

BLACK WOMEN IN BLACK-LED CHURCHES
A STUDY OF BLACK WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE GROWTH
AND DEVELOPMENT OF BLACK-LED CHURCHES IN BRITAIN

by

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DEDICATION

To my parents Ena and Harold,

My sisters and brothers:

Yvonne, Dorett, Delphin, Sharon,

Min, George, Earl and Glen

and

To all the:

Mavis's, Beryl's, Mother Drummond's and Zenna's

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SYNOPSIS

The existence of Black-led churches in Britain, owes much to the contributions of Black women. They have given tirelessly through evangelising and their prayers and fasting. The churches have been financed in the main by their tithes and offerings. The women have been faithful in their nurturing of their brothers and sisters. Very little of this has been recorded.

Women have also played their part in building communities, which have offered security to a people often alienated and oppressed by race, class and gender inequalities.

Ironically Black-led churches can also be oppressive, with their sexist structures. At the same time however, there are elements within them that could be termed incipiently liberational.

Liberation Theologies seem to offer a challenge and possible way forward for Black Women and Black-led churches in Britain. Can the patriarchal structures of the churches give way to a Womanist Theology, based on the experiences and realities of Black Women in Britain today?

Aim of the research

1. The work aimed to examine the role, past and present, of women in Black-led churches in Britain.
2. To evaluate the role of women within the total ministry of the churches.
3. To assess the relevance of liberation theologies to the position of women in these churches.

Scope of the work

In the main churches in and around Birmingham, but also related to churches in London, Leeds and Sheffield. Much of the work centred on the experiences of women in the New Testament Church of God, but also in the Church of God of Prophecy, the Wesleyan Holiness Church, the Shiloh Apostolic Church, Light and Life Mission, the United Church of God and the African Episcopalian Zion Church.

Methodology

I have used taped interviews with individuals, tapes of services, photographs, and literature produced by the churches. It is hoped that I have built as complete a picture as is possible in this work of the situation of women in Black-led churches in Britain.

N.B. The term Black-led is here used to describe churches with predominantly African-Caribbean membership. Some churches are organisationally and doctrinally linked to white American Pentecostal organisations.

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CHAPTER 1

THE EARLY PRESENCE AND INVOLVEMENT OF BLACK WOMEN

Beginnings

The number of women present in black-led churches during the very early and initial stages of the churches' existence corresponds well with the general pattern of migration from the Caribbean to Britain. It is generally believed that the first to migrate were the men, followed by spouses and much later on, children. For example, in 1955, 62% of those migrating from Jamaica, and 85% of those from Dominica were men. By 1960, the pattern had significantly shifted, so that, *of migrants from Jamaica and Dominica 57% and 59% were male* respectively. The number of children arriving from Jamaica rose from 331 in 1955 to 2,430 in 1960.¹

By the early 1960's, it would appear that the evening out of the sexes had begun. *Two* factors seem to have contributed to this: a) the number of spouses and female dependants that had joined husband and male relatives; b) the high number of women who had arrived independently of males, *for example to* study as nurses.

Some of the documentation on early church membership mirrors the above. It would seem that present in the named "congregation" of New Testament Church of God in Handsworth, Birmingham, 1952, were some five people, two of whom were women, namely Sister Hay and Sister Hastings. By the early part of 1953, a further three persons had joined the congregation, and the group now included a Sister Pringle.²

Another example is to be found in the Wesleyan Holiness Church. In 1958, the first group of pilgrims to meet numbered six, amongst whom were two women, sisters Martha Hughes and Maria Simon.³

Between the early 60's and the end of the 70's, there was at first a steady, and then a rapid increase in the number of converts and members added to many black-led churches. There was also an increase in the number of adherents and non-members who sporadically attended church services.

As very few statistics were kept on early church membership and none to date, with a male/female breakdown, it is difficult to find or give near precise figures of the ratio of males to females present in the churches during the period above.

In the little written evidence available, which makes a distinction between males and females, we find for example:

"The Tottenham branch of the N. T. C. of God was evangelised and preached out by a number of faithful brethren, namely Brothers E. Williams, F.S. Hosang, V. Williams, C. Arnold, Mr. and Mrs. A. Scott and Sister E. Silcot, under the leadership of Isaac N. Carter during the years between 1962 and 1963..... The church was organised with eight members, 3 males and 5 females on the 31st October 1963."⁴

Malcolm Calley's study and observations of the male/female composition of black led churches in the 60's is further evidence:

"... it is only since 1961 that they (the churches) have started to acquire the preponderance of female members characteristic of them in the West Indies."⁵

Photographs provide us with another source of evidence. A number of photographs taken between the 1960's and 1970's and to which I had access, show that women were not just a mere equal in number to the men but were gradually out-numbering them. The pictures also showed not only the presence but also the active involvement of women in the churches. They were members of the church choir, sunday school teachers and were in the majority of those being baptised.⁶

A further point inferred from the photographic evidence and worth making here, is that a large number of marriages between members took place in the sixties and seventies. Malcolm Calley found from his research that:

"... in the last two years, (1960 - 1962), a much higher proportion of the immigrants have been women and the numbers of marriages among sect members has increased."⁷

4.

So there were marriages between: fiancées newly arrived from the Caribbean; newly converted couples, perhaps living in a common-law arrangement as well those already converted.

The children from these marriages were to ensure, at least for a while, a fairly stable future in terms of the churches' membership. Marriages made natural recruitment to the membership of the churches a reality.

The final source of my evidence is from the conversations and interviews I had with the women with whom I spoke. Several women were able to recall the large number of women in their church groups and to point to their significant involvement in the prayer bands, the choir and the growth of the Ladies Auxiliaries aptly called in one organisation - the Ladies Willing Workers Band, and in another, the Ladies Missionary Band.

Growth Theories

Several theories have been proffered, offering reasons for the growth of black-led churches in Britain. None of the theories I have come across to date have described, analysed or made inferences based upon the number, role and involvement of women in the black-led churches.

Christopher Wright in his article "Growth of West Indian Religion in Britain" provides us with a succinct review of some of the arguments:

"A commonly cited reason for the relative success of these movements among West Indians in Britain is the racism of British society, which confines most West Indians and their descendants to low status and vulnerable positions in the labour and housing markets, and to educational disadvantage (Daniel, 1971, Rose et al., 1970, Barron and Norris, 1976, Hill, 1971b). It is claimed that, in this situation, deviant religions function as movements of the dispossessed by mobilising either symbolic means of asserting high status through inversion of the dominant social hierarchy or by denial of the reward and status systems of the dominant culture (Hill, 1971a, Hill, 1971b, Calley, 1965). In a similar vein, it has been claimed that these religious movements provide an alternative community with its own rules, roles and opportunities for fellowship (Theobald, 1981), thus providing 'solace for their members. (Pearson, 1978, p. 354)."

Fission and the schismatic nature of the early churches appear to have contributed in a positive way to their growth and development. Gerloff saw the above as a necessary part of the evangelisation process. ^{8a}

Ari Kiev suggests that the psychotherapeutic aspects of Pentecostal churches is one reason why they grew and took on such importance among the early immigrants:

"The sects provide a social acceptance for everyone and a socially acceptable way of releasing suppressed emotions and frustrations. The gifts of the Spirit compensate for the lack of material gifts and the gift of 'tongues' provides the

cont..

inarticulate with an opportunity to speak in a patterned way to an applauding audience. Acknowledging the presence of evil and hopelessness in the world at large, the group offers the individual an opportunity to transfer his hopes to a greater life in the hereafter."⁹

It would appear that there are a number of factors which contributed to the preponderance of women in black-led churches in Britain.

Although I might not arrive at definite or conclusive answers, I would like to offer the following as worthy of some serious consideration.

Factors contributing to the preponderance of women in black-led churches.

Firstly, many of the women who became members of black-led churches were already members of a christian church/sect in the Caribbean. To continue to attend or to become a member of a church was not regarded as unusual.

All the women I interviewed had been church attenders or members. They claimed that they attended or had been members of one of the historical christian churches or one of the newer evangelical or Pentecostal ones. Although not members of the folk/ traditional African religious groups, these women admitted to using remedies and cures on offer from the healers or herbalists in their localities.

On the whole, the women were active members, involved in the life of their village churches as choir members and Sunday school teachers, while others regularly attended open air meetings, prayer meetings, conventions, and other church related events. One woman claimed that in the Caribbean:

"Everybody went to church."

Although when closely examined the above statement is not entirely true, one can appreciate this perception, as religious activities, whether they were church or sect related, were part and parcel of the communities' modus vivendi and modus operandi.

Many women had been taught and had accepted that Great Britain was the locus of all christian activity. To want to continue to attend a church in a country known as, or at least perceived as a christian country was in no way out of the ordinary. There was a rightness about upholding one's faith and showing allegiance to tried and tested beliefs. One way to do this was to attend church services, another, being a member of a local church and fully participating in the life and work of the church community. In the minds of these women there did not seem to be a problem over these very ordinary desires.

Other women interviewed said that when they first came to England, they attended churches other than black-led evangelical

or pentecostal ones. When questioned about why they became members of a black-led church, they talked of a conversion experience:

"Brought to know the lord," or "I gave my life to Christ."

My second contention is that:

The model of evangelism used by black-led church groups was most effective when applied to women.

When speaking about the Caribbean, there were a number of references to open air meetings or campaigns held in the village square or fair ground, as well as to long and late night services held in covered open-sided buildings or make shift, tatchy minis (small thatched halls). The services were therefore held in full view and hearing of the villagers or passers-by. This apparently indiscriminate form of evangelism reached both the voluntary and the involuntary listener and participant. In many ways this was seen to be effective.

The climatic, legal and social conditions here were not conducive to the above type of evangelism. The new immigrants found the weather conditions to be less than favourable to open air meetings, their lack of knowledge of the laws governing the use of public spaces and the attitudes of white British people to zealous religiosity were strong

deterrents to evangelism of the kind mentioned above. It was much later when certain church groups became established that they began to use open spaces, like the Bull Ring market in Birmingham, and large parks for their open air or tent meetings.

The early immigrant church groups faced a number of difficulties over finding buildings in which to worship. In many ways theirs was an itinerant existence:

"The vestry of St. Nicholas Congregational Church was loaned to this zealous group for their early morning Prayer Meetings on Sundays, whilst the Sunday School Hall was loaned for their Bible Study on Wednesday evenings. The main Sunday Services were then held at 6, Primrose Hill on the Chantry Estate ... Later that year rooms were used at 2, Violet Close, the home of Ted and Edna Friend ... The membership increased steadily, so another move soon became necessary for them, this time to the Red Cross Hall in Berners Street, which became 'church' for Sunday Services for several months until it was sold in 1961.¹⁰

The groups were at the mercy of caretaking staff or landlords/ladies. There was always the fear of not getting anywhere to rent and therefore nowhere to worship. In order to ensure further use of a property it was not really in the early black christians' interest to have prolonged services, especially late night ones.

It would appear that there were a number of ways by which the early immigrants witnessed to their faith. The first I have called, the active witnessing technique.

The active witnessing technique, employed confrontational, but not aggressive tactics. Members of churches/fellowships would go out on 'house to house mission'. They would knock on doors and hand out small pamphlets containing short sermons, usually imploring non-believers to repent. In the conversation which followed, the benefits of repenting from one's sins and of being saved would be outlined. There would be an invitation to attend a church service or a church related event. This might have been a baptismal service or a prayer meeting. There would also be an invitation to send the children to Sunday School. Where parents could not bring the children themselves, then arrangements would be made to have them collected and returned by the church van or by a person with a car. Where a parent did decide to accompany their children to Sunday School or to church, it was usually the mother who did so.

'House to house witnessing' effectively employed the 'grape vine' technique.¹¹ In what was still a relatively small black community it was easy for the 'evangelists', witnessing in any given area to find out by word of mouth who had moved into an area, who had moved out and whether they were saved, unsaved or backslidden.¹² This also certainly included a little about their familial circumstances.

The 'house to house witnessing' technique effectively trawled on women who were more likely to be at home during the evenings and weekends when evangelism was taking place.

Having worked the early morning or night shift, the women were the ones who undertook the child rearing and household chores in the early evening hours and at weekends. The men also worked anti-social hours, awkward shifts and weekends, but they were the ones most likely to be out socialising with their men friends during the critical evangelism periods. The men were the least likely to be witnessed to.

It is possible that the women found at home were undergoing periods of loneliness. The support of the extended family available to them in the Caribbean was no longer available here. One of the women described what she did in the absence of her immediate family:

"So many times when I was on my own, I used to take the photographs of the children and put them on the mantle-piece and just cry and cry."

The above quotation suggests the women were very alone, perhaps in need of friendship, someone they could share their problems and aloneness with, someone with whom they could cry and share their memories and stories. Eventually, as we now know, *the women also needed someone with whom they could pray.*

Evangelism in the early immigrant church groups was undertaken by women, and perhaps inevitably reached women, as we see from the interviewee below:

Cont...

"Women were pioneers, there were mostly women doing the pioneering work ... Cottage services, witnessing, working hard in every aspect of the church work ... as well as working in full time jobs ... They would spend, I would say about 15 hours a week, ... they would go to work and even during their working time they would be witnessing ... and on their days off, weekends they would move from one place to the other ... say they were living in a certain city or vicinity ... they would move from one house to the next witnessing to people, talking to people, trying to bring people out to form a fellowship or something of the kind, that was the work of the pioneers and that went on for sometime. I used to go out with the brethren."¹³

The 'word of mouth' and in-house advertising strategies employed by many industries in the 50's and 60's, which is still used in some places, was extensively used among immigrant workers. This strategy drew on relatives, friends, and friends of friends. Small enclaves of immigrants could be found in factories, hospitals or transport depots. Out of these workers, social and cultural groups were formed and converts made.

It was in these work place situations that the 'passive witnessing technique' was used. The features of this included reading the bible, praying, saying grace before the start of a meal and the obvious non-participation in 'ludicrous talk' and 'unholy behaviour'. This very marked alternative mode of behaviour was perhaps further highlighted by the fact that the people displaying it were black. It would seem that this type of behaviour attracted the curious, but also acted as a sign to other black workers who understood the 'born-again christian' ways

of behaving. Ridicule or genuine enquiries about one's faith would be treated positively. The chance to witness was never spurned.

In many ways the early immigrants tried to carry out what they understood to be an effective and scriptural way of evangelisation. Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller's models of New Testament evangelisation as quoted below, seem to fit those which were being put in place by the early immigrants. There was the Direct Proclamation model, where:

"Missionary preachers announced the good news of salvation and taught its implications to those who would listen ... this direct verbal communications of the gospel was the most important instrument of evangelisation in the early church , 1 Thess. 1:7-8, also cf. Mk 3:14; 6:12; Mt. 10:7; Lk. 9:2."

as well as the "Witness on Behalf of the Gospel" model :

"The early christian community recognised that the message of salvation would be brought to the 'end of the earth' not only by what the church preached to the Gentile world, but by the way it lived and what actions it took. Therefore the 'witness' or testimony given by christian living was another important mode of mission in the early church."¹⁴

Restrictions arising out of an understanding of scripture and cultural and social taboos were imposed upon evangelists.

At times the female evangelist suffered most, as these restrictions made it difficult for them to reach the men.

The following is my third contention.

In true Pentecostal tradition, as understood by many Caribbean immigrants, one's life is controlled by strict moral and ascetic codes. Many of these moral obligations are contained in the practical commitments of the organisations, to which members are asked to pledge their allegiance.¹⁵

Professor Walter Hollenweger's excellent documentation and critical analysis of the ethics and practical commitments of various Pentecostal groups provides a deep insight into the beliefs that underpin the above:

"The main concern in ethical questions is not seen to be that of living with one's fellow men in bearable and human fashion. From the Pentecostal point of view more is at issue. What matters is not to lose glory; to keep and guard the white garment, the sign of purity, the ring, the sign of the love of God, for the coming marriage feast, 'the crowning day'.

The function of ethics is to keep the believer on the narrow way which leads to heaven. For this reason there is even opposition to cremation. As long as ethics has the function of preserving the white garment of the kingdom of heaven, the concern of Pentecostal ethics can never be for one's fellow man, but only for one's ^{self}. I must endeavour not to get my hands dirty, not to have any stain on the marriage garment, so that I may be ready when Jesus comes. To this end it is also necessary to behave respectably towards my fellow men, otherwise my account in heaven is blotted."¹⁶

Many of these codes are axioms used liberally in every day conversations and are regularly scattered in exhortations and sermons. For example, members of the N. T. Church of God are asked to totally 'abstain from all liquor or strong drinks'. Prov. 20:1; 23:29-32; Isaiah 28:7; 1Cor.5:11; 6:10; Gal.5:21; so everyone 'knows' that wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging. Depending on how this is used it can either serve to condemn those who partake of strong drink, or it can be a warning to those who might be attracted to strong drink.

In practical terms, any thing or any place associated with the taking of 'strong drink' must be shunned by the believer. So irresponsible and degrading behaviour consequential of taking alcoholic beverage is viewed as unholy and not that expected of saints. The places where men are most likely to be found are those places where saints are encouraged not to visit or be seen in. Other places where saints should not be associated with, included cinemas, theatres, social clubs, public baths, and lodges. A whole group of people who used the above places for their social gathering were being missed in the evangelisation programme of the early immigrants.

Malcolm Calleys' comments on this withdrawal from the 'world' might appear pertinent to the anthropologist, but not to the saint:

"The thoroughgoing, obsessive, ritual withdrawal of the saint from the world appears to be out of all proportion to the actual difficulty of the situation he is withdrawing from."¹⁷

It was believed that a saint's life should be 'circumspect and without blemish'. Saints should not allow questions to be asked of their behaviour. Furthermore they had a responsibility to other christians who might be 'weaker' than they are, as well as to the unbelievers. We often hear the following quoted:

"If you know that your brother does not eat meat, then for your brother's sake..."

Underpinning the strict moral codes laid down by the churches are others, which in the main were applied to women. They appear informal but are nonetheless persuasive and effective. They say what is expected of women in terms of their personal life and behaviour, women should be, according to scripture: 'discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, love their children'. And there should be nothing in their life that could imply loose living, bring reproach or 'tempt the devil'.

By going to a place where one was likely to tempt, (especially men) and be tempted (mostly by men whose 'Adamic nature' had not been 'washed by the blood of Christ') meant that the woman was bringing temptation on herself. This amounted to an act of provocation. By implication, such a woman could not be chaste and discrete. One of the obvious consequences of putting one's self repeatedly in this position is that one would or could eventually yield to the temptation, and end up in the backslidden state of an unholy life.

Christopher Wright takes up the theme of respectability in Caribbean societies in his article cited above, which goes some way in explaining the restrictions under which the immigrant women laboured as evangelists:

"The respectable person is modest and sober and concerned for their family's welfare. Crucially, respectability is associated with women and the respectable woman is one who is married or in a stable common law union, is faithful to her husband (sexual laxity forfeits a woman's claim to respectability, hence the shaming effect of illegitimacy), maintains a clean house and well clothed children, does not fight with her neighbours and is acceptable to any household ... So closely identified is respectability of women, that the family's standing in this regard is set by its female head ..."¹⁸

So, unwittingly perhaps, women were kept yet again, from ministering the word to the men folk among them.

The above perhaps gives an insight into how the convergence of cultural taboos and a particular interpretation of scripture led to a persuasive dogma. A belief which when applied to evangelism by women in black-led churches resulted in the prevention of the actualisation of another message: 'go into all the world and preach the gospel'.

Fourthly, Women's social groups within churches worked effectively as support systems and networks for women, to the exclusion of men.

As early as 1957, the ministers of the New Testament Church of God voted for the setting up of a women's auxiliary in the organisation. This was called The Ladies Willing Workers Band. After a period of planning, and with some opposition from male ministers, it is reported that the first L.W.W.B. was organised in the church in Handsworth. This was in 1960.

The emphasis as I understand it, was placed on women meeting to support each other and their church, socially, materially, and spiritually. The following, taken from Ira Brooks' 'Where Do We Go From Here?' highlights the thrust of the work the women were involved in:

"An announcement made in the convention (1961) by the president of the Ladies Willing Workers' Band went like this: - We have organised two more fund-raising events in the L.W.W.B., 1) Each member is to contribute 6d per week for purchasing knitting wool; 2) Each member has further pledged to contribute 2d each week for the purchasing of flowers for the sick." 13

It would appear that several activities took place among the women. Possibly, they were learning a relatively new skill, that of knitting. They could either be knitting for themselves, their families, or for others, and they could either be giving away or selling the articles they were making. There was obviously a concern for the well being of the sick. The sick here could either have been those who were members of the church or adherents and non-members.

We cannot rule out the idea that the activities of the women's bands were possibly designed to benefit both members of the church and non-members alike. As well as nurturing and building up the group, the opportunities to invite other women to join in the activities, as well as to evangelise through them were ever present.

On the face of it, the women met to use certain skills which they had between them, but another, more important activity was always taking place, the informal talk. My observations of women's groups has led me to believe that the informal and unplanned talk which took place, and still takes place between the women, was possibly one of the most healing and long lasting things that happened at these meetings.

