore, our challenge is to build on what has already been achieved: “Why not now? Why not here? Why not us?”

Suggested Assignments

(a) Questions for Group Discussion

- Discuss the role of the arts, media, education and culture in your lives, families, congregation and community.
- How important are these things to the development of the Caribbean’s peoples and cultures?
- In Acts 17, Paul argues that God created the nations. Since culture and its expressions in the arts, media and entertainment are important aspects of national life, how then can you account for the way good and evil are so closely interwoven in our region’s culture?
- Given the challenge that we are not to be worldly, how we, as should Christians in the Caribbean, respond to this mixed blessing aspect of our culture?
- How can the fulness vision help you to bring the gospel to bear on these things?

(b) Practical Exercises

- Develop a plan for culture, education and the media, as an aspect of the discipleship plan.

(c) For Further Reading

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Dare to be a Daniel: Godly Service and Renewal in the Professions, Institutions and Government

GEM 99:06:20

Newspaper headlines all across the Caribbean trumpet corruption and incompetence, in high places, and in low. Even more sadly, in a region boasting one of the highest church attendance rates in the world, Christians — too often for good reason — are frequently derided as hypocrites, just as bad as their neighbours, but sanctimoniously pretending to be "holier than thou."

The Contrast: Daniel

What a contrast we have in Daniel! When envious men sought to break his career, they "could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent." [Dan. 6: 4b, NIV.] So, they had to resort to attacking his godliness: "We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God."

They went to the king with a flattering lie: "The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into the lions' den." [v. 7, emphasis added.] Daniel, duly caught in the act of prayer to God, went to the lions' den because a foolish king had listened to deceitful advisors and issued a rule that had consequences he did not understand. Thankfully, God delivered Daniel to a grateful king.

Sadly, destructive scheming, corruption, incompetence and folly in high places are still with us. How, then, can we work to be

true "salt and light" in the office, factory, institution or community?

Daniel's Path

Daniel's career path has much to teach us. Born in a generation justly under the shadow of God's judgement, he was taken as war booty and sent to "College" in Babylon, to be trained for the Babylonian Civil Service.

The first step was to try to destroy his faith in God, so the pagan Babylonians gave him an idolatrous name and tried to force him to eat ceremonially unclean food. But "Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way." [Dan. 1:8.]

The reply was telling: "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you." Thus, we see the callous brutality and intimidation that mark so many who hold high office.

Daniel persisted, and approached his guard: "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." [vv. 12-13.] God blessed his persistence, and he and his three companions were able to keep themselves ceremonially pure.

God also blessed their studies: "To these four young men God gave knowledge and

understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds. At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, the . . . he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom." [17 - 20.]

In short, right from youth, Daniel boldly put God first, and courageously and persistently "dare[d] to stand alone." Accordingly, his competence was grounded in his commitment to God, even in the face of a dangerous, unstable situation — Nebuchadnezzar's favourite solution for those who displeased him was to put them to death — and in God's gifts of knowledge and tactfully applied wisdom and prophetic insight. Thus, "he was found to have . . . a keen mind and knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to . . . solve difficult problems." [5:11 - 12.]

Daniel in Crisis

Even before the three years of training were over, Daniel faced a major crisis. Nebuchadnezzar had a dream, demanded its interpretation, and refused to tell his astrologers what it was, to test their power. They replied: "What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among men." [2:11.] The king promptly ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon.

Daniel learned of the crisis when "men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death." [v. 13.] Daniel spoke to the captain of the king's guard "with wisdom and tact" — asking for clarification rather than accusing and complaining — and was able to request time to interpret the dream. Together with his three friends, he prayed to God, and during the night, "the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision."

Soon, Daniel was ushered into the king's presence, and told and interpreted the famous dream of the great statue of the kingdoms of men shattered by the power of the eternal kingdom of God. "Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men . . . at Daniel's request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon." [vv. 47, 48.]