Women talked and listened to each other. They talked about their problems and family concerns. They shared their experiences of life and living, of their working conditions and of their spiritual 'ups and downs'. The women also passed on useful bits of information. As well as the gossip, they told stories from ghost stories to slightly exaggerated real life ones, of life here and in the Caribbean.

For a long time the women's meetings were possibly the only gatherings the women had to themselves, for themselves. It could be argued that the talking and the re-enacting of the realities of life were essential ingredients which served to bind the women together and

helped them to survive in a new, strange and alienating land. The commonality of the testimonies and the stories, the parallels drawn, and at times the answers arrived at, I believe gave the women a security which could not be found anywhere else. This was group counselling and therapy at its best.

While this very positive and supportive network was being developed and used by the women, there was not a similar or corresponding group for the men in the congregations.

Although not wishing in any way to cast aspersions or doubt on the invaluable work of the women's groups, I would like to make the following observations:-

It appears that while the women were involved in a very supportive network of meetings and activities, their husbands and other men folk were themselves alienated from and by them. The leadership of the churches was perhaps short-sighted in not being more strategic in their plans for the men in the churches.

Women's influence in black-led churches

It is quite clear that as the number of women increased in the churches, the churches were being sustained, run and defined by the

women. Some of the departments, for example, the Sunday School, the Youth and Christian Education Departments, the Choirs (which are commonly known as auxiliaries in the churches), should rightly be defined as the foundation of the organisations. These auxiliaries were the places where the women's labour and influence were most obvious.

From very early on, the women were the inspiration and the workforce behind the Sunday schools. The women were involved in the entire process, spanning the recruitment, teaching and nurturing of the young. Many of the young people who were recruited to the Sunday school were not the children of church members but of non-members and adherents who, while themselves not church attenders, thought that it was necessary at least for their children to attend Sunday school. The axiom 'train up a child in the way he/she should grow and when he/she is old, he/she will not depart from it', appeared as a sober reminder to parents of their duty to their children and to God. Very few Afro-Caribbean parents would forfeit what they considered a God-given requirement. It was, and still is, the women who through their faithfulness and relentless work in the Sunday schools, saw to the spiritual well-being of the children and young people of the Afro-Caribbean communities. The women were convinced that the 'children are the church of today and of tomorrow'. Out of this band of children and young people, many converts were made to the developing churches.

In the same way it was the women who made the contacts with the families with new born babies to be blessed. In the belief, as one pastor put it at a dedication service for a baby:

"It is our obligation ... our solemn duty ... the Lord depends on us to see to it that children given to us are brought up to fear the Lord. All parents should recognise the sacredness of this charge."

The other youth and christian education activities in which the women led the way included, Youth Camps, Youth Weekends, Training Workshops, Youth Conventions and Youth Clubs, to name a few. The women were not only teaching the youth the fundamentals of the faith, but were also defining for them the parameters in which they socialised, and caught and were taught moral values and standards. Many aspects of culture and traditions, language and folklore were transmitted by the women through the activities among the youth. Again, it must be stated that these activities were for both members and non-members of the churches, thus touching on the entire community.

Through their involvement in the choir, and therefore as lay ministers, women ministered through songs and choruses in all the main services. Members of choirs were often those who led the affirmation and signifying of the congregational responses to the word being preached. Choir members were often reminded of their duty and responsibility to 'bear the preacher up in prayer', and throughout any service, the choir, and therefore the women had to be alert to the

moving of the Spirit and ready to respond accordingly. The choir and the women in it were often presented as the epitome of the holy.

Black-led churches were in their very early years largely self-financing. At a local level they often defined their rules and directed themselves. It is widely believed that the churches were possibly the only black organisations in Britain today that did not, in their initial stages of development, depend upon, or seek revenue funding from central or local government or from charitable organisations.

What has not been recognised however, is the tremendous amount of financial support which the women gave, and continue to give. On the basis of numbers alone, it is fair to suggest that women gave much more than the men did. On the basis of the jobs women did and the wages or salaries they were getting, and consequently what they probably tithed to the church, it is just to assume that the women gave proportionately more to their church than did men. As well as their own personal giving, the women found ways to:-

- a) generate funds from within their local situations, and
- b) successfully fund raise from outside their organisations.

Thus the burden of the financial up-keep of the 'life' of the church

fell heavily upon the shoulders of the women. The women were the ones who paid the electric and gas bills. They paid more than their fair share of the mortgage on the church building, and the minister's stipend. In fact, without the women and their financing of the churches, the organisations would never have been able to function in the way in which they did. In many ways too the Afro-Caribbean communities would never have had their own churches, often seen as a vital mainstay, to their very existence.

Over the past ten years, the women have proven themselves to be something of the social conscience of the churches and of the black communities around the country. Although much of their action may be seen as reactive and piece-meal, they have nonetheless staffed supplementary schools, worked on, and developed projects for the elderly, and set up hostels for the young homeless to name a few. Many of these activities have helped to heal, bind and protect those who are grossly disadvantaged or discriminated against.

One of the sisters I interviewed, said:

"The church wouldn't survive without the women, ... if all the women should come out of the church, what would happen? How would they survive? ... I mean, the women contribute in all different ways, financially, spiritually, because you find that the women are always praying and travelling more so than the men. When it comes to finance, you can't stop a woman from raising funds if you have a survey, .. to see how much the men contribute, how much they bring in and compare to the women, ... the women knock them out, ... 75% more than

cont..

the men. ... The women are more dedicated and whatever a woman intends to do, nothing stops her."

Another sister intervened with a very pertinent biblical

reminder:

"Mark you, originally it was the women, even in the bible, it was women who went with the first message of Christ's resurrection."

1. Davidson, R. B., West Indian Migrants Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962
2. New Testament Church of God, Handsworth Silver Jubilee 1953 - 1978, Brochure, Birmingham 1978.
3. Pilgrims in Progress - A Review of the first 25 years of the Wesleyan Holiness Church in the British Isles Birmingham 1983.
4. Souvenir Brochure N.T.C. of God, Southern Region's 25th Anniversary Celebration. London 1978
5. Calley, M., God's People, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1965 p.7
6. I have seen a number of photographs, especially those collected by the ex-Overseer of the New Testament Church of God, Rev. O.A. Lyseight, which bear this out.
7. Calley, M., op. cit. p 34
8. Christopher Wright, Growth of West Indian Religion in Britain in Religion, 14, London: Academic Press Inc. 1984. p 337-356.
- 8a. Gerloff R. History of Black-led Churches in Britain. in ed. Gerloff and others Partnership in Black and White, Methodist Home Mission Division 1977 p 13f.
9. Kiev A. Psychotherapeutic Aspects of Pentecostal Sects Among West Indian Immigrants To Britain, in British Journal of Sociology, Vol. XV No. 2 June 1984. p129-137.
10. First United Church of Jesus Christ Apostolic -Souvenir Magazine Ipswich 1985.
11. The 'grape-vine': the informal word of mouth passing on of messages within a community.
12. 'Backslidden' is used to describe the state of a person who has returned to her old ways, that is after confessing to being born again.
13. Brethren - a generic term used to describe both men and women members.
14. Senior D. and Stuhlmuehler C. The Biblical Foundations For Mission, London: SCM Press 1983 p. 333 - 335.
15. See for example , Practical Commitments of New Testament Church of God, 1988 available from the Headquarters, Overstone College, Northampton.
16. Hollenweger W.J. The Pentecostals London: SCM Press 1972. p408

17. Calley M. op. cit. p145
18. Wright C. op. cit. p344
19. Brooks. I., Where Do We Go From Here, (published by the author)p.25 - 26
20. Fe, as used here means from.

I have tried to retain the Creole - language used by Caribbean people, derived from West African and European languages.
(Jamaican Creole is a language comprised of a mixture of West African and English lexicon and syntax, while St. Lucian Creole is a mixture of French and West African)

CHAPTER 2

POWER, POSITION, ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES.

I would like to offer the following as a model of the relationship that exists between male and female members of Black-led churches. The model consists of two pyramids, one is upright the other is inverted. They are superimposed one on the other.

The first is the upright pyramid. It represents the church in all its patriarchal and hierarchical glory. The leadership, the juridical and priestly roles are vested in this pyramid.

The second pyramid is inverted and represents the 'female' church. In this pyramid lies the spirituality, the life giving and life sustaining nature of the church.

The 'male' pyramid appears to be based upon scripture and is therefore sanctified, and constant. To change this model would be to change scripture and since scripture never changes the model defies change. It is also verified and protected by cultural norms and traditions.

Men in the organisational structures of Black-led churches

The church I know best, and the one with which I begin is the New Testament Church of God. Its leadership structure basically reflects that of its predominantly white American Headquarters to which it organisationally belongs. It is adopted to suit its British situation. At a national level the church's structure has a top tier which consists of the National Overseer. A second tier, the Executive Council, is made up of prominent ordained and District Overseers, the third tier is comprised of District Overseers who have oversight of a fourth tier of local ministers or pastors. There are no women to be found in the top three tiers of the organisation. The church's auxiliaries, by which I mean the Youth and Christian Education Department, the Ladies Ministries, the Men's Fellowship, the National Evangelism Project and others, are with only one exception, led by men. The exception of course being the Ladies Ministries.

The First United Church of Jesus Christ has a less elaborate, but similar structure. At the top of this pyramid is the Overseer/Bishop, with a second tier made up of five bishops who form 'the Council'. They represent the five districts of the organisation. Below them are the pastors of the local churches.

A third example is the Wesleyan Holiness Church which has a District Superintendent and a District Board of Administration, made up of elected representatives from an annual conference. This Board is chaired by the Superintendent. A third level is made up of Zone ministers who are in charge of a group of local ministers who form the fourth tier.

The church of God of Prophecy has the following presbytery structure. In the first strata are Bishops, secondly deacons and thirdly evangelists. There is a management structure which in descending order includes: the National Overseer, the Finance and Approbation Committee (chosen by the National Overseer and which must have a representative from the deacons and a 'layman') and District Overseer and Pastors of the local congregations.

In all but one of the above examples, whether the system of government is defined as conciliar or episcopal the fact remains that the post holders at the most senior levels are most likely to be men.

How has this happened? The churches clearly build their governing structures upon, in the main, the following New Testament scripture:

1Timothy 3 v1-v7:

"This is a true saying, if a man desires the office of a bishop he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?). Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil."'

According to scripture, the 'bishops' or ordained ministers in the New Testament Church of God, the Church of God of Prophecy, and the First United Church of Jesus Christ to name a few, can only be men.

In juridical and executive terms decision making, the implementation of decisions, representation and leadership at a national level, are vested in the hands of the men in the organisations.

When questioned about the absence of women from the ordained ministry in the New Testament Church of God, one minister, informed by popular wisdom, implied that because women were more susceptible to misusing power, they had to be kept from being in leadership positions. Secondly, as Jesus did not have any female disciples the church was simply following Jesus's example, as one pastor pointed out:

Pastor A:

I have a very high opinion of women ... as long as they use the authority that they get without usurp authority (sic)

E. F.:

What do you mean by 'usurp authority'?

Pastor A:

... Usurping authority is using the authority in a manner which is not conducive to leadership formally...

E. F.

Could men usurp authority?

Pastor A.

... Yes.

E. F.

What do you mean?

Pastor A:

To usurp authority is to use authority far beyond which it is actually given (sic) you the power to go... Well I think women in our church are already giving leadership in our church...

E. F.

But why are women exempted from the ordained ministry of the church?.. They cannot become members of the executive council because they are not ordained ...

Pastor A:

It seems they (those responsible for laying down the teachings) were following the basic principles of the apostles (disciples), when Jesus had only twelve apostles... and he only had men... we have no women that perform good works with him... but it seems they are following that basic principle that he only selected men as the apostles of the church which was the leadership of the church. So as the master did it they did not see any discrimination... so maybe they are following that principle.

There is perhaps only one dissenting voice amongst the ranks of the older and more influential pastors in the Black-led church communities, that of Ira Brooks, who in 'Another Gentleman to the Ministry' said:

"...the true value and position of women in black-led Pentecostalism has never been faced squarely. If the ruling hierarchy of these churches are guilty of racism in the way that they relate to their black counterpart, then, similarly, black leadership is guilty of sexism by its attitudes to female members collectively, but, especially those ladies who serve in active ministry of pastoring." ²

When questioned about the possibility of women's ordination, and of their assumption of the role of a bishop, only the Wesleyan Holiness Church said that this was possible through their teachings and regulations. They allowed for women to be fully involved in the total ministry of the church. The First United Church of Jesus Christ was ambivalent. Bishop Dunn, the present Overseer of the United Church of Jesus Christ pointed out that a woman could become ordained and thereby rise to the office of a bishop, and that in his early days in Jamaica his own minister was a woman and a bishop. He did not however feel that in this case 1Timothy 3v1-v7, was being correctly interpreted. Conferring this position on a woman might not have been scriptural. He further felt that the churches in Britain had not arrived at the position where they could deal with such a situation.

It is interesting to note that when it suits us, we use the the scripture to verify our own human and oppressive beliefs as in the above case. Herein lies the conflict between what Teresa Okure calls 'the liberative and the oppressive elements' in the bible:

"Our foregoing analysis of the Bible has revealed the fundamental truth that the Bible and its interpretations embody both a divine and a human element with respect to women. The liberative elements in the Bible with respect to women stem from the divine perspective, the oppressive ones from the human perspective. The latter are socioculturally conditioned and, in the last analysis, sinful. The liberative elements emphasize the woman's equality with the man, her being conjointly with him in the image and likeness of God, of equal dignity and honour, and her being given the special privilege, akin to God, of bearing, mothering, and fostering life. The oppressive and sinful elements on the contrary, portray her as an inferior being, subjected to the man, having no identity of her own, and ultimately the cause of sin and death." ³

Not only are men to be found in the decision making and leadership stratum of the churches, they also have the monopoly over the priestly functions in the churches.

The functions, open to men only in several churches, include the following: baptism of converts, administering the Holy Communion (Lord's supper and Washing of the Saints' Feet) and solemnizing rites of matrimony and death and the dedication of babies. All of the functions referred to places the functionary in a highly visible position within the church, as within the wider community in which the pastor ministers.

There are a number of other ways in which the position of male leaders in the churches are further strengthened. All of the Black-led churches have a plethora of national, regional and local events, loosely called conventions. In the main they are worship and teaching services and meetings. They often serve to revive and enthuse as well as to reward members for their individual or collective services to the organisations. The meetings are often used to signal the intentions of the organisation, for example to outline missionary programmes, financial dealings or other organisational changes. Sometimes clarification is given on the church's teachings or positions taken on matters of policy.

Having looked at a small sample of convention programmes, they reveal that at major national conventions, male ministers preached approximately 99% of the time and for 95% of the time they are the ones who lead the sessions. Clearly they are the more visible in the leadership roles of the conventions.

However, at the same time, the supportive duties were almost singularly undertaken by women. These included running the catering service and undertaking the secretarial and first aid duties. Those who ran the children's church and who were the altar workers were women. Half the ushers were women. On the other hand the finance and ushers' committees were led by men.

From personal knowledge, I know that the largest representation of women was to be found in the choirs. It is however, unlikely that we would gain this information from the convention programmes, as neither the names nor number of women in the choirs is mentioned.

The areas of achievement reported on, seem always to be those that are quantifiable, for example the number of sermons preached, the number of people added to the church, the number of churches organised and the financial situation of the organisation.

There are glaring omissions in those things reported on. Where for example do they account for, and give value to, the number of people prayed for, fed, visited, healed; the number of times members are counselled or supported and the length of time spent in fasting and prayer? The fact remains these activities are the ones that make the churches what they are, and these are the areas in which women are overwhelmingly involved.

Could the churches not find a way to celebrate women's achievements in the above areas?

The local church structure and management

At local church level there are to be found slight variations in terms of organisation and structure which do not appear to be that

significant. Basically, a local congregation might be led by a pastor who, in some organisations could be licensed or ordained to preach and lead the congregation. This is likely to be assisted by deacons, evangelists, missionaries and church mothers but to name a few.

The pastor as a manager, might be supported by a church council to whom he or she is accountable. This accountability varies from organisation to organisation. In some cases the church council has an executive as well as an advisory role. Members of a council might be appointed by the minister or elected by the congregation. There are some organisations where membership of the council is limited to male members of the church only, for example in the New Testament Church of God.

The minutes of the 1984 General Assembly stated:

"Members of the Pastor's Council shall be loyal/~~male~~ members of the church."⁴

The above position is verified by scripture, as quoted in the minutes:

"Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business."⁵

Further qualifications for membership to the council include, loyalty to the church, adhering to all its teaching, baptism in the Holy Ghost, faithfulness in tithing and regular church attendance.

On the basis of the further qualifications, it is difficult to see how men and not women can be elected to the church council. The only 'real' qualification they seem to have over and above women, is their sex.

Beliefs about the power relations that men and women in a patriarchal society operate in, is uncritically accepted by leaders and members alike. There does not appear to be any question about whether men do have inherent leadership and management abilities. As long as this remains the case, as long as neither brother nor sister questions men's monopoly of powerful and leadership positions in the churches, then women will never be able to play their full part in the total development of the church community. How long can Black-led churches continue to remain 'slaves to tradition'? A deviation from the norm described above, is to be found in some churches where there is a post for aged, loyal women only. The post is that of church mother. I have not been able to find in any of the minutes (of the NTC of G) any reference to or the basis on which this post came into being. However, there is some recognition here of the need for the wisdom and counsel of these elder women and as such they sit on the local church council.

The church mothers wield enormous influence over matters such as the maintenance of moral codes of dress and behaviour. They are the ones who uphold the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting and spirit filled worship. Church mothers are well respected, often having the last word in official church business as well as in personal matters of people they might have counselled.

One of the women made the following statement to justify the 'church mother' position:

"Paul said the younger women should be called sisters and the older ones mothers, and this sisterhood or motherhood comes through being born again through the blood of Jesus Christ."

In most churches women participate in an active way in the members/business meetings. These are meetings held to discuss and agree on issues that directly concern the local congregation. However, an exception to this must be the practice in the Church of God of Prophecy. Here women are not allowed to speak in the meetings, anything they wish to say must be said outside the meeting or by proxy through a male member. If a woman should speak in such a meeting, any decisions taken at such a meeting are declared void and the meeting itself declared "shallow". It follows that anything a woman says amounts to empty chatter.

Women's responses to men in leadership and management roles in the churches

There seem to be pockets of favourable, if not strong support for maintaining the status quo. There were a number of ambivalent responses which suggest that the women have not taken the opportunity, or had the opportunity to reflect upon and develop a critique of their position in the churches. For some of the women the interviews I undertook with them appeared to have given them the first opportunity to talk about the 'why' of their presence, and the part they were playing in their local and national churches.

Firstly, there was the feeling that only men could make right and good decisions. This is a total denial of the fact that women, in particular Black women, have always had to make crucial decisions, often on their own which will affect themselves and their families, because they are more likely to be the head of households.

"Personally, I think right decisions, and good decisions which will help to promote the work of the Lord, .. should be made by men ... and the women can endorse it, (sic) but I think the men, men of God ... because Peter said you should select men filled with the Holy Ghost, should make the decisions."

The man is seen as possessing something which is essentially different from that possessed by women:

"The only thing women can't do in our church...is baptise, dedicate babies, marriages and burial... They do every other thing ... maybe I am from the old school, I don't think they should...men and women are different. The man has something we have not got in their inner strength... and I would not like a woman to baptise me...the only thing I think she could do is to dedicate a baby because she is a mother."

The third interviewee on the subject, declared herself to be totally against women in priestly roles. Her explanation is couched in her understanding of scriptures, and is informed by traditional views about men and women:

"Well I think that's one thing they might throw me out of the church for...I am not in agreement with it (females in the ministry). A woman should never be a pastor, because according to the word of God, if we are going by the word of God, it says man is the head. So I don't understand how a woman could be the head ... There should be a head which is the man and the woman should work alongside them(sic), but a part of the scripture said a woman should never usurp authority over a man, (sic) and that is a part I cannot come to, (meaning she cannot reconcile what the scripture says and what is happening in the church) and I don't think I would ever agree with that."

The above are themes which echo throughout the observations made by the women, and I wish to reiterate them:

(1) Men have an added spiritual dimension which women have not got. They also enjoy the unique position of decision makers because they alone are able to make right decisions.

(2) Women on the other hand cannot be leaders, because they do not possess the strength nor the intellectual ability and wisdom to be leaders. They are basically reduced to the position of endorsers of decisions, or helpers. These women appear to view themselves as subservient.

(3) The women seem to suggest that scriptures verify things they 'intuitively' know to be true. Scriptures can be, and are applied in their entirety to the present situation. There is therefore little need for a scientific interpretation of scripture, as the popular chorus, often sung attests:

" Give me that old time religion....its good enough for me. It was good for Paul and Silasits good enough for me."

(4) There is a hint of doubt in the comments of the sister who said: 'they could dedicate babies'. Is it possible that she is trying to reconcile the role women play in the life giving process, and could she then go on to be questioning why women are not involved in the other rites which are presently taken care of by male pastors?

My first pyramid placed the emphasis on the position, role and responsibilities of the men in the churches. Although there are a number of worrying features in relation to where women find themselves in the organisational structures of the churches, we

cannot deny the fact that for many Black men, the churches have given them self-worth, dignity, and a positive identity, in contrast to the ways in which white British society has alienated, devalued and effectively excluded them from many forms of legitimate involvement in the wider society. Given the pressure on Black men to 'prove their worth', it is difficult to see how those that have achieved some status and power in and through the churches are going to relinquish it.

In addition to the above many of our immigrant church leaders were totally ill-equipped to function in white British society. Many came from post colonial countries, from mainly peasant and working class backgrounds and lacked conventional paper qualifications.

Perhaps it was within the context of White historical churches that the position of potential Black church leaders became amplified. The historical churches emphasised academic qualification and training as the route through to priesthood or the clergy. The episcopal hegemony and a speculative approach to theology of the historical christian churches were sure ways to deter any who did not fit the bill.

Black-led churches with their emphasis on Biblical fundamentalism, the infallibility of the Bible, the power and leading role of the Holy Ghost in and through believers regardless of, social class

status, academic qualifications or Bible school training was undoubtedly a better alternative.

Women-run churches

I now turn to the second pyramid. Here I wish to concentrate on its depth and breadth as representative of the women's involvement in the churches. The pyramid is inverted to represent the vast number of women that are actively involved in the spiritual life and upkeep of the churches.

Regardless of what the men might do or think of their position in the organisations, there is a sense in which they only do and hold those positions on the approval of the women. This is never talked about, so there seems to be a silent collusion which is accepted on both sides. This collusion has resulted in a mutually acceptable way of relating and in agreement as opposed to conflict.

There are so many ways in which the women, if they wished, could defy, 'usurp', paralyse, or make the men within the organisations totally ineffective, 'but for the grace of God!.' When asked: 'What do you as women do in the church today?', many of the women listed a large number of activities, but above all they stated clearly that they, in the words of one of the women: *Oh my Lord!, we run the church...*

"I'm local director for my church (Youth and Christian Education). I'm assistant District Ladies president, I'm on the District Youth Board, I'm in the catering department, sing in the choir, prayer band leader,..Take for example the prayer band, how many men would you find in it? Two, and maybe about twelve, sixteen women."

"They make the major contribution to the upkeep of the church, if it o.k. (sic) for them to be prominent in their finance (sic) and their presence, why can't they make major decisions?"

"If you take away the women from the church you wouldn't have anything left."

"The church would not survive without the women for a start, if all the women should come out the church how would they survive?"

The following list of activities spans the width of the pastoral work which, in this case a woman pastor is involved with. It is unlikely that any of her male counterparts would be involved in such a comprehensive way with his congregation.

"When I'm not preaching, I'm cooking. When I'm not cooking, I'm sewing. When I'm not sewing, I'm visiting. When I'm not visiting, I'm praying, and my whole life is a life of work wrapped up in God. And socially, because you know I like to do a bit of community work. I go visiting the old people, say a word of comfort to them. It makes my life worthwhile living. And without that I don't think I am a christian."

The concept of women running the church, but men leading it, seems common in Caribbean women's understanding of the dynamics of their relationship with their men.

Louise Bennett, the Jamaican poetess calls it the 'cunning' of the Jamaican 'Oman. As she writes of in her poem, Jamaica Oman:

"Jamaica oman cunny, sah!
Is how dem jinnal so?
Look how long dem liberated
An de man dem never know!

Look how long Jamaica oman
--Modder, sister, wife sweetheart--
Outa road an eena yard deh pon
A dominate her part!

Jamaica oman know she strong,
She know she tallawah^{5a}
But she no want her pickney-dem
Fi start call her 'Puppa'

So the cunny Jamma oman
Gwan like pants suit is a style,
An Jamaica man no know she wear
De trousiz all de while!"⁶

Dr. Carolyn Cooper, in a critique of the above poem makes the following apposite comment on the relationship between males and females in Caribbean societies. 'Cunning rather than overt male/female confrontation is the preferred strategy for maintaining equanimity.'⁷

It appears that the women are more concerned about the survival of the community than about who leads or manages the organisation. So anything which could rupture the stability, or lead to dissent in the community must be avoided for the sake of its survival.

There is too, a knowing which is benignly conspiratorial. The women know that they are the ones who 'run the church' and that without them the churches 'would not exist'!

There was implicit in the voices of the women, a selflessness and a modesty. The women saw their involvement in terms of what they were 'called' to give, or to do as a responsibility which was not of their making but one which was God given. These responsibilities were therefore to be executed with grace and humility. The above was possibly inspired by, or inspired the following chorus which we often hear sung:

"I'm not my own, I'm not my own, Saviour I belong to thee, all I am and all I hope for, Saviour let me walk with thee.."

Earlier, I suggested that the female pyramid represented the spiritual source and life of the church. I now wish to explore what this entails in some detail.

What in essence is a Black-led church.

A Black-led church community in Britain is made up predominantly of black women. The estimated number of women in Black-led churches given to me by different church leaders varies, from between 65 and 95 per cent of their organisations. Given that the women believe

that they run the churches, is there anything about the churches that is uniquely womanist?^{7a}

Can that which is uniquely womanist be found in the worship services for example?

Worship in Black-led churches is, undoubtedly communal. From the singing, extempore praying, dancing, testifying and affirmation of the sermon we see the participation, or the opportunity for participation by the whole congregation. There is a vibrancy and a liveliness which reflect the style of the women. There is no place for isolation in Black-led church worship. Worship provides for fellowship, comfort, edification and exhortation. As Roswith Gerloff once observed: '...the full participation of all members in the services of worship of the church... is their ^{real creed'} ^{7b} and a similarity could be drawn between that worship found in Corinth, as seen through the eyes of Professor Hollenweger, 'a temple of sounds, a social acoustic sanctuary under whose roof they (could) feel at home' ⁸

Worship draws heavily upon oral and other traditions associated with those retained from the members' African past. Although the following quotation is specifically about the worship in the Cherubim and Seraphim church (An independent church with its origins in Nigeria) there are practices in many Black-led Afro-Caribbean churches that are reminiscent of the above. Members are

often asked to "claim the victory" by giving a clap offering to the Lord, singing and "dancing in the Lord or in the Spirit" are common features of many worship services.

"The C&S explanation for their use of these phenomena is that they are "the mode of happiness by which the Order was founded" and when they are used in divine services, the members are believed to be "endowed with different kinds of blessings appertaining to each action which are revealed by divine injunction as follows: Clapping for victory, protection, love and providence; kicking (that is stamping of the ground) for spiritual power, peace and prosperity; singing and dancing for joy, happiness"... Apart from their aesthetic nature and their sociological significance, and despite their great 'emotionalism,' which is an essential characteristic of any religious form, these religious expressions are reminiscent of the traditional African way of worship." ³

The dominant factor in worship however, is the guidance and 'moving' of the Holy Spirit, and women are expected to be attuned to this. Whichever of the above characteristic we focus on we cannot but appreciate the role of women in sustaining and passing them down. In many ways the women act as keepers and purveyors of socio-religious traditions in Black-led churches.

There was a time when most worship services began with what was then known as a 'song service', although no longer popularly known by that name, worship services still begin with a session of songs and choruses. This session is usually led by a team of women. Even though at first not apparent, the task of this team is to 'get everyone in

the right attitude for worship', or to 'warm-up' the worshippers. Their duties extended to choosing the right and appropriate songs and choruses for worship and setting the mood and pace in which worship would continue to take place. Perhaps the women also choose songs and choruses which reflect their concerns, as well as the perceived needs of the congregation.

A chorus like the one which follows might be supplicatory, asking for the Lord to dwell in the individual:

"Fill my cup Lord, I lift it up Lord,
Come and quench the thirsting of my soul,
Bread of heaven fill me till I want no more,
Fill my cup, fill it up and make me whole."

To songs which give praise and adoration to God, in this instance, in a slightly anthropomorphic way:

"Birds in the tree tops praising the Lord,
Flowers in the garden bowing down their heads,
Angels singing chorus, praising the Lord,
Then why should I, why should I, not praise the Lord."

Or refrains which openly point to those things which are of peculiar doctrinal significance.

In the example which follows we even see an oblique reference to those who do not believe in the "Washing of the Saints' Feet':

"Together we walk, together we talk,
Together we wash one another's feet,
Some people say that we have no need
But we are doing the Lord's command.

When a group or an individual is asked to render a song, they do not do so to the exclusion of the audience. The audience, if they so wish, can hum or sing along with the artists. This is so unlike the individual performance preferred in the West.

Extempore prayer which does not depend on the literary form is inclusive both of those who can and cannot command the written form. Because extempore prayer is dynamic it is a useful tool with which the believer can respond to his or her changing daily spiritual and material needs. But also to the needs of fellow sisters and brothers. Prayers certainly are the vehicles by which cares, pain, sorrow and needs are carried to the Lord.

Here are two illustrations taken from prayers said in a Sunday morning worship service:

"Lord we pray that your holy presence will be here and dwell among your people ..O God we thank you for the day. Lord, 'this is the day that the Lord has made we will rejoice and be glad in him'. Lord Jesus we rejoice because you have kept us and bring us safe thus far. We thank you O Lord Jesus for everyone, as we gather in your house..Bless them O Lord Jesus. God as we come



cont..

here, Lord with the purpose to worship you Lord and to obtain a blessing.....we pray O Lord that our hearts will be lifted up to you, Lord you will bless us..., Oh Lord as we worship before your presence..."

and

"We come to worship the Lord of host..Praise God...Thank you Lord for bringing us here...today is a day Lord we come to worship the Lord, to draw from the fountainWe worship you. Today we pray that thou would be with us. You know every doubt, every sorrow we bear..we bring them before you. This morning we are asking thee to take first place in our hearts, we are asking you to stir our hearts...we thank you so much for the refreshing, for the revival. We pray this morning that you would revive our heart bring us to the place Lord where you can talk to our hearts and where we can be subdued, we pray Lord that every high look would be brought low and the spirit of God will be able to breathe upon us..."

Testimonies essentially depend upon openness, and a sharing of experiences in the knowledge that what is said will not be used to ridicule the testifier, or be a source of idle gossip. No one testimony is ever deemed better than the other, though the listeners may learn different lessons from them. There is no room for a hierarchy of testators based on age, sex or leadership status. However, as the predominant group of people testifying are women, there is a sense in which the women define and standardise testimonies. They provide the idiom that is, the language which is shared and understood by every person in the congregation, as well as the formula, that is the way in which what is said is structured. The subtleties and the interplay between text and sub-text in testimonies are also in the main, defined by women.

Leontine T. C. Kelly in her article 'Preaching in the Black Tradition' gives a vivid portrayal of a woman's testimony and the responses of the congregation:

"WOMAN: I *know* how Daniel felt in the Lion's Den!
 RESPONSE: [Men and other women, and children] Yes!
 WOMAN: I *know* how the Hebrew children felt in the fiery furnace!
 RESPONSE: [crescendos] YES!
 [The "I knows" would continue in an ascending tonal excitement with companion response until a climatic affirmation was spoken.]
 WOMAN: But, like Job, I *know* that my Redeemer lives!
 I *know* that he goes to prepare a place for me!
 I *know* that this old world is not my home!

In the midst of the emotion-packed affirmation some personal experience of the week would be shared, and the testimony would come to a close on a peaceful plea:

WOMAN: Brothers and sisters, just pray for me that I may *press* on!
 That I don't grow no ways weary [the ascending tone begins again,
 and the entire group is lifted with it], no ways tired. I just want to *press* on to see what the end will be!

The "Amen" and the "Thank you, Jesus" betrayed not only the emotion of the moment, but the experiential sharing of a common harshness of life. The emotional response testified to faith in a God who would, in the end, bring victory to the believer." 10

In Black-led churches it is the practice of the word of God which counts, *By their fruit you shall know them*. The real 'work' of the church whether defined in terms of the praying, the fasting, the laying on of hands or the cooking, the counselling, or the cleaning are activities almost solely undertaken by women.

It is the women who are attuned to what needs to be prayed for, what needs to be fasted over, who needs to be counselled and supported. It is predominantly the women who give their time and energy to these activities.

The women attend to, and care for the material and physical needs of the believers through their attention to, feeding the congregations, and individuals or families in need, as well as nursing the physically ill. They also see to the physical environment in which worship takes place by making it comfortable and welcoming.

Women have created the social-spiritual context in which the social, spiritual and emotional needs of the congregation, and at times the wider Black community are taken care of. Black women in the churches are often the ones who share the pain and hurt of division in the family and the community. The women's ministry can be best described as Letty Russell puts it, as:

"...curative diakonia, in the healing of wounds of those who have become victims of life; providing help to the sick, the hungry, the homeless."''

From their experiences as mothers, some women bring children into the 'fold'. As in the highly symbolic naming ceremony performed by

the church of the Cherubim and Seraphim, where the prophetesses of the church march up with the child and the mother to the altar where they are presented or given to the priest who performs the ceremony. The women cry with other mothers whose sons have been criminalised or involved in deviant activities. It is the women in the churches who in the end, embrace the young unmarried mother and her child even though the evidence of her 'sins' are there for all to see.

Sexism in Black-led churches

Black women in the churches are part of a collective Black history steeped in colonialism and imperialism. Race, class and sex oppression have always underpinned their existence.

Bell Hooks in 'Ain't I A Woman' makes the connections in the following way:

"In a retrospective examination of the black female slave experience, sexism looms as large as racism as an oppressive force in the lives of black women. Institutionalized sexism-- that is, patriarchy-- formed the base of the America social structure along with racial imperialism. Sexism was an integral part of the social and political order white colonizers brought with them ..."¹²

Racist oppression has been perpetuated in the main by white people,

various institutions and is in some cases supported by legislation which is racist in outcome. Institutionalized and personal sexism is perpetuated by white and black men. Taken together they are powerful forces of oppression in the lives of black women.

Although Black women have found their local churches to be life affirming, a source of strength and void of racism, they cannot say that the churches are not rife with sexism. Black men have not begun to address the question of their sexism, and Black women appear to be far too protective to push them into a situation where they have to address this question.

It seems that what needs to happen is for women and men to 'unpack' the term *sin* and name sexism as one of the sins which perpetuates inequality and oppression. How can we all be one in Christ Jesus when women are held back from fulfilling their potential in the life and work of the church? How can Black men be helped to rid themselves of the guilt and burden of sexism, and to be whole persons?

There are rays of hope. Already in existence in the language and meanings in women's talks, in the creative interpretation of the bible, is the notion of liberation, liberation from persecution, from fear and captivity to victory and hope. Liberation from sexism. This theme is dealt with more fully in later chapters.

Black women are predominantly working class women.

Although many younger women in Black led churches are professional, middle class women, the majority of women are from working class backgrounds. The women understand the gospel and the scripture as speaking consistently to their every needs.

Here for example, in highly metaphoric language, is an exhortation which I believe highlights some of the ways the women interpret and use scripture in relation to their daily lives and experiences:

"We have persecution, we don't know how we are going to overcome it(sic) sometimes the mountain is so high how we are going to get over it?. Brother Paul said.. "What can separate me from the love of God?".... We can see many things that would separate us, but because we know in whom we believe.. "Nay in all these things we are more than conquerors. "You know sometimes the battle is really hard, we can hardly make it... He is our mighty rock, He is our everything.. The song writer says: "It is alright because we have got his hand to hold. He is watching over us.....""Though sorrows overtake me along life's weary road, I've got somebody with me to share my heavy load .."

Persecution, the mountain, the sorrow, the heartache and trial evident in the above exhortation, are themes commonly repeated in the prayers, exhortations and testimonies of women. The problems might arise out of a range of situations from unemployment, bad job prospects, racism at the work place, bad housing conditions, to husbands who physically and mentally abuse the women, or just the inability to make ends meet.

Women lead the way in articulating their concerns and those of others, in supporting each other, by prayerfully and faithfully finding and applying answers to their material existence. They take actions that help to heal feelings of insecurity, powerlessness and uselessness. They are involved in a small way in signalling the creation of a new community here in Britain. A community where each is valued and where there are no divisions based on class and status.

Conclusion

While not wishing to be disparaging of the obvious power, position, responsibilities and the tremendous burden and task of leadership vested in the hands of the males in Black-led churches in Britain, it is evidently clear that the churches are the women, and the women are the churches. In many ways when we look at the role and the responsibilities the women have assumed, the way in which the women have defined the churches and the spirituality of the churches, the positions the men hold pale into insignificance. In a Black-led female-run church could these functions not be dispensed with? It seems to me that the churches need to re-visit scripture, listen to what women are saying in the theological debates about the priestly and pastoral functions of males and females in the body of Christ and seek to learn from their challenges of the inequitable patriarchal structures we have in place.

1. King James Version
2. Brooks I. Another Gentleman to the Ministry (published by the author) circa 1980's
3. Teresa Okure Women in the Bible in eds., Fabella V. and Oduyoye M.A. Maryknoll / New York: Orbis 1988 p.52
4. 1984 Minutes of the General Assembly of the Church of God - Supplement to the Minutes Cleveland Tennessee: Pathway Press 1984 p.79
5. Acts 6 v3 *op.cit.*
- 5a. 'Tallawah' Jamaican Creole for strong.
6. Bennett Louise Jamaica Omanin ed., Owusu K. Storms of the Heart London: Camden Press 1988 p.135
in K. Owusu
7. Cooper C. Ibid., p.135 -151. Cooper's critique of Bennett's sometimes humorous, often ironic poems offers an invaluable insight into the dynamics of the relationships between Caribbean men and women. At times women are portrayed as militant 'oman lib' taking their cue from Maroon Nanny 'who teck her body / Bounce bullet; as resourceful if full of 'tricksterism' or as 'tallawah' (strong). At other times "women will tolerate disparaging labels of powerlessness as long as they retain actual power."
Womanist - term first used by Alice Walker to describe African American women's feminism. Taken from popular term Womanish - often used in African American and Caribbean communities.
- 7a. Hollenweger W.J. Conflict in Corinth and Memoirs of an Old Man New York: Paulist Press 1982 (English translation).
9. Omoyajowo J.A. Churebim - The History of an Independent Church New York: NOK Publishers 1982 p.164 But see also Mulrain G.M. Tools for Mission in the Caribbean Culture in Responses to the Spirit - 1. Pentecostalism, International Review of Mission Vol. LXXV No.297 January 1986
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CHAPTER 3

DEFINING THE BLACK CHURCH SISTER.

The term sister is used to denote a female member of the church. A woman is a 'sister' when she is (a) 'born again', (b) when she keeps the teachings of the church and (c) has the characteristics of a God fearing woman.

'Sister', conjures up at one and the same time an inclusive as well as an exclusive group of women. It also has a familial connotation. Neither the inclusive nor the familial ring of the term is merely accidental.

There is a clear process through which all must go in order to belong to, or be a member of any Black-led church. This includes repentance from sin and baptism in water as an outward indication of one's conversion and acceptance of the teachings and obligations of the organisation. From this point on a woman can consider herself to be a 'sister in the making'.

There are possibly two major ways in^{which} the black church sister can be identified: one by her spirituality, which is engendered by her consistent involvement in the spiritual disciplines of fasting, confession, worship, prayer and meditation and two, by the way she

dresses and her general demeanor. Some of the younger professional women have challenged the view that the spiritual aspect of their life must be viewed as more important than the social, intellectual or emotional. The ways in which a woman and a sister dresses has been a point of some contention for many years. Although some changes have taken place, they have been piece-meal, undertaken by those women who are strong enough to question authority and who are perhaps on the margins of their church.

It is possible to construct a typology of the black church sister from what is expected of her, both in terms of what is written into the list of commitments she has agreed to, and from those unwritten codes of behaviour which are powerfully persuasive.

In the main the definition of the Black church sister has come from the males' understanding of what women should look like. By this I mean 1) white American men, who have given and continue to give leadership in the interpretation of scripture in some of the black churches that have organisational ties with white American churches, and 2) black men who are in juridical and leadership roles in most Black-led churches in Britain, or in the Caribbean. However, there is a sense in which the women, by accepting these definitions, collude with, and perpetuate the image of the Black church sister. The acceptance of the sister's image by black women, is in part about maintaining the parameters of the organisation and the

solidarity of the church community. It might also be seen as part of their belief as a people believed to be chosen, and called by God that there has to be a way of marking out what makes this believer different from a non-believer and different from another group of christians.

A typology of the Black church sister.

A Black church sister:

Wears a hat, or a covering for her head

There are a number of justifications given as to why a sister should wear a hat or at least a covering for her head. These include the projection of herself as a christian woman, honouring her head, (some have taken this to literally mean to respect one's head, while others take this as meaning to show honour to the man who is the head of woman) and her preparedness to pray or prophesy at any time.

So powerful are the arguements, that even in organisations where a hat is not a requirement, the elder sisters and even some younger ones do wear hats, for example in the Church of God of Prophecy.

It is interesting to note that the wearing of hats by the white American women in the churches that have organisational ties with

Black-led British churches, has not been an issue with them for many years.

There are not many women in Black-led churches who would openly say, that by wearing a hat it shows their subordination to men, however by failing to challenge the premise on which this 'rule' is based they remain subjected to it.

Apart from anything else, the women maintain that scripture dictates that women should have their head covered. The following reference to 1 Corinthians: 11 vv 5&6 was much quoted in response to the question of head covering:

And every woman who prays and prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head, it is just as though her head were shaved.