Thus, Daniel's coolness, tact, wisdom and seeking of God saved the day. His three friends, likewise, stood the test of a fiery furnace. Later on, Daniel had the opportunity to tactfully call the king to repent when God warned him, by another dream, about his arrogance. The king persisted in wickedness and pride, and was struck mad by God, ultimately confessing: "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble." [Dan. 4:37.]

Following Daniel Today

Nasty schemes, corruption, incompetence, arrogance and intimidation to do or support wickedness are all too familiar to most of us as we live and work in the Caribbean and beyond. However, prophetic dreams, rescuing angels in fiery furnaces, and silenced lions sound more like fairy tales than realistic expectations. As Amos records: "You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts. Therefore the prudent man keeps quiet in such times, for the times are evil." [Amos 5:12, 13.]

But such "prudence" is not the whole story. As Jesus put it: "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in

exchange for his soul?" [Matt. 16:25 - 26.] Indeed, when Daniel's friends were facing the furnace, they were confident that: "the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." [Dan. 3:17 - 18.] In short, courage, witness and martyrdom have always been linked.

Second, there is the principle of escape: "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." [1 Cor. 10:13.] Sometimes, that way is a miracle; sometimes, courage to suffer for Christ; sometimes, strength to resist temptation; sometimes, avoiding or getting out of situations that put us under unyielding pressure to sin. Frankly, poverty or even martyrdom are preferable to prosperity at the price of one's soul.

Finally, there is the strategy of the godly alternative. The church is a bright "city on a hill" in a dark world. [Matt. 5:14.] We therefore have a collective responsibility to develop alternative systems and structures that show the godly way to the surrounding society. This clearly includes: family structures, businesses, professions, industry, institutions, education, conflict resolution, outreach to the poor and needy, etc.

If we were to systematically develop such structures, many Christians who are presently struggling to stand under crushing pressure to yield to wickedness at home, school or work would have godly alternative frameworks for living, studying, working, and serving that would collectively be a powerful witness to the world, demonstrating how Christ works to "fill all things." [Eph. 4:10.] Could it be that this is what God is calling us, as His people in the Caribbean, to do and demonstrate in our time? Is this our "way of escape," and the

"good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do"? [Eph. 2:10.] Have we "come to . . . position for such a time as this"? [Esther 4:14.]

Why not now; why not here; why not us?

Suggested Assignments

(a) Questions for Group Discussion

- How do professionals, civil servants and institutions operate in your community?
- In our region, much of the corruption in official institutions and the professions is linked to inadequate training, and to the effects of political and personal patronage and secret societies. There is also a tendency to excuse going along with evil since "we have to survive." What would Daniel have to say?
- What would he say to you?
- How then could we work to promote renewal and reformation in Government, Civil Society and the professions across the region?
- How does this fit in with the fulness vision?

(b) Practical Exercises

- Add these issues to the plan. How would you prepare students and practitioners to be Daniels in the community?

(c) For Further Reading

CHAPTER TWELVE

Breakthrough to Reformation: Renewing Community Leadership and Life through Christ

(CC Series, 10: September 2000)
GEM 2000:03:21

“Folly-tricks!” With a bitter pun, Caribbean street wisdom aptly sums up the state of politics all across our chain of islands and coastlands.

Christians often add “politics is dirty,” meaning that, since we should keep ourselves “unspotted from the world,” we should not soil ourselves by dealing with it too closely. (Oddly, “business is dirty” — an equally half-true observation — is relatively rare: there are far more Christians in business than in politics across the Caribbean!)

But, as Ephesians 4:10 reminds us, Jesus came, descending and ascending as Lord “in order to fill all things.” If “all” means *all*, then politics — the art and science of power, influence and leadership in the community — cannot properly be excluded from the “good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” [Eph. 2:10.]

That is, we should promote the renewal and reformation of the community, its leadership, its culture and its life through the gospel: the truth, in love, purity and God’s power.

Discipleship and Community Leadership

Jesus, who holds “all authority in heaven and on earth,” has commissioned us to “disciple the nations.” [Matt. 28:19, cf. Colossians 1:20 – 29.] Thus, it is through discipleship that we are to shape communities, their cultures and leadership.

For instance, as Paul points out: “there is no authority except that which God has

established . . . *for [the ruler] is God’s servant* to do you good . . . an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.” [Romans 13:1 & 4; emphasis added. Cf. Colossians 1:15 – 20.] Such a community leader will obviously be able to do a better job if he or she openly acknowledges and lives by this duty to serve God.

Paul, in speaking to the leaders of Athens, adds: “From one man, [God] made every nation . . . and he determined the times 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 . . . ‘For in him we live and move and have our being’ . . . he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.” [Acts 17:26 – 31.]

In short, all of us — including our rulers, judges, journalists, artists, academics, entertainers, professionals and other leaders in the community — are created and sustained by God, and are therefore his children and servants. Thus, we all have a duty to surrender to him, and “act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with . . . God,” serving him as disciples by how we live, work, think, teach, rule and lead in the community. [Micah 6:8.]

Indeed, when Paul stood as a prisoner before Felix, a Roman governor, he boldly spoke to him about “faith in Christ Jesus . . . righteousness, self-control and the judgment

to come.” [Acts 25:24 – 27; Cf. Heb. 6:1 – 2 & Rev. 20:11 – 15.]

The Voice, and the Courage, of the Prophet

Felix did not welcome Paul’s message. And, over the long haul of history, the truth that we are all servants of God who will one day account for our service has usually been less than welcome in halls of wealth, influence and power. For, power and wealth tempt us to ignore our duty to God, and resort to arrogance, to abuse of the powerless, and to wicked schemes backed up by corrupt courts or even violence. [Cf. Deut. 8:10 – 20.] Thus, the bitter wisdom in the street-word: “folly-tricks.”

Amos sharply points out the resulting challenge to the people of God. First, speaking to a corrupt elite, he cries out:

You who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground . . . you hate the one who reproves in court and despise him who tells the truth . . . you deprive the poor of justice in the courts. Therefore the prudent man keeps quiet in such times, for the times are evil. [Amos 5:7 – 13.]

On the other hand — magnificently — he declares:

Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets. The lion has roared — who will not fear? The Sovereign LORD has spoken — who can but prophesy? [Amos 3:7 – 8.]

Thus, we see a sharp clash between that prudent fear that counsels silence in an evil day and the call to speak with the lion’s roar of God’s voice into a sin-sick world dominated by wicked, powerful elites.

But, true courage is to do our duty in the face of danger. As Jesus put it:

I tell you . . . do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more . . . Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell [W]hoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels. [Luke 12:4 – 9, cf. 11 - 12.]

Clearly, then, the call to discipleship is a call to lead our communities in repentance, renewal and reformation under Christ. But, how?

Leading Renewal and Reformation in the Community

Again, David is a good model. As we noted above: “When he came on the scene, his nation was desperately trying to cling to its land in the face of invasion and hardship. Then, almost out of nowhere, he leaps onto the stage of history, first as a young musician soothing the troubled mind of a sad king; then as an anointed warrior defeating Goliath and leading the armies of Israel to victory; then as a rising, but controversial, national leader; finally as the greatest king — but One — of Israel.”

In short, the rise of a new generation of community leadership can transform the fortunes of a whole nation. For instance, when David — clearly too young to be called up for service — was sent with provisions to his big brothers in the army, he heard and responded to the challenge of Goliath, resisting the ridicule of his eldest brother. Soon, he was taken to King Saul.

“Let no-one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.”

“You are not able . . . you are only a boy, and he has been a fighting man from his youth.” [1 Samuel 17:32 – 33.]

Clearly, Saul, who had been chosen by Israel “to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles” [1 Sam. 8:20], failed to see that God was raising up an even mightier warrior than Goliath — David.

Due to his insecurity, popularity seeking, disobedience and fear, Saul had lost his vision and faith to lead. [1 Sam. 13:1 – 15 & 15:1 – 31.] Then, when David triumphed over the giant and rapidly became a successful general and a popular hero, Saul jealously sought to protect his status and privileges, even in the absence of performance. Therefore, he sought David’s life.