To date I have not heard any arguments from the pulpit or in general bible study classes which seek to unravel the contradictions found in Paul's arguments in the text, 1Cor: 11v 2-v16, upon which definitions of our women have been built. Susanne Heine, in 'Women and Early Christianity', outlines Paul's shifting arguments, arguments which have been presented as though they made a coherent and infallible premise on which so much else rests. Heine suggests that at one time the arguments are based on what Paul knows to be his cultural traditions. It was a Jewish custom for women to wear a

veil, at least in worship. At another level, the argument is based on the notion of sexual hierarchy, '*..the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband,* to theological argumentation '*... any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonours his head...any woman who prays with her head uncovered dishonours her head* and even onto a mythological reason - 'That is why a woman ought to have a veil on her head, because of the angels' :

" Now it suddenly strikes Paul where his interest in a custom has taken him - right into the middle of his former rabbinical existence. He corrects himself and breaks off: 'But', the Christian Paul now says, 'in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman' vv 11,12. Rabbinic exegesis does not work 'in the Lord' so Paul denies all previous theological statements which were meant to justify wearing a veil."¹

Elizabeth Fiorenza in part of her exegesis on 1 Cor.11, points out that Paul's main concern was to control the frenzied worship of the Corinthians as well as to make it distinguishable from the other cults around at the time, for all of whom 'unbound hair was necessary for a woman to produce an effective magical incantation'. She, like Heine also cites Paul's reliance on Jewish cultural traditions to inform his judgement on an issue concerning the new christian community. ²

However, so strong is this belief in the covering of the head, that I have even come across women in The Church of God of Prophecy,

where the wearing of hats is not deemed a necessity, who insist on wearing a hat, as not to do so would in their view amount to disobeying the scripture. I also had incidents reported to me of women who have left one church for another where the wearing of a head covering was seen as not important, to join another where it was.

A sister does not cut her hair - "our women have long hair" as in 1 Corinthians 11 v 6:

"If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head."

and in 1 Corinthians 11 v 15:

"But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering."

The above like the uncovered head remains contentious. Especially when a woman's hair is obviously cut short. Those of us who cut our hair are often reprimanded, and have been told in no uncertain terms that 'if the good Lord intended women to have short hair he would have said so in his words'. However, with long hair being fashionable, the cutting of the hair has not been a point upon which sermons have been preached.

The fact that there are many things upon which the 'Good Lord' seems to be silent; conventions, sunday schools, gospel concerts, building programmes to name a few, ~~does~~ not seem to concern those who use the bible to justify those things they believe in and want verified.

One of the older women I interviewed said:

"Concerning the hair, I don't like the cutting of the hair, like curling the hair or so I usually do mine, but say going into straightening the hair I did not believe in that, but I always use curlers in my hair because I love to see a woman's hair look nice...."

There was a time when many women in Black-led churches would not curl, tong^e braid their hair, as they were told that this was contrary to the will of God. They implied, even said, that the will of God advocated natural beauty.

This particular aspect of women's presentation of themselves has been the cause of many disagreements, long debates and upsets. Presently, women have agreed to differ and to take a more individual approach to the question of hair and hair styles. It might be that with the coming of the 'curly perm', which seemingly has promoted hair growth in Black women, who in the past suffered from poor hair growth, the debate is no longer necessary. The bible they argue, teaches that long hair on a woman is her glory, so although this growth is achieved through a chemically induced process it promotes

hair growth so this is accepted. It would seem that by applying chemicals to one's hair, one of the pre-requisites of the Godly woman is being fulfilled !

It might be interesting to note at this point that the 'back to natural Africanicity' debate during the 1960's, which engaged many Black women in their reassessment and reconstruction of Black womanhood, in North America, the Caribbean and elsewhere in the world, did not seem to impinge upon what was happening in the Black-led churches in Britain and the Caribbean. Many conscious Black women in the West were rigourously denouncing the West, christianity and imperialism for the ways in which they had together, fragmented and reshaped their image of themselves. At the same time they were projecting images of themselves which promoted and celebrated dress based on African styles, the natural Afro, African hair styles and jewellery.

3) She does not wear cosmetic make-up

A sister has no need to wear make-up, which is seen firstly as unnatural and secondly as contrary to scripture. If the intention behind wearing cosmetic make-up is to enhance one's beauty, then the sister is reminded that, her *beauty comes from the Lord* and that the Lord has: *beautified the meek with salvation*. It follows that any attempt to enhance one's features is seen as deviating from the norm

and therefore also negating the natural and creative work of God. Lest women should forget, they are reminded time and again from the pulpit, of the fate which befell Jezebel.

In many churches the emphasis is placed on building up the inner person. Therefore anything which could be seen as a detraction from this has to be eliminated. Because of the above, the adorning of the 'outer person' must be kept to a bare minimum. 1 Peter 3: v3-v4, is often quoted as substantiating the claim that women should be more concerned about the inner person:

"Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit...."

So too is 1 Timothy 2 v 9:

"In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array."⁴

and therefore a sister:

4) does not wear any form of jewelry apart from her wedding ring/s (if she is a member of the Church of God of Prophecy then she does not wear any jewelry at all.)

Church members, especially the older ones, find the possibilities of the reverse side of the argument to be difficult to countenance. That is if women were to spend time on the inner person it would not matter what the external looked like.

Fiorenza's comments on early church, which she locates within their socio-historical context would be lost on the churches because of their fundamentalist interpretations and application. She attests, that the call to women in 1 Peter 3, to submit themselves to their husbands, could be seen as a missionary strategy:

"It is not adornment, but the quietness of spirit seeking peace and harmony in submitting to their husbands as their lords which might convince the husbands that their wives are law-abiding and virtuous.... The patriarchal pattern of submission, therefore, does not so much seek to, put wives back into their proper patriarchal roles and places, but seeks to lessen the tension between the Christian community and the pagan patriarchal household. "5

In recent years, women in some congregations, especially those in the more affluent and cosmopolitan London and the southern regions have taken to wearing make-up, expensively made designer clothes and accessories and a modest amount of jewellery, usually dress rings, worn as though they were engagement rings, and brooches. A few women who were interviewed did recognise the tensions that exist between how they as individuals feel and what their churches feel. In some of the discussions with younger women they raised questions about the effectiveness of the rules which some women felt they had

to adhere to. Some of the younger women thought that if women could think through for themselves, the guiding principles governing their motives and actions with regard to their dress, and presentation of self and live by them rather than by doctrinaire statements which they find difficult to reconcile with their own thoughts and deeds, then this might lead to a healthier way of life.

"Instead of putting down all these rules give people the basics, give people the Word, give them the teaching, the principles.. ..of how they can grow in Christ. We all want to look nice, but everything boils down to how badly you want to look nice... It's the motive behind why you want to look nice!. If the motive behind why you want to look nice is because you want to 'knock out this sister' (as in a competition), "I want to be the best dresser", then that is just as sinful as coming in with a plain frock and saying: " I want to be the humblest sister", because it's the same kind of thing."

Other considerations with regard to dress

In some churches they have even gone as far as stipulating the acceptable length of a skirt and sleeve of a blouse. While in other churches women are not allowed to wear trousers, as they are seen as a male garment and therefore not suitable for women. Again both these issues have caused considerable debate and consternation between groups of women. The sides have been drawn between those who are of the older generation and those younger, and between those who are more liberal in their views and those who are more traditional.

The question of how women dress reflects a number of issues related to ethics and morals and how they are constructed, by whom and for what purpose. It also raises a question about who is expected to keep these values, pass them on and to what end. The answer to both these questions is, "the women". While in the main it is the men in the leadership positions in the churches who have selected those aspects of ethics and morals which are to be maintained, and it is also the men who have designed the parameters within which the women operate. The parameters here being the doctrinal and practical commitments of the organisations. It is the sisters' responsibility to keep the men from themselves. They have to be moderate and modest in their dress so as not to tempt the brothers to lust. This sort of thinking would seem to suggest that one brother's lustful desires and a woman's purest of motives to look and feel good are interchangeable. Some of the younger women I spoke to were acutely aware of the unfair pressure they are under to protect their brothers from harbouring sinful thoughts. They also felt that the older women did not give them the sort of support they should have given them. As one young person said:

"Girls were supposed to be leading the boys astray and so the girls got a lot of stick from the older women...probably more than they got from the men. They said it was us who were leading this good brother astray. We used to get angry about it...The young men were being praised while the young ladies were being rebuked."

As well as being responsible for protecting their brothers, sisters have to protect the name of the church to which they belong. One sister reiterated the point, that a clear distinction and an identifying mark must be maintained by church members. One of the sisters could not emphasise enough the fact that there had to be a difference between what is the church and what is the world:

"It's wrong that we should go against the doctrines, when we go out people associate us with the world by the way we dress."

Hollenweger in "The Pentecostals" adds another dimension to our understanding of Pentecostal ethical attitudes which I have suggested are maintained largely by women.

"This ethical attitude cannot be explained solely from the underlying hostility to creation which has always been present in the Pentecostal movement. It is also the expression of (a) an uncertainty with regard to the emancipation of women and (b) a protest against the ethical perplexity of our times."²⁵

Black female characteristics?

Going hand in hand with the conformity to a particular standard of dress are some characteristics which are portrayed as exclusively female. These are verified by a number of 'teachings'. In practice they govern in a very subtle way, the relationship between males and females in the churches. They could be described as based on the notions of power and control, powerlessness and submission.

Ira Brooks' comments, support some of the observations made above:

"In traditional practice, it would seem diabolically complacent on the part of the preacher, if he or she concluded a sermon without dogmatising on the seriousness of divine retribution on members who condoned the wearing of wigs, pressed hair, chains or necklaces, bangles, make-up (lipstick, nail polish) trousers, shorts.

Interestingly enough, all these are levelled at the female members. Those pointing to males seem rather minimal in comparison.... Today, these churches in England are facing an unprecedented challenge in those cultural matters, but the battle for a decisive answer that will finally stipulate between traditions of worldliness and the things that are divine, drags on."7

A sister in the Lord is one who is of 'a meek and quiet spirit', thus claims 1 Peter 3 v4. The sister who bears the above characteristics is one who would never think of usurping power, being boastful or showy. She is however, conscious of her place as influencing and being supportive of others, both brothers and sisters, not of leading and taking charge, unless specifically called upon to do so.

In some cases she might be reminded of her call to meekness by her church's teaching which stops her from making any contribution in business meetings. If she insists, in some organisations she makes the entire meeting 'null and void'. It is also the pervasiveness of this teaching which stops a number of women from even contemplating the 'call' to a full ministry. A sister if she is of a quiet spirit

is necessarily imperturbable, not loud nor given to lewd talk. She is even-tempered. It is particularly important for women with 'unsaved husbands' to have these qualities. By being of this nature, by being peaceful and submissive to her husband it is possible that the christian wife would win over her husband to Christ.

Whichever way one looks at the above there are a few worrying issues which must be faced. The first has to do with the sexist/ christian teaching construct, which seem to suggest that women have the monopoly over meekness and quietness. Secondly, while not wishing to project the Black woman as the impenetrable matriarch, without fears, and insecurities, the reality is, she knows that if she were to accept or rely upon such a characterisation of herself, she and her family would not survive. ²

Sisters are women of virtue:

"Who can find a virtuous woman?"....Proverbs 31 v 10.

There is a belief that there are virtues which married women have and to which single women should aspire.

The virtuous woman and sister is still defined in terms of the wife in Proverbs 31. So therefore a virtuous woman is a married one. Her virtues are magnified through her relationship with her husband and

her children. She is trusted by her husband, she provides food, clothes and warmth. She looks after her family and supports her husband. Her virtues are paraded in the guise of her husband. It is with pride that her husband responds to compliments with, "Behind every man there is a good woman".

There appears to be some support in the churches for this view of the woman, but there are dissenters who question this idealised image of the good woman, as seen below:

"...one of the women in our church was going on about it, she was going to each girl while she was preaching and she was getting wound-up and she said "girls the scripture says in Proverbs 31: "who can find a virtuous woman, for her price is far above...", and she was going girls don't you want to be like this? One of the young women in conversation with me, said, "who would want to be like her, "she is the most boring woman I'd ever come across." "

An unmarried sister while aspiring to the married state, is considered virtuous if she remains a virgin, is chaste and circumspect. So chastity and circumspection are qualities which every virgin, and single woman, have or should be desirous of. The metaphor in 2 Corinthians 11 v 2 ascribed to Paul, of the entire church community as a virgin, which he presents to God, is often quoted to young women as an admonition to be chaste:

"...for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."

She must be a woman who maintains high moral standards. One who is above reproach and especially to aspersions which have a sexual connotation. One woman recalled how these teachings and expectations affected her life and the behaviour of other young women in her church:

"..A lot of young women in our church would have problems talking to young men.... you put me in a room of men and I don't know any of them, I'd faint.... I could not go and want a conversation to develop like that. It could be because I was brought up like that...but if you look at the bible we are expected to be circumspect, chaste, royal, regal and mysterious."

Another woman spoke of the fear of being one of the five foolish virgins. Her interpretation of what brought about their downfall is an indication of how the parable was used to control women. The foolish virgins are seen as those who had succumbed to lust and lost their virginity in the process. The interpretation was unquestioningly accepted by many young women whose moral conduct and sexual desires were governed and tempered by it.

The married sister is one who should submit to, and obey her husband. Amongst the older and more traditional women this submission covers all aspects of a woman's life. The married sister is to fulfil her husband's desires, accept his words as final, sees to his physical needs, gives him her pay packet at the end of the week and so on.

However, more and more women are redefining their relationships in terms of partnerships rather than ones based on submission. This is so especially amongst the younger, working couples and a few enlightened older women. I have come across a few cases where women, young and old, whose husbands have ill-treated them have moved out of the marital home and set up home on their own. They have done this even though their church would prefer to see them reconciled rather than separated or divorced.

The term 'daughter of Zion' is often used to describe women who are exceptional in their struggle for holiness. These women are the ones who fast and pray regularly and who live out without compromise the teachings of the church. They are also actively involved in the life of the church. In their dress, speech, and manner they are faultless. They are women filled with the holy ghost and the 'fruit of the spirit' is evident in their daily lives. These women are the corner stones of the church community. They are ardent and true acolytes. Every sister should aspire to be a 'daughter of Zion'.

"They live what is known as a holy life, they are separate from the world, in that they spend a great deal of their time in bringing up their family, they fast and pray, they care for other people they transform communities, but not in a political way. Though they change what's here in a very holy way. Their minds are on things to come, they are women who belong to a place that is with God... Zion is linked with God's abiding place, therefore when we think of daughters of Zion, we think of women of God." 10

In praise of women and of sisters in the Lord?

Black Pentecostal churches in Britain do not generally have any icons of Black females present or represented in their worship or teachings. Only in the African Methodist Episcopal Church did I hear reference made in the liturgy to Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth of the anti-slavery movement. They were remembered for their work and struggle for freedom, and presented as examples for women to follow.

However, there is a strong tradition in songs and choruses which embody images of the christian woman. The central messages of these songs are based upon an evangelical/ pentecostal interpretation of scripture. The messages and the images embodied in the songs could be thus categorised:

Wholeness and forgiveness from sin for women who are particularly prone to adultery, as embodied in the image of the woman of Samaria in the song below:

"The woman of Samaria, the woman, she left her water pot and gone, The woman of Samaria, the woman, she left her water pot and gone, Jesus asked her for her husband and she said she had none, she said she had none, she said she had none,....."

and:

"Jesus gave her water that was not from the well, Jesus gave her water that was not from the well, she came there sinning and she

went away singing, for Jesus gave her water that was not from the well".

Spiritual and physical cleansing for any woman as seen in the woman of faith who had a haemorrhage, touched Jesus, and was healed of her physical illness as well as from sin:

"Oh it is Jesus,
Yes it is Jesus,
It is Jesus in my soul, for I have touched the hem of his
garment and his blood has made me whole"

The woman in the image of the mother is depicted as essential to the protection and the sustaining of the christian family. So it is the mothers who are remembered as bringing children to Jesus to be blessed, in another popular song:

"When mothers of Salem their children brought to Jesus the stern
disciples drove them back and bid them to depart, but Jesus saw
them ere they went and sweetly smiled and kindly said, suffer
the little children to come unto me"....

It is also the woman as mother who teaches her children and prays for their protection:

"My mother prayed for me, she taught me right from wrong,
Of her I have sweet memories and now from me she's gone..."

It is not surprising to find the child birth imagery being used to describe the Church Mothers who are often asked to 'travail' (as in child birth) at the altar with members who are seeking to be filled

with the holy spirit or for their prayers to be answered.

Many of the songs and choruses seem to celebrate qualities of Christ that in the main are associated with women. Christ is portrayed as a loving saviour, gentle, caring, forgiving and full of grace:

"In all the world around me I see his loving care....None other is so loving so good and kind...."¹¹

This is not to say that many of the songs do not also celebrate those qualities often regarded as male.

Io Smith, a pastor in the New Testament Assembly uses the image of mother as pastor.

"Women do succour the church. When a woman is pastoring an assembly she is as close to the flock as to the child on her breast. They have a tender feeling towards someone in their struggle and will give out to them as if they are breast-feeding a child. They watch their growth closely. Sometimes I have only to sit and listen to someone crying to know exactly what is coming behind that feeling."¹²

Single women in Black-led churches

In 1988 four of the leading Black led churches, (Church of God of Prophecy, New Testament Church of God, Shiloh Apostolic and the Pilgrim Holiness Church) estimated that approximately 60% of the women in their congregations between the ages of 18 and 35 years

were single women. It is also in this age range that there is a noticeable drop-out rate. In the past, women who leave the church are mainly those who are having relationships with 'unsaved' men or because they become pregnant. More recently however, it is because they question and challenge the rules and regulations, and are less tolerant of answers that do not make sense. In my own congregation, in the 36 to 65 age group, approximately 50% of the women are married to men who are saved and members of the church and another 50% to men who never became saved. In the latter case, most of the marriages would have taken place between the couple before the woman became a christian, but there are a few exceptions. It follows that Black-led churches can accurately be characterised as 'the church of the single women'.

In recent years the singleness factor has been placed high on the list of concerns in many churches. This is especially so as the churches hold marriage between believers and the birth and rearing of children as God-given privileges. Through marriage, child bearing and the rearing of children in a Godly household, the foundations are laid for the growth and prosperity of the church.

With hindsight the churches can now see how a combination of evangelism strategies which were more geared to women than men, the provision of support groups for women within the churches and a strong commitment to ethical standards which demanded much of women

might have contributed to their disproportionate representation in the churches. The question remains what are they likely to do with this information?

There is fear too on the part of a number of older women who were victims of unplanned and early pregnancies, who would not want their daughters to emulate them. Though not denying that they were born out of wedlock and sometimes many of their children, many women and church leaders are fierce defenders of marriage, but also accept celibacy if God wills it. Neither position has been looked at seriously or sensitively from the point of view of the single woman. There are male church leaders who are trying to think this through but unfortunately, speaking of the women as though they might not be part of the solution!

At the moment the response of the churches to single women is at best insensitive. They often forget that these women have needs that are peculiar to them and that they are not failures. As Elaine Storkey puts it:

"...single women often find churches unsympathetic and alienating with their contemporary focus on the family and their adulation of motherhood. If to be a truly successful Christian woman is to be a wife and mother, then surely they have failed on all accounts?"¹³

The question of singleness can be best understood in the context of Caribbean societies and the lifestyles, views and influences of certain groups of people.

Caribbean Pentecostal and evangelical Black-led churches held strong beliefs about high moral standards which would mark them out as different from what was sometimes seen as sexually permissive Caribbean societies, but also of what was sometimes allowed in some of the 'nominal' churches. The late 1960's and 1970's was seen as a time of radical permissiveness and lax sexual behaviour and here in Britain Black preachers preached hell and damnation on this sort of behaviour.

Rastafarianism was a strong influence amongst young black people. Although they would deny that they were preaching loose morals and sexual behaviour, Rastafarianism rejected Christian marriage, and taught that African people could not afford to commit genocide by taking contraceptives and denying themselves children. This was viewed by Black-led churches as a potentially dangerous doctrine.

Some churches afraid of the influence of such teachings laid down stringent rules about how young women and men were to relate to each other. Courting young couples were chaperoned and people were encouraged to marry as soon as possible after the decision was made. A period of engagement was often seen as dangerous because it gave

the couple the right to be together alone for periods of time in which they could easily 'commit fornication'. In order to keep young men and women away from each other they were made to sit in separate pews or on different sides of the church.

As if not to corrupt the young single women, questions about courtship, sex, contraceptives were viewed as almost 'unspeakable issues'. These questions were shunned and sometimes seen as things to be prayed about rather than have a healthy debate on. I have been present in meetings where questions were raised about contraceptives, abortion and sex and they were treated as though the very thought of the questions themselves was a sinful act.

Contraceptives were said to be unnatural and only married people should even think about them, abortion was murder and sex was something which only happened in the dark and between married couples.

There is now a range of personal responses to the question of singleness in Black-led churches. These are indicative of the spiritualisation of a singularly practical and material matter, but also the lack of an appropriate and sensitive organisational response.

Many women remembered, and some agreed with three of the oldest responses to the question of singleness: (a) pray that the Lord will

find you a partner; (b) wait upon the Lord and (c) Thou shall not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

Many women believe strongly in the power of prayer. So it follows that if they pray for something which is within God's will and plan for their life then that will happen, in this case a partner would be granted. Conversely, if it is not in God's plan for a person to have a partner then that person will not have one. Some women who have remained faithfully single are viewed with pity and concern and often the response to them is :

"It is a pity that you are not married because you are an intelligent and a nice girl."

There are women who are resigned to the single life, but not without regrets. One of the women interviewed said:

"The sad thing is that some of us black females will have to realise that our lives are going to be lived without any men and that it is just going to be a relationship between us and God, and that's the way it is going to be... because there are just not enough males in the church to go around and we have got to be realistic and not try to go against God's will".

Another talked of her wish to have children, and her impatience with a God who seemed to take forever to answer her plea.

"I can remember praying and repeating the verse of scripture 'They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength' - I believed if only I waited on the Lord and was patient the Lord would find me a partner - in the end I could wait no longer..."

The young woman above was one of many who decided that her childbearing years were fast decreasing and that she wanted to find someone to love and with whom she could share her life. In the end she discontinued her membership of the church and went after her own happiness.

In Pentecostal and evangelical circles one often hears that believers 'should not be unequally yoked with unbelievers'. This is taken to mean that a christian sister should not be married to a non-christian/unsaved man, or vice versa. It is a strongly held belief that persons so unequally joined had chosen a path which would eventually lead to their spiritual downfall. One elderly church mother's comment on the subject shed some light on the dilemma, between a particular belief and the consequences of it:

"Christian girls marrying unsaved men, ... in my whole life as a christian, it has never worked out..yet some peoples' life is the means of bringing another, but then we still have to go back to scripture which says we should not be unequally yoked .."

This position is taken by a number of older women and agreed with by some younger women, even though there is a tinge of hopelessness echoed in the words 'there is just nothing that can be done':

"We can't court unsaved men can we? We can't go out with a man who smokes and drinksimagine 50 years of that ...and here's me going to my church, in the end he's going to have to leave me..because we are incompatible. It is sad to say God wants this for two thirds of his people ..then why does he not bring in a whirlwind of men?..Bring in the two-thirds that matches us...there is just nothing that can be done..."

As the conversations with women around the issue of the unmarried, single women got more involved and open, one could detect a growing ambivalence. Perhaps the fact that a number of young women had made the choice to leave the church in order to find partners rather than accept a life of singleness was an important factor which cannot be overlooked. The churches would after all, prefer to keep their sisters than ~~lose~~ them:

"I would say that this is an individual thing, but I would not go ahead and say, do that. I know that God is able to change any man if any man will allow himself to be changed by God. I suppose when one knows the scripture and yet do it, then that person will have to stand the consequence. Yes, we realise that there are not many young men in the church ..but as a matter of fact I think it is a national concern because I have spoken to sisters of my age and we have talked about it...many times when we meet we talk and pray about it."

If black single women cannot court or marry unsaved men then what alternatives are opened to them? For some women, only their strong belief in 'God's will', supported by biblical texts which seem, when applied to their situation, give them reasons and answers with which they are satisfied.

"The whole duty of man (sic) is to fear God and keep his commandment, our duty is to serve God..."

said one elderly sister. The message implicit in this particular quotation was clearly, single women should concentrate on serving God.

A quotation ascribed to St Paul, in 1 Corinthians 7 v 8, is often used as an encouragement to the unmarried sister. The verse reminds the single person that they, like Paul could spend their time doing God's work rather than looking after, and being distracted by children and a partner:

"I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I."

Perhaps without intentionally meaning to create 'an order of single women devotees' Black-led churches have done just that. Many of the women I spoke to on this issue agreed with marriage and would choose to be married or at least have the prospect of choosing a partner. However, the question of choice or the opportunity to choose to be, or not to be married is taken away from women and replaced instead by the choice made for them by God. Is there not a need for the churches to find ways of positively including the single women's issue as something worthy of serious concern?

Until the churches see the single sisters as having their own needs, wanting love, warmth, companionship, comfort, care and touch, recognition and self affirmation then there stands to be a gap in the meaning of the good news of the gospel. To deny that these needs exist, is to deny the single women their humanity. Any such denial leads to people being oppressed, and alienated. It is not incidental that so many young women (and men for that matter) are voting with

their feet, choosing to leave the churches rather than become lesser humans.

Perhaps the question of the single woman's sexuality and sexual feelings is the one most shrouded in secrecy and silence or treated as non-existent. The fact that single women are human beings and that no amount of 'cleansing in the Blood of the lamb' is going to deny her of those feelings must be understood. These women need the space to at least talk about and affirm these feelings as natural. Too many women have suffered untold guilt over their thoughts, feelings and physical intimacy with a partner and have not found the support nor the understanding forthcoming in the churches. Some in the end have been labelled weak and backslidden.

Although I have heard homosexuality and lesbianism harangued from the pulpit, I have yet to come across anyone who has countenanced the thought that there might be single women who are passive lesbians and members of the church. The moment when any church recognises that lesbians too are human and part of the body of Christ, perhaps needing to be understood differently, would be the day the church proclaims the full extent of the body of Christ.¹⁴

Perhaps now is the time for the Black churches to begin to apply their understanding of spiritual liberation to their every day experiences, the structures they operate in and to understand the

role of the individual as tools in the system. That liberation is also about being set free from the oppressions of race, sex and class.

As long as the patriarchal organisational structures which masquerade under the guise of early Christian practice unquestioningly prescribe our behaviour today and are seen as infallible and believed in by both males and females, it is difficult to envisage a time in Black-led churches in Britain when the women will be free to define themselves.

The message of equality and partnership implicit in the following chorus probably sums up the churches' present thinking on the issues:

"We are heirs of the father, we are joint heirs with the son, We are children of the kingdom we are family we are one."

Here is the somewhat naive acceptance, voiced by one young woman which indicates the possibility:

"I have not differentiated much in my thinking about women or men in the church... I just see people as one... I have not up 'til now addressed myself to the question of leadership and women pastors whether they should be ordained or not I am not sure whether there is a scriptural basis to say whether women can be ordained or not."

Elisabeth Fiorenza suggests that: '*ekklesia*' the actual assembly of

free citizens gathering to decide their own spiritual-political affairs is some way off.

"Since women in a patriarchal church cannot decide their own theological-religious affairs and that of their own people-women, the ekklesia of women is as much a future hope as it is a reality today." ¹⁵

1. Heine S. Women in Early Christianity London: SCM Press 1986
2. Fiorenza E.S. In Memory of Her - A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins London: SCM Press 1983 p. 226-230 Elizabeth Fiorenza's commentary on the historical context of New Testament writings have been insightful.
3. Tong: to use a heated device to straighten the kinks in the hair. See also Hollenweger W.J. The Pentecostals London: SCM Press 1972 (The British edition) p.399 - 410
4. Women can if they so wish wear jewellery in the The New Testament Church of God (Church of God in America) but there is wide spread resistance to this especially from the older members.
5. Fiorenza E.S. op. cit., p.262
6. Hollenweger W.J. The Pentecostals London: SCM Press 1972 (The British edition) p.404
7. Brooks I. Another Gentleman to the Ministry (Published by the author) circa 1980's p.140
8. Wallace Michele Black Macho - The Myth of the Superwoman London: John Calder 1979. Wallace argues that the image of the black woman as the matriarchal superwoman is dangerous as it masks black women's material conditions and lets black men off the hook.
9. Is this young woman voicing an indication of the possible rift that exists between the older and younger women? Unfortunately, preaching does not allow for debate and questioning, this woman's views might never be heard from the pulpit.
10. Daughters of Zion - I suppose a literal translation of this term would be, 'daughters of the dwelling place of God'. Women are often admonished to live a holy life like 'daughters of Zion', circumspect and beyond reproach and in preparation for Christ's return. cf. Zechariah 9 v9; Isaiah 62 v11; Matthew 21 v5
11. Rodeheaver H.A. 'He Lives' one of the many popular songs which most members know by heart. N.B. authors of the choruses and songs quoted in the text unknown. They are also quoted from memory.

12. Smith Io with Green W. An Ebony Cross - Being a Black Christian in Britain Today London: Marshall Pickering 1989 p.67
13. Storkey Elaine What's Right With Feminism London: SPCK 1985 p.45
14. Britton M. The Single Woman in the Family of God London: Epworth 1982, Britton's work would be considered radical in Pentecostal circles, yet there are some sobering thoughts in her work that could well be applied to black single women in Black-led churches.
15. Fiorenza E.S. op. cit., p.344

CHAPTER 4

ROOTS OF LIBERATION IN BLACK-LED CHURCHES

In the previous chapters I looked at the role of women in the development of some Black-led churches in Britain. I can with a certain amount of justification, based upon the women's testimonies of their own contributions, conclude that the women are central to the development of the churches, and I would even go further and say they are the church. To reiterate the words of one of the women:

"If you take away the women from the church you wouldn't have anything left."

At the same time however, there are a number of features that are a cause for concern. Women are still considerably under-represented in the leadership of the church and are continually denied their priestly capabilities. White American males continue to define codes of dress and morality which the women seem unwilling to challenge. There seems a fear on the part of the women to align themselves with, and redefine themselves as, African women.

Sexism abounds in Black-led churches. It is also effective as a tool of oppression in Black-led churches. Sexism will remain intact as long as the churches, and especially the women within them,

continue to be ambivalent or openly supportive of it.

Some churches have recently been involved in programmes of social action. They are addressing the problem of the old and the question of educational under achievement of their young and homeless. However, the social action projects have tended to be reactive rather than proactive initiatives.

The churches have yet to develop an analysis of the social, economic and political context in which they operate. There is still the need to address the complex nature of racism, sexism and capitalism and how they impact upon the lives of Black people in Britain today. In the event, some more progressive action may ensue.

With very few exceptions Black led churches continue to deny their African heritage. There are very few individuals, and to my knowledge no church organisations that have addressed the question of slavery and colonisation as part of the history, religious experience and shaping of Black people in Britain.'

The last three chapters have provided me with enough evidence of the potentially liberating influence and action of the women in the

churches. But the question remains: Why then has a revolution not taken place?

In order to look forward, we now need to look backward at the historical background of the churches to find any pervading influence that might have helped or hindered the churches in their liberatory actions.

In order to answer the above question it is necessary to take a cursory look at the history and development of christianity in the Americas and the Caribbean, and Black peoples' experiences within that development.

Slavery

In 1492 the Spaniard, Christopher Columbus' exploration took him to the Caribbean. This date marks the beginning of a period of European colonisation of the Caribbean. A period which interrupted and destroyed the Aboriginal peoples, the Arawaks and Caribs, of their history, and a period which also saw the inhumane enslavement of millions of African peoples.

"It is an error to say that Christopher Columbus discovered Jamaica. The Arawaks were there when he arrived. The cruelty the Spaniards meted out to them calls attention to the interruption of their history by Columbus. This interruption resulted in the decimation of the first Jamaicans by the Spaniards. According to historical estimates, the population of Jamaica was

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approximately 60,000 at the time Columbus arrived. A century later it was 1,500 of whom 74 were Arawaks." ²

A number of historians have argued that between 9 and ~~20~~ million Africans were imported into the Americas and the Caribbean during the period of slavery. Their figures cannot account for, or only suggest estimates of those who died in the middle passage. ³

Some of the records kept by the masters of ships gave accounts of the causes of death. This is not surprising as these would affect the profits they were likely to make on reaching their destination. These accounts have fired the imagination of many writers and historians, enough to conclude:

"Chained and herded together in the slave ships, they were decimated by contagious diseases, by hunger and thirst, and their bodies were thrown into the ocean. Sometimes no more than half the cargo would reach its destination." ⁴

Others did not wait for death, but freed themselves from the horrors of their captivity by committing suicide during the middle passage. Suicide and murder were, in later years used as a form of liberation from the inhumane and degrading life of slavery. The following Spiritual seems apt as it immortalises both the recurring theme of freedom and implied defiance of the slave.

"And before I be a slave I'll be buried in my grave and go home to my Lord and be free."

The first shipment of African slaves arrived in the Caribbean in 1498 and what started as a trickle soon became a flood. By:

"1517 Charles V of Spain granted permission for 4,000 African slaves to be transported annually to the islands of Hispaniola, Cuba, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico."⁵

Christianity and Slavery

From the start both the Roman Catholic and the Anglican churches accepted the enslavement of African peoples. Their clergy and theologians sought to, and did justify, slavery on biblical grounds. Texts such as those imploring slaves to be obedient to their masters, and others which asserted that slavery was ordained of God and of benefit to the enslaved were appropriated by the clergy. This misappropriation of scripture was one of the earliest tools of oppression.

The Roman Catholic Church

It has been argued that approaches to the christianisation of the slaves differed between the Roman Catholics and Anglicans. Roger Bastide writing about slavery in Brazil points out that the Roman Catholic church accepted slavery on certain conditions:

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"But while the church accepted the enslavement of the African, it did so on certain conditions. In taking his body, it gave in return a soul. While the white master might make profit by slave labour, this right was counterbalanced by corresponding duties, first and foremost the duty of Christianisation. Any black who had not been baptised before leaving Africa had to be evangelised on arrival, had to learn Latin prayers, receive baptism, attend mass, and partake of the holy sacraments." ⁶

However, the plantation and slave owners were only interested in the physical strength of the slave and the profit they made.

Further, there was no compulsion on the part of the church to minister to the slaves.

The above resulted in: a) the slaves being taught only those aspects of Christianity which instilled obedience and servitude to the master; b) the slaves practising their religions, and sustaining many aspects of their cultures and traditions.

The French established the Code Noir in 1685. This decreed that all slaves in the French islands were to be catechised and baptised in the Catholic faith. However, the establishment of the code did nothing to make conditions any better for the slave, nor to hasten freedom for which the slaves longed.

The Anglican Church

There were not many serious attempts to convert the slaves to the

Anglican faith. The Church of England was the church of the plantocracy and the governing officials. It was not a missionary church. There are a number of reasons which might serve to explain the church's position. Firstly, the church was little more than an adjunct of the state. The clergy were paid by the planters, and were therefore indebted to them. Secondly, there was no active missionary association involved in propagating the gospel to the slaves until the early part of the eighteenth century, unlike the Roman Catholics who for example, had large numbers of Jesuits in the French colonies. Thirdly, the plantocracy strongly objected to the conversion of the slaves.

The following quotation taken from the Articles of State Papers, serves to highlight the opposition of the plantocracy:

The gentlemen of Barbadoes attend, Sir Peter Colleton, Messrs. Lucy, Scutt, Davers, and others, who declare that the conversion of their slaves to Christianity would not only destroy their property but endanger the island, inasmuch as converted negroes grow more perverse and intractable than others, and hence of less value for labour or sale. The disproportion of the blacks to whites being great, the whites have no greater security than the diversity of the negroes' languages, which would be destroyed by conversion, in that it would be necessary to teach them all English. . . . Conversion will impair their value and price, and injure not only the planters but the African Company.⁷

The work of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel was not always a success. Primarily because of the continued opposition of the planters, because of the underfunding and understaffing of its

operations, as well as the general lack of interest the church had in the slaves. By 1784 the mission had come to be regarded as a failure.

Like the Roman Catholics, the Anglicans did not believe that Christianising the slaves altered their temporal condition. To be a christian did not mean that one was a freed person.

The Moravians, Methodists and Baptists

The second third of the eighteenth century heralded the work of the non-Conformist churches in the Caribbean.

In 1732 two Moravian missionaries arrived in the island of St Thomas in the eastern Caribbean. At first sight their message, Christ had died for Blacks as well as whites, seemed to suggest equality between enslaved and free people. However, the message of the founder of the Moravian Mission soon put an end to the above idea. In a speech to converted slaves in 1739, he made it clear that they should remain obedient and servile to their masters. Slavery as an institution was ordained by God:

"...be obedient to your masters and foremen. The Lord has made all ranks-kings, masters, servants and slaves. God punished the first negroes by making them slaves, and by your conversion will make you free, not from the control of your masters, but simply

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from your wicked habits and thoughts, and all that makes you dissatisfied with your lot."^e

The Methodist Church in the Caribbean grew out of the work started by missionaries in Antigua in 1770. Their work was supported by Nathaniel Gilbert, a one time slave owner converted to Methodism. Gilbert was eager to integrate black and white, free and enslaved. It is said he even encouraged Black and Whites to worship together in his own house.

There was some precedence for the above set by John Wesley, who in the 1770's vociferously denounced slavery. His example seemed in principle acceptable to the Methodist General Conference in America (1780) which denounced slavery as:

"...Contrary to the laws of God, 'man' and nature and hurtful to society."^e

The Church was soon to retreat from the above position, and sought instead to dismantle slavery by 'wise and prudent means'. Thus ^{arose} the inconsistency between those Methodists who believed in slavery and kept slaves, and those who sought to end slavery.

The Methodist missionaries were somehow seen as the most radical of the missionaries. It is said they often taught the slaves to read and write, married them, and taught them that slavery was irreconcilable with christianity. By using a 'class' system in

their evangelism work amongst the slaves, they were able to deploy converted slaves to minister to the sick and lead prayer meetings amongst themselves. This was one way in which slaves were given leadership roles and responsibilities, a system which the planters did not approve of. It was because of this stance that the Methodist missionaries were seen by the planters as troublesome, and the protagonists of slave insurrections.

It is mainly in the references to the Methodist activities that women are mentioned as involved in evangelism work amongst fellow slaves and workers. For example there were two unnamed women who continued the work in Antigua after the death and departure of Nathaniel and Francis Gilbert, respectively:

"Two Negro women confessors of humble stock took the lead by carrying on the meetings in their own cottages."¹⁰

and in Jamaica:

"Missionary William Knibb informs us of a Mammy Faith in whom the people had tremendous confidence. They believed she had power to forgive sins."¹¹

The name George Liele is synonymous with the founding of the Baptist church in Jamaica. Often associated with him is Moses Baker. George Liele was a freed slave who migrated from America to Jamaica with his master in 1783. It is said that in one of Liele's

first messages to the slaves, he compared the plight of the slaves to that of the Israelites in Egypt. Liele had voiced the hope that the slaves like the Israelites would one day be free. Consequently he was imprisoned.

On his release Liele had to make a promise to the planters that:

"...black people would not use church attendance as an occasion to plan revolts or private meetings."¹²

The second precaution which Liele took was to draft a covenant, which was ratified by the Jamaican legislature prior to being adopted by his church. This covenant stated that they were against the shedding of blood, swearing, and concubinage. Slaves could only become members of the church on the master's reference of good behaviour. Those who disobeyed or committed any misdemeanor against their master would be censured by the church.

It would seem that Liele had coalesced with the plantocracy. However, another way of interpreting this move would be to say he and his followers had found a way of surviving in the face of gross oppression.

Soon after Liele started his church in Kingston, one of his deacons, Thomas Swingle, split away from him and formed the first Native Baptist church in the Island. Erskine, commenting on the

importance of the Native Baptist church said:

"The Native Baptists, on the other hand, were involved in the search for the God of their ancestors. This God represented for them freedom from the cruel world of oppression."¹³

The Baptist church in Jamaica was possibly one of the fastest growing in the late eighteenth, early nineteenth century. By 1831, there were 24 churches with a membership of 10,000 people in Jamaica alone.

The African Response - Survival

There are certain difficulties associated with attempts to honestly write about or represent the African response to slavery. These problems arise because:

- a) there is very little in existence of the Africans' own word that can testify to their earliest experiences of captivity and enslavement.
- b) the earliest documentation of slavery was written by white traders, officials and planters.
- c) some of the earliest interpretations of the effects of slavery on African peoples were done by white anthropologists.

Recently however, much more radical work has been done by people such as M. J. and F. S. Herskovits, C. L. R. James, W. E. B. DuBois, Walter Rodney, Eugene Genovese and Roger Bastide to name a few. This has resulted in somewhat of a reinterpretation of the complexities of slavery. Slavery as it were, from the underside.

Roger Bastide, although recognising the 'unfavourable conditions' under which the African slave lived, had this to say:

"Despite the unfavourable conditions of slavery, which mixed ethnic groups, broke down African social structures, and imposed a new work rhythm and life style, the religions the blacks brought with them from the Atlantic did not die."¹⁴

There are certainly enough reasons why African religions should have died out amongst the slaves. These include the fact that: many religions were linked to families, lineages or class; Slaves from different nations were systematically mixed to avoid similar language groups from communicating, which in turn must have had an impact upon the religious groups to which the slave belonged. Further, this socio-geographical dislocation must have posed tremendous tensions and problems for any slave, especially as:

"The African does not, ... divorce the material world from the universe of values, each of which occupies an ecological position in the whole. He does not see the hillside just as a hillside, but as the abode of certain spirit or the traditional center of a certain ceremony."¹⁵

To try to recreate the above in totality, in a strange land was not possible. However, there is enough in existence today which points to the fact that the slaves in captivity did not forsake their religious beliefs but sought to sustain certain aspects and adopted new aspects arising out of their contacts between each others' and their masters' religions.

The existence today of Vodun in Haiti, Shango in Trinidad, Santeria in Cuba, Cumina in Jamaica, Kele in St Lucia, Streams of Power in St. Vincent, Candomble and Macoumba in Brazil to name a few, is testimony of African retentions in the Caribbean and Americas.