So David fled, ending up in the cave of Adullam in the desert. There, “those who were in distress or debt, or discontented gathered around him, and he became their leader.” [1 Sam. 22:2.] As the Psalms record, this leadership was based on his walk with God, and so, at each step he prayerfully and passionately sought God’s wisdom and guidance. [Cf. Joshua 1:1 – 9, Deut. 17:18 – 20, and Psalm 1.] Thus, under tested godly leadership, a circle of desperate men gained experience, skill, success and exposure, thus becoming a new generation of leaders that carried their nation on to its finest hour.

Sadly, Saul soon added to his sins by slaughtering the priests at Nob for supporting David, over the protest of his own officials. Abiathar, son of the High Priest, however, escaped and joined David. Later, Jonathan, the crown prince, came to David at his hiding-place and magnificently encouraged him: “You shall be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this.” [23:16 – 17.] Ultimately, after David had twice spared his life, Saul declared: “May you be blessed, my son David; you will do great things and surely triumph.” [26:25.] Which, he did.

So, step by painful step, David rose to national leadership, though not without stumbles along the way. [Psalm 37: 23 &

24.] For instance, soon after Saul’s declaration, in fear, he fled to his enemies the Philistines and lived a life of deceit and raiding among them, for sixteen months. In doing this, he was only saved from being required to fight against his own nation by the intervention of the Lords of the Philistines. And, in his mid-life years, idleness led to adultery and veiled murder to cover it up, severely damaging his moral authority as a leader of the nation. This loss of legitimacy led to scandal and strife, paving the way for rebellion by ill-disciplined princes and civil war. But, by God’s grace, David was able to take the time to prepare Bathsheba’s second son, Solomon, to consolidate his achievements.

In short, David emerged through national crisis, which created a desperate groping for a way out. In the midst of danger and panic, he responded with faith, vision and courageous initiative: godly leadership. The initial breakthrough then led to greater opportunities as the King put him in a position of command. Success led to popularity, which triggered sinful jealousy and persecution. When he had to flee, desperate men came to him and, under his leadership, became the core of a movement of national renewal, that is reformation. Then, David almost dropped the ball: his own sins and neglect of his sons were only redeemed by his second chance, with Solomon, who led the generation of consolidation.

Towards a David Generation in the Caribbean

If we are to become such a David Generation in the Caribbean, we must learn God’s strategy: first, he opens the door to renewal and reformation through the chaos and crisis caused by the sins and selfishness of a Saul Generation.

Secondly, in the midst of national failure, there are Davids God is raising up: people of faith and vision, who respond to roaring Goliaths with godly courage and initiatives

that open doors to unexpected breakthroughs.

I am convinced that there are many such Davids across our region today, for the same Spirit who empowered David is now poured out on all nations through Christ, giving us access to the power that raised Jesus from the dead. [Ephesians 1:17 – 23.]

In short, we who have given ourselves to God through Christ are — potentially — a David Generation. Therefore, let us be diligent to build up our skills and knowledge, and to seek a vision from God that creates breakthroughs in the midst of crises: in the family, church, school, campus, business, arts, media, civil service, community and government. Through such breakthroughs, we can lead our nations, under God, into renewal and reformation in our time.

As we rise to national leadership, we will make mistakes, but God orders the steps of good men and women and upholds us when we stumble, lest we be utterly cast down. But, we must beware of self-indulgent sins that destroy legitimacy and open the door for self-centred opportunists to seize power and create chaos. And, we must carefully

nurture the Solomon Generation: those who will consolidate what we achieve.

Suggested Assignments

(a) Questions for Group Discussion

- Use the pattern of the Saul and David Generations to analyse where the Caribbean is today:
 - Families
 - Churches
 - Institutions
 - Education and the media
 - The arts
 - Government
 - Business
 - Entertainment
 - Development
- How could we become a David Generation in our time?
- How would this fit with the fulness vision?

(b) Practical Exercises

- Add this to the plan. Present the revised plan to your church's leadership.

(c) For Further Reading

CHAPTER 13

In Closing, A Caribbean Challenge

We end this book/course/manifesto with a challenge: Why not now? Why not here? Why not us?

-THE END-