Resistance and Survival

There is much evidence to support the idea that African peoples resisted slavery, and that they used a variety of methods in trying to do so. These ranged from the very passive ridicule and accommodation, which were effective means of disguising the slaves criticism and subversion of the master and his wishes. On the other hand there were the well planned and protracted rebellions, as well as the sporadic and short lived uprisings. Sometimes the acts were perpetrated by an individual, at other times by the group.

Genocide amongst slaves was not unusual, as Bastide notes in the Brazilian situation.

"The Brazilian 'Negro' was perfectly aware that his suicide was an act of war, for slaves were expensive, and when a whole group vowed to let themselves die or to poison themselves, this meant certain ruin for their master."¹⁶

There are examples of the collective resistance of slaves that are worth mentioning.

"Consider the magnitude of a few lesser known eighteenth century revolts. In the almost successful insurrection of 1733 on the small island of St John in the Danish West Indies, 150 slaves were directly implicated. ...Thirty years later an estimated 2,000 slaves rose in Berbice and claimed the lives of 200 of the colony's 350 whites.....During the eighteenth century a series of slave revolts erupted in Venezuela, culminating in one of about 300 in Coro in 1795, and shook the Spanish power....."¹⁷

The reports and correspondence between Britain and her colonies suggest that the British often confronted not just rebellion, but large scale civil war. This was especially so in Jamaica.

"Jamaican revolts varied greatly in size...The first serious revolt broke out in 1669...Several took place in 1690's and marked virtually every year of the decade 1730-1740"¹⁸

C.L.R. James cites the building up of a strong Maroon resistance as a precursor to the revolution in San Domingo:

"All of them did not submit to it. Those whose boldness of spirit found slavery intolerable and refused to evade it by committing suicide, would fly to the woods and mountains and form bands of free men--maroons. Women followed them. They reproduced themselves. And for a hundred years before 1789 the maroons were a source of danger to the colony. In 1720, 1,000 slaves fled to the mountains. In 1751 there were at least 3,000 of them..... Many of these rebel leaders struck terror into the hearts of the colonists by their raids on the plantations and

the strength and determination of the resistance they organised against attempts to exterminate them." ¹⁹

African peoples' religious beliefs often acted as a catalyst for both group and individual resistance.

A number of historians believe that an African religious ceremony marked the beginning of a massive slave revolt which was a prelude to the Haitian revolution. George Mulrain writes:

"On the night of August 14, 1791 Boukman conducted an African ceremony in the north that started a massive slave revolt. This ceremony known to posterity as the 'Bois Caiman' was of a religious nature and included the sacrifice of an animal and the drinking of its blood. All pledged allegiance to the cause of the revolt which indeed furthered the move towards the abolition of slavery in Haiti. Historians have maintained that the Bois Caiman ceremony was instrumental in starting the Vaudou religion." ²⁰

The Haitian Revolution of 1790 was an inspiration for other revolts in the Caribbean and the Americas. The leaders of the Haitian revolution were emulated and immortalised in song.

"As soon as news of the Negro revolt in Haiti reached Brazil, the mulatto regiment ..revolted. Its battle hymn went:
 I want to emulate Christovao
 The immortal Haitian hero!
 O my sovereign people,
 You emulate his compatriots" ²¹

C. L. R. James in 'The Black Jacobins', points out the importance of slave religion as inspirational as well as a vehicle for organised resistance. Leaders such as, Chief Mackandal, Jean-François,

Biassou, Romaine Riviere, Hyacinthe Ducoudray, and Boukmann.

Judging by the evidence we have of the participation of women priests in Vaudou and more generally in West African religions we might safely assume that they took their rightful place in the ceremonies prior to any insurrection or war. Again Mulrain's work attests to the involvement of women in vaudou:

"In Vaudou, women may become priests, in which case they are referred to as mambos. . . . In vaudou, there is no prejudice against women being vested with spiritual authority because of the way vaudouisants understand divine revelation. . . . In vaudou, no monopoly of spiritual power is granted to either of the sexes." ²²²

In Jamaica the Maroons practised mayalism and obeah and called on African spirits to protect them in their battles against the British.

Sam Sharpe who led the 1831 rebellion in Jamaica was a Native Baptist leader.

Although we do not have many references to named women in the leadership of religious groups or resistances, it is of importance to note at this juncture one who has become immortalised in the folklores and songs of Jamaica.

"Nanny was a leader of the Maroons at the beginning of the 18th Century. She was known by both the Maroons and the British settlers as an outstanding military leader. . . . All legends and documents refer to Nanny of the First Maroon War as the outstanding woman of this time, leading her people with courage

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and inspiring them to maintain that spirit of freedom, that life of independence which was their rightful inheritance." 23

Many Africans believed that at death they would be reunited with their ancestors in the other world. It was on the basis of this belief that many took their own lives. Roger Bastide noted that another form of resistance, which he termed banzo, or homesickness, existed amongst slaves. This wasting away occurred when the African found it impossible to recreate the ecological pattern, for the tribal and religious configuration in their new situation.

The above evidence suggests that African peoples as slaves and freed persons used many opportunities to liberate themselves and others from the oppression of slavery. At times they were mercilessly slaughtered as they tried to fight cannons and guns with sticks and stones, but what shines through is their relentlessness and determination. Toussaint L'Ouverture and his army are an indication of the possibilities there were in terms of warfare and the fight for freedom. Religion appears to be central in the struggle for liberation. Although, women were present in the slave communities, and certainly played a significant role in religion and religious ceremonies, the references to their involvement are few. When we read, discuss or debate the period of slavery, we must somehow keep their 'presence' in our memories.

1838 and Beyond

No attempt will be made to describe in any detail the growth and development of African peoples' religions during the early years of manumission to the early 1900's. Suffice to say African people were now more able to continue their religious practises in less restricted ways, there was also a growth of religions already in existence, and the development of new ones. The drive to reflect the religion of the colonising state in the colonies also continued.

Noel Erskine in 'Decolonising Theology', notes that a series of revivals took place in Jamaica between 1841 and the 1860's. He concludes that: 'The main focus of these revivals was myalism'. This was contrary to the wishes and intentions of the Christian churches which had launched these missions.

"The mission churches launched a united assault against black religions in Jamaica in the early 1860's. This took the form of a revival, which was aimed to convert black people from their 'heathen ways' to 'pure' Christianity. The revival was a great success in terms of the number of people who attended. There were fasting and praying, and the high point came when the Baptists set aside the last Sunday of April 1860 for God's arrival in Jamaica. There is no mistaking what happened -- the revival turned African. ..As the revival proceeded the new converts were given to oral confession, trances, dreams, 'prophesying', spirit seizure, wild dancing and mysterious sexual doings.." ²⁴

Many other revivalist groups sprang up in other parts of the Caribbean during the late 1800's and early 1900's. For many, the early post emancipation period did not bring freedom from poverty and dependence. This is also true of the late post emancipation period and the newer era of independence. The new peasant class often struggled to eke out a living from their small holdings. Wages fluctuated from bad to poor, new inventions in the field of production created a surplus of human labour and there was a decrease in European demand for certain crops and products.

The Caribbean in Turmoil 1900's

The early 1900's was marked by some growth in the Caribbean economy. There was an increase in both the demand and the production of sugar cane. The first World War necessitated the expansion of the sugar market in the European as well as the Canadian and American markets. However, this period was short lived and came almost to an abrupt end with the end of the war.²⁵

The 1930's however, heralded a series of uprisings. To some extent they were part and parcel of the wider world recession, but there were issues peculiar to the Caribbean. The provisions for social, political and economic advancement were poor. Land was unevenly distributed and owned, ^{with} the working class having the worst share. Wages on the sugar and other estates were poor, discipline was

harsh and the hours of work long. Major shifts in the population from the countryside to the towns formed an underclass of unemployed. Poor sanitation, health, education and housing compounded the situation.

Back To Africa

It was however out of the above context that several 'Back To Africa Movements' were born. Jean Price-Mars, the father of *Indigenism* in Haiti, 'called the Haitian people back to an awareness of their folklore and their African past.' He reminded them that it was 'from their African past that they drew their inspiration to fight against oppression.'

Negritude had its origins in Martinique and had its beginnings in the thoughts of Aime Cesaire. Negritude attempted to:

"...redeem the African past and to revive the dynamic and pragmatic philosophy of Africa which had been destroyed by the deadening influence of Europe."²⁶

Jamaica's prophet of Africanism was Marcus Garvey, whose work and preaching was to have far reaching effects upon the life of African peoples in the Caribbean and beyond. Much of his teaching provided the basis for the Ras Tafari Movement. Garvey, the founder of the

Universal Negro Improvement Association in Jamaica and America preached:

"One God, One Faith, One Destiny--Africa for the Africans at Home and Abroad!"²⁷

American Christianity into the Caribbean, early 1900's

During the second half of the nineteenth century American christianity was typified by the proliferation of different Holiness groups. In the main the churches sought after a 'purer and holier life', and were advocates of the poor, oppressed and enslaved. With a few exceptions the groups were conservative and fundamentalist in their theology.

Much of the work in the previous chapters came out of interviews with women from The New Testament Church of God and sister groups, as well as with people from The Wesleyan Holiness Church. The two churches between them represent two different strands of Afro-Caribbean black-led churches in Britain. They both have their beginnings in America and were also among the first to evangelise the Caribbean islands.

What follows is a brief look at historical factors which might have hindered, or aided, the involvement of Black women in the management and leadership of these churches. There will also be a

look at acts or indicators of liberation present in the history of these churches?

The Wesleyan Holiness Church

The Wesleyan Holiness Church has its roots in the Holiness Movement of the mid 1800's. It is reported that during 'the period of neglect' 1835-1840, two faithful women, Mrs Sarah Lankford and Mrs W.C./Phoebe Palmer, started prayer meetings among other women. They prayed for four years 'for the promotion of holiness.'/The meetings came to be known as the Tuesday Meetings. Support for this group grew and they were later joined by the Wesleyan Methodists and the Free Methodists.

From the beginning the Wesleyan Holiness Groups were abolitionists. They advocated civil disobedience in their struggle against slavery. The group also encouraged inter-racial marriage.

The Wesleyan church was also committed to the emancipation of women. As such Antoinette Brown, was the first woman to be ordained. She held one of the first women's rights conventions in the 1850's. Phoebe Palmer, one of the leading protagonists of women's rights wrote a treatise in defence of a women's right to preach.

In 1859 she wrote:

"Pentecost laid the axe at the root of social injustice Acts 2, relying on a prophecy in the book of Joel, affirms that "in the latter days your sons and daughters shall prophecy.....Seth Cook Rees, a founder of the Pilgrim Holiness Church, insisted that nothing but jealousy, prejudice, bigotry, and a stingy love for bossing in men have prevented women's public recognition by the church. 23

The church, as a sign of equality, removed honorific titles and replaced them with brother or sister. The rigid class system which was present in the churches was also challenged. The church removed the pew rental system, and protested against those who sought money rather than look after the poor.'

Thomas Upham, one of the Holiness preachers, wrote a peace manual. In this he opposed the military chaplaincy, and advocated 'tax resistance'. He also called for the abolition of capital punishment.

The above clearly indicates that the Holiness church was founded on radical tenets. Some of the actions suggested could be said to be in the tradition of the new theology of liberation.

The New Testament Church of God

The New Testament Church of God, is a Trinitarian Pentecostal

church. It has its antecedence in the Holiness Movements of the 1800's. In 1886 a group of nine christian believers, drawn from the Baptist and Methodist churches in the Appalachian border of Tennessee and Georgia, came together because they were disturbed by the lack of spirituality in their churches. Initially, and for some years, the group was simply called the 'Christian Union'.

Among the nine members of this Union were five women; Barbara Spurling, Polly Plemons, Melinda Plemons, Margaret Lauftus, and Adeline Lauftus.

Ten years later the group was strengthened by its merger with another band of christians who were similarly seeking after a 'holier and purer life'. During a revival meeting in the summer of 1896, the group had a strange and unexpected experience. Members were filled with ~~ecstasy~~, spoke in a strange language, and many sick and afflicted persons were healed.

News of these events soon spread throughout the countryside and the ~~Ku~~ Klux Klan came to ridicule and persecute them. C. W. Conn, the Church of God church historian, claims that amid persecution and struggle, the church grew and was joined by other preachers. Together they evangelised the region.

One of the preachers to join this band of christians was A. J. Tomlinson, who was to become the church's first General Overseer in 1909. A. J. Tomlinson is said to have received the Holy Spirit at a meeting conducted by G. B. Cashwell, who had himself received the Holy Ghost experience at Azuza Street, under the leadership of W. J. Seymour.

W. J. Seymour, a black man is possibly the most instrumental person in the development of the Pentecostal Movement. He also seems to be the least recognised of those historical figures amongst Black and White Pentecostals, many of whom are caught up with the history of their own organisations. As such it is still not clear how much of an impact the experiences and world view of this black man has had on Pentecostal theology and thinking.²⁹

However, the church grew out of the working class and poverty stricken areas of the South Eastern states of America. Conn cites the following report from one of the pastors of one of the churches, which says something of the poverty in which these people lived:

"Some of the members of this church could not come to the meeting for want of clothing. I am told that some of their people will suffer want this summer on account of the winter being so severe that they could not work. A number of them asked me to bring them some clothing, as I have taken some there before. I saw little boys of six or eight years old, barefooted wading through icicles, the ground frozen two or three inches deep and the higher mountains covered with snow."³⁰

The minutes of the Eighth General Assembly, 1913, reports four 'Coloured Churches' in the Church of God. These churches were situated in Florida at Coconut Grove, Jacksonville, Miami, and Webster. Two years later Edmond S. Barr was appointed overseer of the 'Coloured Work' in Florida. Thus was put in place the first form of institutional racism in the church of God. It was not until 1975 that the Church removed the system of White and Coloured Departments from its international headquarters in America.

A positive step towards equality must be mentioned here, the church's international college, Lee College, was one of the first Pentecostal colleges to become desegregated.

In many ways the Church's doctrine and practical commitments have always been conservative. They have tended to emphasise holy life and high moral standards. Of the 34 teachings, (1984 Minutes) 13 are concerned with the practical commitments of members and include abstinence from strong drink, tobacco, opium, morphine and ask members to conform to scripture with regard to dress, and adornment. Members are required not to attend dances nor other ungodly amusements. Some of the teachings on practical commitments were germane to the survival of the church in those early years.

It is possible to see how a church founded during a period of economic decline and amongst the poor, would seek to protect rather

than exploit its members. Therefore, some of the practical commitments, especially those related to the abuse of alcohol and drugs although seemingly stringent, provided much needed safeguards and support systems. The commitments were incipiently liberational.

However, having made the above observation, one must note that the focus was on relieving the poor from themselves, rather than removing the systems of oppression. The fight to remove systems of oppression would necessitate political action, which some fundamentalist churches did not see as theirs to take.

Although, the Church of God issued a statement of Human Rights in 1964, in which it claimed equal rights for every citizen in the light of the gospel, this is yet to be realised in its entirety. Although women are mentioned as pioneers and leading evangelists, the full magnitude of their involvement has not yet been recognised. Equal rights for women is still some way off.

The Caribbean and American Evangelism

As already stated the Caribbean of the early 1900's, was a place of ferment. The various labour uprisings across the Caribbean led to the formation of labour unions and organisations. Changes in the economy, including the depression, led to a surplus in the labour force, and low wages. Bad and inadequate housing, health and

educational provisions contributed to social unrest and instability. Africanism and the 'Back to Africa' doctrines challenged ideological complacency.

The 'New Age' missionaries had much to contend with.

The Holiness Movement

According to Paul Thomas the missionary work in the Caribbean was in the main undertaken by the Missionary Bands founded in 1895, and the Pilgrim Holiness Church founded in 1917. The following people were leading and influential figures in the formation of the Holiness Movement in the Caribbean. James Watson a Guyanese who was led to Christ through a strange vision. Miss Ella Ruddock and Miss Susie Schlatter who built a tiny church in the small district of Friendship in Jamaica in 1912. C.O. Moulton and James Taylor were leading lights in the development of the movement in Barbados, St Kitts, Nevis and Antigua.³¹

The Church of God

The Church of God's missionary work among Caribbean Blacks started with work in the Bahamas and gradually expanded to the other islands. I will not attempt to detail the growth of individual missionary activities in the Caribbean islands.³²

An example of the Jamaican experience follows. It is not clear from Conn whether J. Wilson Bell was a white or black American, nor whether he was a Jamaican. But in 1917, J. W. Bell a missionary in Kingston Jamaica sought to be affiliated to the Church of God. In 1918 J. S. Llewellyn went to Jamaica and organised a church with seven members from among Bell's adherents. J. M. Parkinson was appointed to pastor the church. During the years that followed Parkinson and his sister Nina Stapleton worked in the 'slums of the city'. Within five years they had opened five preaching stations in Kingston.

Between 1925 and the early 1950's, the church in Jamaica went through a period which was characterised by growth and expansion as well as by the demise of several of its leaders. Some leaders 'fell into various sins', others, like the American whites could not tolerate the opposition they received from the Jamaicans, still others were not thought to have good leadership qualities:

"Llewellyn had observed in the beginning that the work was in desperate need of an American overseer. Although the Jamaicans were good evangelists, none of them had true leadership qualities, and they needed further instruction in the scriptures and in church organisation."³³

Whatever the difficulties might have been, the church in Jamaica grew and by 1935 there were fifty three churches.

"In 1959 there were 189 churches and seventy five missions, with 11,218 members and thirty thousand adherents. To help in the care of this work there are 152 native ministers and two schools."³⁴

In its missionary work the church repeated its own early beginnings, that of working among the poor and often dispossessed. It continued to work to offset the deprivation felt by the poor, through giving people something to live for, and something to do. The church also became a substitute community, inclusive of the poor.

It was out of the above history that the early migrants came to Britain, the 'Mother Country', firstly to join the armed forces, then to help to rebuild a war-torn economy.

A very useful report compiled by C. Senior and D. Manley in 1955 tried to give a view of the 'host and immigrant' views of their co-existence. The report concluded on a high and optimistic note.

"211. History shows that the people of Britain have been sympathetic and generous in their response to the struggles of others against the ravages of nature, to economic handicaps and misfortunes and to the personal aspirations of the disadvantaged. Knowledge of the background and the goals of the migrant will undoubtedly help to enrich sympathy with positive understanding and comprehension, crucial ingredient in speeding up the adjustment process."³⁵

For thirty five years things have not been easy but black women have been strategic in finding a way to survive and live.

1. A number of pastors and church leaders from a number of Black-led churches have been pursuing Further and Higher Education courses some of which address the question of African peoples in the diaspora.
2. Erskine N.L. Decolonising Theology New York: Orbis/Maryknoll 1981 p.16
3. See for example Curtin P. as quoted in Simpson G.E. Black Religions in the New World New York: Columbia University Press 1978;

Goulert M. as quoted in Bastide R. The African Religions of Brasil Maryland: John Hopkins University Press 1978
4. Bastide R. The African Religions of Brazil Maryland: John Hopkins University Press 1978
5. Erskine N.L. op.cit., p.16
6. Bastide R. op. cit., p.53
7. Articles of State Papers October 8 1535 (Colonial Papers) Birmingham: Birmingham Central Library p.611
8. Simpson G.E. Black Religions in the New World New York: Columbia University Press 1978 p.31-2
9. Ibid p.225
10. Ibid p.38
11. Erskine N.L. op. cit., p.48
12. Ibid p.42
13. Ibid p.44
14. Bastide R. op.cit., p58
15. Ibid p.82
16. Ibid p.81
17. Genovese Eugene D. Roll, Jordan, Roll - The World the Slaves Made New York: Vintage Books/Random House 1976 p.589
18. Ibid p.589
19. James C.L.R. The Black Jacobins London: Allison and Busby 1980 p.20

20. Mulrain G.M. Theology in Folk Culture - The Theological Significance of Haitian Folk Religion Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang 1984 p.47
21. Bastide R. op. cit., p100
22. Mulrain G.M. op. cit., p.241
23. Ed. Ellis P. Women of the Caribbean London: Zed Books 1986 p.27
24. Erskine N.L. op. cit., p.80
25. For a seminal account of developments in the Caribbean 1492 to the 1960's see Williams Eric From Columbus to Castro - the History of the Caribbean 1492 to 1969 London: Andre Deutsch and by the same author History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago London: Andre Deutsch 1963; Rodney W. How Europe Underdeveloped Africa Bogle L'Ouverture Ltd 1988 is also essential companion reading on the subject.
26. Barrett L. African Religions in the Americas in Ed. Lincoln C.E. The Black Experience of Religion New York: Anchor/Doubleday 1974 p.340
27. Rastafarian motto, widely used among Afro-Caribbean youth.
28. Dayton D. The Holiness Churches: A Significant Ethical Tradition in The Christian Century February 26 1975 p.199
29. See for example Nelson Douglas J. For Such a Time as This - The Story of Bishop William J. Seymour and the Azusa Street Revival Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, the University of Birmingham: 1981.
30. Conn C.W. Where the Saints Have Trod Cleveland, Tennessee: Pathway Press 1959 p.30
31. See for example Thomas P.W. and P.Wm The Days of our Pilgrimage 1976 as quoted in Pilgrims in Progress A review of the first 25 years of the Wesleyan Holiness Church in the British Isle 1958 - 1983 Magazine
32. Conn C.W. op. cit., history of the missionary work of the Church of God in America and around the world.
33. Ibid p.62
34. Ibid p.71
35. Senior C. and Manley D. Jamaican Migration to Britain - a report Kingston: Government Printer 1955 p.45

CHAPTER 5

BLACK-LED CHURCHES AND A BLACK THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION

For a very long time Black-led church leaders rejected the notion that they, or their churches had anything to do with theology.

Theology was seen as an academic discipline pursued mainly by those who, according to many preachers, 'had not received their education at Calvary' and who doubted the very fundamental doctrines of the christian faith and who through their disputations created doubt and confusion in peoples' mind. Indeed, who needed theology when one had the literal inspiration of the scriptures, and the power of the Holy Spirit which continually inspires the individual, and reveals the hidden messages of the Word?

The above is the sort of approach to theology which Elizabeth Shüssler-Fiorenza describes thus:

(it) "understands the Bible in terms of divine revelation and canonical authority...it conceives of biblical revelation and authority in a-historical dogmatic terms. In its most consistent forms it insists on the verbal inspiration and literal-historical inerrancy of the Bible. The Biblical text is not simply a historical expression of revelation but revelation itself. It does not just communicate God's word but is the Word of God. As such it functions as *norma normans non normata* or first principle. Its mode of procedure is to provide proof-texts the ultimate theological authority or rationalization for a position already taken. The general formula is: Scripture says, therefore...The Bible teaches, therefore...As Holy Scripture the Bible functions as an absolute oracle revealing timeless truth

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and definite answers to the questions and problems of all times."'

On the face of it Fiorenza's ^{'doctrinal approach'} model fits very much the approach of many Black-led churches to theology. This seems especially so of those founded on White North American fundamentalism. For example the Church of God of Prophecy and the New Testament Church of God whose first article in their list of Declaration of Faith states: 'We believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible'.

Because of this fervent and simple belief in the Word many difficult questions have been answered faithfully, but uncritically, with the words 'the bible says'... Other questions have been answered in such a way as to underplay the different responses scripture gives to the same questions. Dr. Michael Goulder's dialogue with students from a range of traditions, Pentecostal, Evangelical, Methodist, Roman Catholic and others at a Black and White Christian Partnership study weekend at Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, raised just such an issue through the question: Has the kingdom arrived or is it to come? Students struggled with their differing positions and saw with amazement the contradictions unfold. One Pentecostal brother concluded: "Looking at it literally the kingdom is not here yet, but spiritually it is here..."

In the examples which follow we see Black women responding to the scripture in such a way as to make it appear firstly as 'errant',

and secondly as an historical document which cannot be wholly applicable to Black people today.

One sister who was called to preach on a Sunday morning, took as her text 1 Timothy 2. When she arrived at the verses which read:

"Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent."

she instantly, and intuitively, gave the following interpretation:

"That piece of scripture was written for those times. Not for today. We, men and women are called as disciples to preach the gospel, and if the women were to remain silent in church or on the streets we would be failing in our duty. We women are called to preach and teach the word in season and out of season...."

This particular sister had not undergone theological training, nor was she a radical feminist hermeneuticist. However, in the light of her experience as a woman in a Black-led church, as a preacher, teacher and evangelist, she had no alternative but to contradict, or shed a new and different light upon scripture.

The second example comes from a sister in whose church women are not allowed to speak out at business and management meetings. When asked whether it was right for women to be silent, she immediately invoked scripture.

"The scripture says, women should be silent... If that was good enough for those women then it is good enough for us today."

However, when this same sister was asked whether she and her congregation would bring back and endorse slavery, she immediately said:

"No!, Paul was wrong on that score!".

Two major issues, one of the exploitation and enslavement of human beings and the other, the oppression of women, are said by some to be 'founded', if not supported, by scripture. How is it then that in an instant of divine inspiration, the submission of women is erased and in another instant of indignation, the enslavement of Black people is dismissed as wrong and so too the scripture that teaches the compatibility of slavery and christianity?

There are other tensions and questions that have been created by the seemingly inapplicability of scripture to Black peoples' experiences in the diaspora. Is God on the side of the oppressed or the oppressor? Is God on the side of Black people and against racism, or is God on the side of white racists? Why does God not bring down a government which: passes laws which keep families apart, unjustly imprisons our sons and our husbands, and ignores racism which keeps us unemployable and ignorantly undereducated? Why are women still battered and abused, even though they remain faithful to the

teachings of the scriptures and are committed to their churches?

If one takes the doctrinal approach to theology, as that most used by Black-led churches, then one is forced to say some of these tensions and questions remain unanswered, or are not raised at all, but are suppressed. On the other hand the examples quoted above indicate that there are certain things about which scripture is not treated as inerrant, and that there are interpretations and understandings of scripture which come out of the different contexts and experiences of Black people.

For that reason there are those who strongly assert that Black-led churches in Britain today are 'doing' theology. That Black churches in the U.S.A., in the Caribbean and in the continent of Africa have been doing theology for a while now. However, in order to make such a claim then the term 'theology' had to be redefined. Professor Walter Hollenweger amongst others, is said to be a visionary and an advocate of this broader definition of theology and through this redefining of theology is said to have:

"...shattered the narrow limits of what theology is about. In line with the growing claims of Third World theologians, he has been demonstrating that theology is wider than the conventional models of Western academic tradition. Theology is human rational talk about God in the light of divine revelation. There is no valid reason for restricting it to the intellectual exercises of self appointed specialists.....On the contrary, authentic and effective confrontation with God's Word can be, and is in fact being, done in other contexts of human life, with the use of oral, narrative, religious, cultural and symbolic resources.

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Within the Black churches such an oral and popular theology is taking place through the committed christian living and witness of the believers animated and directed by their pastors and leaders.²

In the Americas, theologians like James Cone, Gayraud Wilmore, Gustavo Gutierrez claimed that 'theology was done by persons', not by God, and that theology is done in historical and social contexts.

"Theology is done by persons who, whether they know it or not, are caught up in particular social processes. Consequently, all theology is in part a reflection of this or that concrete process. Theology is not something disembodied or atemporal. On the contrary, theology is the attempt to express the word of the Lord in the language of today--in the categories of a particular time and place. Of course, I am speaking of authentic, relevant theology. No meaningful theology can be elucubrated in disconnection from concrete history, by stringing together a set of abstract ideas enjoying some manner of interior logical connection. No meaningful theology springs forth fully arrayed from dusty tomes of yesterday."³

The suggestion has already been made, that there are a number of tensions and questions raised within Black-led churches and communities which the 'doctrinal approach' to theology cannot fully answer. There is also a reflection on God's word taking place in Black-led churches and these are evident as Kalilombe sees it:

"...in the whole complex of worship, prayer, sermon, exhortations and testimonies, hymns and choruses, prophecies, dreams, counselling, fraternal gatherings, mutual support, care for the sick, the poor and the marginalised..."⁴

The women's responses cited above are perhaps also indicative of a latent understanding of the liberating power of their faith for

today, and in their present situations. This theme of liberation is one which underpins Black peoples' history through slavery to the present day. It took shape in the revolts, the insurrections and was evident in various acts of defiance. Many spirituals and folk songs are a testimony of the struggle for freedom. The theme was present in the actions and messages of Harriet Tubman, Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, Nanny of the Maroons, Marcus Garvey and Aime Cesaire, Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. to name some.

Against the theme of liberation which addresses the present, runs another. It is that which Iain MacRoberts calls, 'eschatological revolution'. This theme is strongly emphasised in Black-led Pentecostal churches. It teaches that in this 'revolution' the second advent of Christ would overthrow the present order and establish a kingdom in which the oppressed are delivered, the poor and humble exalted, and the oppressor punished'.¹⁵

However, there remains an undeniable interface, between the concrete experiences of the everyday material life and the spiritual life of Black people in Britain. In many ways Black-led churches are seeking to address both the spiritual needs as well as the various, concrete experiences of injustice and oppression their members face. The churches are not alone in this. There are a number of other Black community organisations that are engaged in addressing issues of injustice and oppression as these affect Black people church and

non-church members alike. Taken together we see an example of the 'spiritual and the blues' (only in this case it is the reggae and the gospel) working as different 'expressions' around the same theme.

How can we best define in theological terms what is taking place in Black-led churches? In terms of their response to the spiritual and material needs of their members and the wider community of Black people in Britain? It appears that we are in the early stages of developing a Black theology for Britain. This poses the question: do we have to re-invent the wheel or can we seek out and apply a model of theology which gives as near accurate a reading of Black Christians' faith in Black-led churches in Britain today?

The model of theology which seems to come closest to answering some of the questions posed by the Black British experience, in terms of the position of Black people both in and outside the church, as well as the role and power relations of women within the churches is that of the Black Theology of Liberation. This is the model as founded and developed amongst Black church leaders, theologians, and Black communities in America. By visiting this theology, and interrogating what this theology has to say, one hopes to find a near honest reading of what is taking place in Black-led churches in Britain today. However, one must not 'throw caution to the wind' by

expecting to find all the answers in this model, so the approach which follows will be tentative, and inevitably inconclusive.

Black Theology of Liberation

Although Black Theology as a theological model emerged in the late 1960's, its proponents are at pains to point out that Black Theology has its genesis and roots in the Black slave experience and ensuing oppression of nearly 500 years. It was embedded in the songs and the testimonies, but also in the actions and symbols of, and for, liberation which many slaves and freed people were, and are, involved in today. This theology was what gave and continues to give hope and direction to Black people who have been ^{forcefully} deracinated and dehumanised. Black theology's emergence, shape and role is sharply defined by Cone and Wilmore in the following:

"Black theology is not a gift of the christian gospel dispensed to slaves; rather it is an appropriation which black slaves made of the gospel given by their white oppressors. Black theology has been nurtured, sustained and passed on in the black churches in their various ways of expression.....Black theology is the product of black Christian experience and reflection. It comes out of the past. It is strong in the present. And we believe it is redemptive for the future."

This indigenous theological formation of faith emerged from the stark need of the fragmented black community to affirm itself as a part of the Kingdom of God. White theology sustained the American slave system and negated the humanity of blacks. The indigenous Black Theology, based on the imaginative black experience, was the best hope for the survival of Black people. This is a way of saying that Black Theology was present in the spirituals and slave songs and exhortations of slave preachers and their descendants.⁶

Black Theology as a distinct model of theology is relatively new. It seemed to emerge in embryonic form during the formative days of the 'National Conference of Black Churchmen' of the 1960's. The term 'Black Theology' was probably first used by James Cone in the title of his book 'Black Theology and Black Power'.⁷

James Cone in his book 'For My People', outlines three major stimuli that gave rise to the need for Black theological reflection.⁸

The first was the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 60's. This was largely associated with M.L.King Jr. and a number of other church leaders and their congregations. As black church leaders struggled with their communities for justice and liberation it became clear that there was a need for a fresh confrontation with the message of the gospel.

The second, was the responses provoked by the publication of 'Black Religion' by Joseph Washington. The latter contended that there was a unique black culture, a distinctive black religion that can be placed alongside Protestantism, Catholicism, Judaism, and secularism. Washington made other assertions, including that because blacks were excluded from mainline churches they did not have a real theology. The only way in which they could have a true theology was to be integrated into mainline white christian traditions. In opposition to this argument, the black clergy said

that Washington had got his arguments the wrong way round. It was black religion which was christian, precisely because, it had identified the gospel with the struggle for justice in society.

The third, and perhaps most potent stimulant, was the rise of the Black Power Movement. By the summer of 1963 the theme of integration seemed to have run its course, while the message of black nationalism, with a more militant voice, gained ground. During the 'March Against Fear' in Mississippi 1966, it is claimed that Stokely Carmichael seized the occasion to sound the black power slogan. The demands of this militant movement forced black church leaders to examine the relationship between black religion and the quest for identity and power among their people.

The Main Stages in Black Theology

Gayraud Wilmore has outlined three stages in the development of Black Theology. These stages are marked by Black Theology's engagement with a variety of themes and interlocutors.

The first stage began in 1966 with the signing of the Black Manifesto by forty eight Black Church leaders. This marked a departure from the theme of integration, love and non-violence advocated by the civil rights leaders, and heralded the dawn of a more radical interpretation of the gospel. The Black clergy

increasingly realised that an appropriate response was needed to the issues raised by Black power advocates. The advocates had come to be seen as symbolic representations of the Black ghettos, who articulated the realities of the ghettos with an urgency which required attention.

The second stage in the development saw Black Theology being developed as an academic subject which placed it in the university and college curricula. To a large extent this is when it lost its radicalism. James Cone on reflection, thought that the loss of radicalism was also due to the fact that those Black theologians in teaching institutions were not accountable to anyone, neither were they clear for whom, or for what purpose they did theology. Some theologians were afraid to 'rock the boat' for fear of putting their tenure and promotion prospects at risk. There were other external factors for example the Vietnam War and the then government's programme on law and order which served to deflect the issues away from Black peoples' agenda.

The third phase, 1977 to the present, is characterised by the focus on global issues in relationship to the Black communities in America, but also in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The recently organised, Theology in The Americas, (TIA) supported by the National Council Of Black 'Churchmen' was involved in a number of projects which included classism and sexism. The TIA's women's project and

the newly organised, Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) introduced the urgent need for feminism and Marxism to be considered and included in Black Theology. There was also a decisive turn to, and challenge made to Black churches. They were being challenged to realise their liberating heritage and to take on greater responsibilities of service to their immediate and wider Black and oppressed communities.

From the start the central theme of Black Theology was racism. Black theology examined not only the relationship between racism and politics, economics and the structure of society, but also examined racism in theological terms. This examination resulted in a challenge to White churches and theologians on their silence on the conditions of Black people.

"But as we examine what contemporary theologians are saying, we find that they are silent about the enslaved condition of black people. Evidently they see no relationship between black slavery and the Christian gospel. Consequently there has been no sharp confrontation of the gospel with racism. There is then a desperate need for a *black theology*, a theology whose sole purpose is to apply the freeing power of the gospel to black people under white oppression."⁹

Black theology re-examined scripture and found 'a liberating God, the champion of the oppressed'. To think of Christ, the theologians proclaimed:

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"...as non Black in the twentieth century was as theologically impossible as thinking of him as non-Jewish in the first century."¹⁰

Black theology's aim was to affirm Black people as Black, and as God's children.

The task of Black theology, then is to analyse the black man's (*sic*) condition in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ with the sole purpose of creating a new understanding of black dignity ... The purpose of Black Theology is to analyse the nature of the Christian faith in such a way that black people can say Yes to blackness and No to whiteness. ¹¹

Black theology also called upon the Black churches to examine how they had colluded with racism and to look at how they were going to redress this. It was said that by concentrating upon 'spiritual matters' and the hereafter, Black churches failed to connect the gospel with the 'bodily liberation of the poor'.

Black-led Churches and Black Theology of Liberation.

The question still remains, what of the above is applicable to Black-led churches in Britain? Patrick A. Kalilombe has a 'Suggested procedure in doing Black Theology' and it is this procedure that I would like to apply to the Black-led church experience in Britain in order to ascertain the possibilities of Black theology for Black led churches in Britain.

The procedure calls for: a) A fact finding expedition to ascertain who the 'underdog' is, and what is the underdog's material reality. Determine where action for liberation is taking place, as well as where the potential for action lies; b) Reflection, this includes social analysis and conscientization. Social analysis is necessary in order to gain a fuller and deeper understanding of the social, political and economic contexts in which the church is operating. 'It searches out the root causes, the structures, the systems.' Conscientization, or consciousness raising is imperative in that it helps the group to reject oppressive situations, it challenges the status quo as God given or inevitable.

There are of course dangers to be avoided, Kalilombe draws attention to two.

"Social analysis is useless and even harmful if it does not lead into or follow from committed action for change. Conscientization is cruel and dangerous if there is no real hope that things could be changed."¹²

The process which leads to liberative action also calls for alliances to be made between the underdog and those who come in solidarity, perhaps even from the middle class. Meetings and get-togethers are important for consciousness raising, the ensuing liberative action is accompanied by prayer.

To continue: c) Scriptures are revisited. Scriptures are evoked and dealt with in the context of the 'tradition', that is the lived experiences and history of a people. The principles guiding the use of scripture are, suspicion, selection and interpretation. The oppressors', pre-existing selection, interpretation and use of scripture should be submitted to rigorous examination. Scripture should be read with care and caution. The text as well as the subtext, and context should be looked into. Those elements which are suppressed or neglected should be sought out, in case these hold liberational elements; d) Action and commitment. Reflection should lead to concrete action. However, the questions which should be constantly asked are: What is the value in pursuing this action? What are the resources to hand? What is the proper procedure to hand?

Black Churches, and principles a) of the underdog and b) a reflection

The churches as congregations of large numbers of Black people with a preponderance of women, have developed and grown amongst other things, as a result of British racism. They have provided members with to some extent a haven from the traumas of racist experiences, as well as a way of assimilating racism as almost an 'acceptable' part of their daily christian life. It is for some a burden which 'keeps me humble and teach me to pray'. Large numbers of non-members

also consider the churches to be essential, seeing them as providing for their spiritual needs, as well as religiously educating their children and providing the spiritual underpinning for the community. But need racism be just that which keeps people on their knees? Or should we be seeing this prayerful response as another of the survival strategies that Black people, especially women, have put in place? Is survival to be seen as^a precursor to liberational action, or do the two, go hand in hand?

Racism

There are many who have testified to the different forms of racism that they have suffered. From name calling to attacks on their persons and property, to institutional forms of racism, suffered at their work place, in educational institutions, in housing provision and social services. While not trying to define or enter into the complexities of racism that Black people suffer in Britain, it is important to look at an example of racist oppression and some of the ways in which Black people in the church and community have responded. ¹³

Education and racism

There are a number of reports and commissions which claim that Afro-Caribbean children are underachieving in the education system.

These included that of the Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration 1973, the Rampton Report 1981, the Swann Report 1985 to name a few. In the evidence given to these commissions, Black parents overwhelmingly reported racism as a major contributor to the underachievement of their children. Parents cited the low expectations of teachers, the negative stereotyping of their children as ineducable and slow learners, teachers' own racism and racism in the educational institutions. They also said that the school curricula, which omitted Black peoples' contributions to world history, literature, science and technology contributed to the alienation which their children felt in schools.

Black educationalists and researchers found that Black children often had career advice which was based on ill-informed opinions of their ability and potential. Many ended up in jobs without any real prospects for promotion or professional development. Others returned to education via access courses or part-time evening classes. They proved their teachers wrong by gaining examination qualifications and entry to higher education institutions. Another effect of an education system which for years has systematically failed many Black children has resulted in a large group of young 'unemployable' Black adults. These young people are effectively unable to participate in the labour market and now are members of that group forced to 'hustle' for a living. Some of whom have been

criminalised, have become involved in criminal activities, are imprisoned or in mental institutions.

The Churches Respond

In the early years the churches emphasised providing support for church members, adherents and their immediate families. Thus the rise of the Ladies' Ministries, Sunday School, Youth Camps and Youth Clubs all of which facilitated the above. It was not until the mid 1970's that we saw the growth and development of Supplementary schools run by local churches for any Black child who needed supplementary education. This was: a) a direct response to Black parents who were concerned and dissatisfied with the education their children were receiving in state schools; b) the churches widening understanding of the gospel and c) their wider understanding of what constituted community and their responsibilities to it.

In many ways the churches came late to this work, but understandably, we can concede that the early years were spent in building a base and community from within. On the other hand we could say that aspects of the supplementary school were inherent in the Sunday school.

The Supplementary School movement had been spear-headed by several community and/ or politically motivated organisations and

individuals. The churches' involvement added a new dimension to the cause. This working together of church and non-church organisations engaged both in the building of community.

Perhaps it was a sign of the churches maturity that they did not essentially conceive of the schools as places where evangelism had to take place and there was no compulsion for parents or children to become 'saved' in order to benefit from the provision.

So what have supplementary schools sought to do? In the main, they have addressed the question of Black children's underachievement. They have sought to do this by, providing a positive Black ethos where it is normal to celebrate Black peoples' achievements but also where it is expected that the children themselves will achieve; using the skills of individuals who have achieved in different fields; using a range of teaching materials which do not present Black people in stereotyped roles and which counter racist information and assumptions and by helping children and young people to acquire the skills with which to learn.

Although the supplementary schools are peripheral to the main focus of the churches' action, the practise in which these members are involved parallels very much the reflection stage of liberation theology as outlined above. The question remains how far can a few members influence and change the main body of the people?

In the end it might be the extent to which the church supplementary school staff make concrete alliances with other schools across the country with the shared intention of pursuing actions that are liberational, which might determine whether their action will be successful or not. On the other^{hand} their success as forces for liberation might depend on how far those involved in the schools use the scripture as a key to their incipient liberational activities.

Some additional difficulties

The questions raised above are serious especially when viewed in a context where Black churches remain almost intransigent when it comes to confronting racism from the pulpit, on the streets or wherever it appears, as a structural evil. The failure to see its significance in the history of slavery, imperialism and their present day situation in Britain remains at issue. For some churches, especially the ones with organisational ties with America, there are some peculiar difficulties. An example of this is to be found in Ira Brooks' 'Another Gentleman to the Ministry' where he criticises the action of the Church of God in relation to its Black members here in Britain.

"Segregation has occurred within American style Pentecostalism in Britain. Of the scores of popular Pentecostalist churches in the U.K. with U.S.A. ties, not one of them has any decisive say in the selection of their overseer...By this measure, once he is placed into office, his prime role is to implement the rules of his electors. '4

The development of the supplementary schools in a number of inner city Black-led churches opened up other possibilities for action in areas such as housing, and work amongst the elderly. Some of the other developments of Black-led churches' in and around the Birmingham area could be seen as incipiently liberational. The Wesleyan Holiness Church, the New Testament Church of God, the Church of the First Born, the Assemblies of the First Born, the Church of God of Prophecy and the United Evangelical Youth Project which works across Black led denominations and the Shiloh Pentecostal Fellowship are all involved in one or several of the following, supplementary schools, pensioners clubs, advice and resource centres, work amongst the mentally ill.

While providing relief for a number of people caught in the complex web of deprivation, the churches must at this stage realise that their action is in the main reformist and based on a sense of moral indignation. If the action does not ultimately change the system and the structures that perpetuate injustice, then the battle is only half won. James Cone highlights the dangers of this appeal to the morality of the oppressor, and concludes that this was the problem with those who asked only for *integration* and a share in the American dream. This approach lets the oppressor 'off the hook':

"When a people's response to a situation of oppression is defined exclusively by its feelings of moral outrage, an appeal to the morality of the oppressor usually follows... The assumption behind the choice of the method of moral suasion was that the oppressor was unaware of the depth of the evil of

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racism, and that if its demonic consequences were revealed and acknowledged, the oppressor would be morally embarrassed and stop being racist."¹⁵

Any agenda for the future must include some action to challenge and change the systems and structures which are at the root of Black peoples' oppression. The churches might need to make alliances with other like minded groups, Black and white. Already there are alliances being made with, for example, the formation of the Afro-West Indian Council of Churches and the multi-racial Evangelical Christians For Racial Justice. The latter organisation is avowedly engaged in examining and challenging a) ways in which racism has become embodied in the laws and institutions in Britain today; b) is working to raise awareness of racism amongst christians, and c) is encouraging joint action between black and white christians for justice and peace. In recent years the organisation has been chaired by Black christians from Black-led churches, one of whom is the pastor of a church.

Black-led churches, and the context of their tradition

Black-led churches are to be found mainly in the inner cities and urban areas of the country. Their congregations are in the main drawn from the working class. These churches are situated in

communities that are grossly affected by economic decline, social disintegration and physical decay.

For a long time the popular tabloid press and right wing political organisations, would have Black migrants and the white community, believe that Black people were the cause of all the 'evils' listed above.

However, Ken Leech in 'Struggle in Babylon' details some of the major and complex issues that are at the base of the urbanisation and economic and social decline in the areas in which most Black people live. For example, decline in the population of inner cities, caused either by the movement of people out of the city to the suburbs, is a major contributor to urban decline. The fact is those who move out of the city are those who can most afford to, the middle class and the employed. As these people move out they take their wealth, skills and 'middle class trappings' with them. They also leave behind 'a ghetto of the deprived' of both Black and white peoples.

Leech uses the inner London borough of Hackney as an example of urban destruction. In recent years the borough has suffered the seventh-largest loss of population in London since 1971, it has the highest ratio of single-parent families, second-highest ratio of

overcrowding, the second-highest unemployment rate and the fifth-highest number of households without basic amenities.

While in the north a similar pattern emerges:

"Two of the areas which were shaken by uprisings in 1981 were Liverpool 8 (Toxteth) and Moss Side, Manchester. In Liverpool, a social area analysis showed a clear concentration of extreme deprivation in an inner ring of some 70,000, people. Here 60 per cent of heads of households were semi-skilled or unskilled, and unemployment was twice the average for the city as a whole.... In Moss Side, four Enumeration Districts in 1981 showed a pattern of extreme deprivation, using the threefold category of stressful housing, large families and overcrowding. 22 per cent of families were one parent ones, contrasted with over 2 per cent for Greater Manchester as a whole."¹⁵

The polarisation between rich and poor is easily detected by a postal address which says Sparkbrook and one which says Moseley, between Handsworth and Handsworth Wood, Solihull and Chemsley Wood. The difference between those areas recently 'gentrified' as in many inner city working class areas of London, for example the East End of London, Brixton in South London, are stark reminders of the maldistribution of wealth in the country. The divide between rich and poor, as well as the divide between poor white and poor black. The problem of the ownership and control of property is at the heart of this aspect of disadvantage.

Unemployment is another major feature in the 'decline of the inner city' scenario. Contrary to the tabloid press, unemployment is not

the cause of the serious decline of the inner cities which the country has experienced over the past forty years, but a result of 'the collapse of the manufacturing base' in many cities. Leech claims that between 1951 and 1981, 'urban areas lost two million manufacturing jobs, one million of which were from the inner-city area'.¹⁷

The combination of the above forms of deprivation and injustice have resulted in, what 'Faith in the City' has called 'a pervading sense of powerlessness and despair' as well as, resentment and hopelessness. In recent years we have witnessed the revolts and uprisings which have come out of such situations of despair.

The uprising in Handsworth, Birmingham in 1985, must have sent out a poignant message to the Black-led churches, and other churches in the area.

One example of the Black community's respect for, and need of, the Black-led church is contained in the following event. During the uprising of September 1985, one person was killed in a fire. As a mark of solidarity and condolence with the family of the deceased the 'Handsworth Defence Campaign' decided to march peacefully to the burnt out shop front and lay a wreath.¹⁸ Hours before the event I was asked to find a minister. In the words of one of the organisers: *"We want our own priest to lay the wreath, lead the procession and*

the short service." The minister chosen to perform this rite was the minister of the Black-led church, whose congregation worshipped in a building not two hundred yards from the centre of the uprising.

Was this event prophetic and indicative of possibilities? Could this have been the start of a communion in which church and the community are not divided as secular and sacred but one in the Spirit of God, and therefore inseparable?

An overview of the employment situation amongst 'West Indians' provided by the Policy Studies Institute (1984), claimed that unemployment was twice as high for West Indians and one and a half times for Asians, compared to whites. Black people are plagued by 'occupational inequalities', for as well as being unemployed they are also the unskilled and semi-skilled. When they are employed and skilled or professional, they are not equitably represented at the various levels of the industries or institutions in which they work. What message can the churches take from the above? But more importantly how can the churches respond to the situation of the communities in which they are located? Can the churches find a voice which truly speaks from the position of the poor and the destitute?

Black women, racism and sexism

To be Black and female in a white, sexist and racist society is to live with a double jeopardy. To also live with Black men's unchallenged sexism adds another dimension to the problems Black women face in Britain. Some of the effects of sexism and racism are seen in the economic, social and political positions that women occupy. But also in the churches.

Economically, Black women are at the bottom of the ladder. Those who are skilled and professional are mainly found in the caring professions and the public sector. Those women who are unskilled or semi skilled are to be found again in the public sector, employed as cleaners, or catering staff, office juniors or ancillary workers. These women are often caught in the web of anti-social working hours, working early morning or late evening shifts and have no access to professional enhancement and are generally trapped in dead end jobs.

Amina Mama in her article 'Black Women, the Economic Crisis and the British State' pointed out that:

"In accordance with racial differentiation, we are to be found in the lower echelons of all the institutions where we are employed,... In accordance with gender divisions, Black women tend to be employed in particular industries (clothing and food manufacture, catering, transport,...). Jobs in the 'caring' professions (nursing, teaching, community and social work)

exploit oppressive notions of 'femininity', and yet actually involve heavy labour as in the case of nurses, ancillary workers and cleaners."¹⁹

The 1981 Labour Force Survey showed:

"47.2% of white women to be economically active, as compared to 67.6% of 'West Indian or Guyanese', 48.1% of Indian women, 40.5% of African women and 15.5% of Pakistani or Bangladeshi women."
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As part-time workers, some Black women have two or more jobs and work longer hours than their white or Asian sister workers. A reading of the Policy Studies Institute (1984) report suggest that Black women on average, work up to six hours more than white women in part time jobs.

Although Black women are discriminated against, and suffer many disadvantages, Black families' survival depend on the women. They are often heads of families, have more dependants than many other families and are more likely to support male partners who are unemployed.

Black women are often subjected to a wide range of sexist and racist abuse. The depiction of white women in the 19th century as pure, virtuous, innocent and goddess-like meant that black women were, and still are, the antithesis. They were 'sapphires'. The Black woman

was portrayed as evil, treacherous, of loose morals, spiteful and a sexual tigress. Whereas the white female could be more like the Virgin Mary, the Black woman became more and more the scape goat Eve. Some of these stereotypes remain part of the popular consensus in Britain today. As such they impact upon the life chances and experiences of Black women in most significant ways.²¹

State legislation, in for example the Nationality Act of 1981 while giving British women citizens the right to be joined by a husband or fiance, there is a rider which could be used as a restriction to that right. The woman has to prove that the marriage or engagement was genuine and not for the 'primary purpose' of immigration to the U.K.. As the Act in its interpretation is mainly about restricting the migration of New Commonwealth citizens, and African, Caribbean and Asian peoples in particular, one can see the consequences and implications of this on the life of some Black women.

In an earlier chapter I outlined the major role and responsibilities that Black women have within Black-led churches. I also outlined the many ways in which the women within the churches have supported and sustained each other, through their strong networks of women's meetings, for social, educational and spiritual enhancement, through their work among the sick, the poor, children and the aged. I would like to suggest that these actions are all signals of the

liberational potential that is present within the churches.

However, there are areas that have yet to be addressed, not least of which is sexism.

Conscientization

For there to be truly liberational action it is imperative to reject oppressive situations. Is it possible for Black-led churches to be part of this process?

From the start Black people, christians and non-christian were resolute in their rejection of situations which were oppressive and alienating. Although here in Britain the first meetings and church services took place amongst people who were already christians, it was not long before those same christians were evangelising amongst their 'unsaved' friends, relatives and country men and women.

The early church community was therefore built from amongst those most dispossessed and alienated of peoples. By evangelising in the Black communities and organising churches, these Black christians began a process which incorporated the dispossessed and alienated into a body of people.

This call to repentance, to being 'born again' could be seen as a most revolutionary act. An act which required a rejection of the

status quo, and the acceptance of a new life, where one was no longer a slave to sin.

Firstly, by rejecting the 'sinful' life and choosing instead to live one which is Godly, secondly, by entering into the fellowship of the community of christians, the individual had to radically alter her or his outlook on life, priorities and behaviour. Thirdly, the individual was no longer alienated from community but was now a member of a new 'miniature community'. A community held together by a commitment and allegiance on the part of the members to rules and guide-lines which defined a new way of life. In this new community people are given positions, roles, and responsibilities, are treated as equals and cared for. This was unlike their experiences of the wider white community which had rejected, alienated and oppressed them.

Simpson believes *that Pentecostal groups are* 'conceptually revolutionary' because:

"...it encourages an experience through which an individual believes himself to be radically changed and many converts behave accordingly in social situations."²²

Black-led churches could be criticised for responding too conservatively to the injustices meted out to the Black communities they serve. But would this be just when we think of the ways in

which they tried to survive against the odds? The first response was as victims, victims who had to survive. In this case the most important and prudent action to take was one which protected and safeguarded the survival of the community. Thus the survival plans through the evangelism, the development of the ministries to the sick, the poor, the bereaved and the work of the women among each other, many of which were designed and undertaken by the women.

The second response was seemingly a spiritual language to describe material actions, which resulted in the mis-interpretation on the part of both the churches and the on-lookers. Kalilombe cites Hollenweger and Gerloff, both of whom warn against mis-interpretation and misunderstanding of what takes place in Black-led churches. Kalilombe points out that:

"In their verbal formulas most churches borrow the language of fundamentalism, other-worldly escapist pietism, millenarianist expectation of the Lord's imminent return, or the exclusivistic self righteous stances of sectarianism."²³

Thirdly, the 'survival plans' seemed only to work for a relatively small number of people. These plans were founded on the notion of the *ekklesia*. *Ekklesia* here being interpreted as the body of 'born again' believers who lived circumspect lives based on the rules and dogmas of the organisation. This understanding served to exclude many from the supportive body of the church.

Fourthly, many migrants believed that their stay in Britain was to be short lived. As such they thought of themselves as sojourners, and developed a nomadic mentality. This mentality curtailed forward planning, the development of a long-term agenda and participation in social and political action outside the church organisation. Coupled with this was the belief in the 'eschatological revolution'. Why fight to establish a new kingdom here on earth, when there was one being prepared - as the hymn 'Just Over In The Glory land' says:

"I have a home prepared where the saints abide, just over in the glory land, and I long to be with my Saviour dear, just over in the glory land..."

"It will soon be done with troubles and trials, in that home on the other side, I'm going to shake hands with the elders, tell God's people good morning, sit down beside my Jesus, sit down and rest a little while."

Recent developments in and between churches point to the fact that there are some real changes taking place. I have already cited the work of the Afro-West Indian Council of Churches, the involvement of individuals in the Evangelical Christians for Racial Justice and suggested that these are movements in the right direction. These are organisations which have long term programmes laid out to fight injustices. In Birmingham, the work of 'Claiming the Inheritance' must be mentioned. The group is predominantly drawn from Black

christians within the historical christian churches, but they are widely supported by others from Black-led churches. The work of the Centre for Black and White Christian Partnership and that of the Multi-Faith Centre are particularly interesting, as many of the people involved in the courses are youth leaders and pastors of Black-led churches. Last, but by no means least, the presence and work of Professor Hollenweger, at the University of Birmingham has done much to encourage academic research by people from Black led churches.²⁴

The younger women I spoke to were not afraid to articulate their experiences of oppression as real and significant in their lives. Among the youth, many of whom have been harrassed by the police, failed by the education system and suffered a range of other forms of oppression, there is a spirit of resistance. Some young people are members of anti-apartheid groups, attend meetings of socialist organisations, and rallies. They are also active members of their churches.

There are other examples of church elders, leaders and older members who have openly supported the work of Bishop Tutu and the liberation struggle in South Africa. Some of the actions have been tentative and far from militant, but nonetheless overt. One of the elder women I interviewed, was moved to say: 'If I had a bomb and I could get to South Africa, I would 'Bomb up' the place and set Nelson Mandela

free'. Such militant talk, from one of the church mothers... led me to think of Malcolm X and the message of so many Black Power advocates, 'freedom now and by any means'.

Scripture re-visited

Could it be that there is developing a more comprehensive understanding of sin and actions for freedom? Is it possible that the actions outlined above are indicative of a conscientised people, or at least of people who have embarked upon the process? Is it possible to surmise that the actions have come out of a wider understanding of, for example, sin, and ekklesia?

If it is the case that sin is now being 'unconsciously defined' not just as individual, personal wrong doing curable by repentance, but as a wider more systematic and corporate evil, then it is possible that action aimed at dismantling unjust and oppressive systems and the building of a new kingdom here on earth could become a reality.

The liberation theologians broadly argue, and agree that:

"Sin is not...merely a private and individual transgression which can be cured by individual repentance, leaving unchallenged the social order in which we live. Rather it is seen as a social, historical fact and is evident in oppressive institutional structures, in human exploitation, and in the domination of peoples, races, and classes...."

Cont..

Sin builds up corporate structures of alienation and oppression which man, (*sic*) individually, cannot overcome; salvation from corporate evil, therefore, requires participation in those political processes which seek to destroy injustice and misery. Conversion to Christ, whose saving work is seen as radical liberation from all forms of enslavement and alienation, implies conversion to the neighbour, or as Gutierrez puts it, 'the oppressed person, the exploited class, the displaced race, the dominated country. 'To place oneself in the the perspective of the Kingdom means to participate in the struggle for the liberation of those oppressed by others.'²⁵

The definition of 'church' amongst Black-led church groups, at one time meant servitude to the organisation's articles of faith and practical commitment. Much time was spent on exhorting the members to observe their commitments to the organisation. Many sermons were based on extolling the virtues of keeping to strict moral and ascetic codes. The preachers claimed that obedience to these codes resulted in a holy life. The holy life was a prerequisite to entering heaven.

This definition of church was also used to hinder, even the most benign of inter-organisational activities from taking place. Invitations from non-Pentecostal groups, to meet and worship together were either ignored or received with suspicion. At times the invitation to preach in these historical churches, was seized upon as an invitation to preach the real gospel. That is freedom from sin, through repentance and baptism in the Holy Ghost.

Gradually, these barriers have been broken down, with the resulting, inter-denominational activities, some of which have been mentioned above. A similar process has taken place between 'church' and non-church organisations, as between members and non-members, christians and non-christians. Could it be that the frontiers of church are being redefined in such a way as to lead to what Gutierrez calls the 'uncentering' of the church?

"...for the church must cease considering itself as the exclusive place of salvation and orient itself towards a new and radical service of people."²⁶

Could it be that as people meet and become engaged in searching the scripture, and applying them to the initiatives mentioned above that they will there find much to affirm those instinctive actions for liberation? Can the Black churches take further steps in faith and action in the directions they have begun to take? It is possible that out of these affirmative actions could come a real and lasting movement for liberation from corporate and structural sin as well as liberation from spiritual death.

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3. Cone James H. For My People - Black Theology and the Black Church New York/Maryknoll: Orbis 1984 p.172
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7. As discussed by Wilmore and Cone ibid. p.67
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13. See for example Faith in the City The Report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas London: Church House Publishing 1985
14. Brooks I. op.cit. p93
15. Cone J.H. op.cit., 1984 p.90
16. Leech K. Struggle in Babylon London: Sheldon Press 1987 p.31
17. Ibid. p.33
18. Handsworth Defence Campaign, a diverse group of people who came together to campaign for the release and just treatment of those arrested and their families, after the uprising of 1985 in Handsworth Birmingham.
19. Mama Amina Black Women, the Economic Crisis and the British State in Feminist Review No.17 July 1984.

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21. See for example Hooks B. Ain't I a Woman 1982 a polemic account on black women experiences of racism and sexism in America and Bryan B. Dazie S. and Scafe S. The Heart of the Race London: Virago 1985 a portrayal of black women's lives and experiences in Britain since the 1950's.
22. Simpson G.E. op.cit., p.262
23. Kalilombe P.K. op. cit., Selly Oak Colleges 1988
24. Professor Hollenweger is regarded by many as the advocate for Pentecostals in academia, recently retired (1989) from the University of Birmingham.
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CHAPTER 6

**IS THERE A NEED FOR A THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION FOR BLACK WOMEN
IN BRITAIN?**

There are still a number of questions which remain unanswered about, for example, the ordination of women in some churches. Can women be successful priests as well as pastors? If women are able to make contributions to the spiritual leadership and life of the church, why are they not also contributing to the juridical aspects of leadership in their churches?

Women still struggle with the issue of self definition both in terms of how they present themselves as black women and as christian women. Should black women continue to deny their African-ness and cling instead to definitions of themselves which they can hardly identify with? Are they Black but overlaid by a southern white American veneer? Or Black but christian and therefore colourless?.

Should Black christian women be allowed to forget a crucial part of their history; that of slavery and colonisation and the ways in which God, through them sustained and held them and their families as it were 'in the palm of God's hand'?

Today in Britain, there is evidence that God continues through the women to supply their needs according to God's riches in glory. Black women's 'cunning', and their ingenuity in devising strategies for survival, as seen in their evangelism work among other women, and in succouring their families is further evidence of God working through them.

Black women's struggle to keep their dignity, and their fight against sexist and racist abuse, have been long and hard. There have been some, but not many gains. However, every effort must be made to keep those hard won gains. Ways must be found to share those gains with other, equally oppress^{ed} women. Therefore to live within the confines and protection of the women's groups in the churches, appears selfish, as this way of living may only serve relatively few Black women.

One task which Black women might need to address, is how they could replicate these networks and support groups among women who are not members of their churches. They could begin to think of ways to push back the frontiers of their own groups so as to include other women. On the other hand they could be standing in alliance with women in other organisations, who are themselves struggling against institutional oppression, or the personal sexism of both black and white men.

Whichever strategies they employ, we know that Black women's struggle against oppression is multifaceted, protracted and fought at various levels. The struggle for recognition and for parity of esteem in the churches, as well as the fight against Black men's sexism, cloaked as it is in scripture, are some of the fronts on which Black women fight.

Although not in any position to greatly influence or determine the ways forward, it is with some conviction that as a sister and a black woman, that one struggles with the above issues and seeks to appropriate a theological model which is not resigned to, nor accepts as the norm, the existing situation of Black women in the churches, or that sexism is normal and acceptable. Can Black women in the churches find a way of prayerfully and honestly approaching the issues surrounding their oppression?. What if anything can we learn from liberation theologies and the experiences of our American sisters?

Liberation Theologies and Womanist Theology

In the upright triangle model of the church referred to in chapter 2, the men were seen as having juridical and priestly powers, whereas the women had a limited amount of power with some influence in the pastoral aspects of the church. In this model, with the power relations so defined, women appear subservient to the men,

trapped by their sexism and their desire to maintain the status quo. The use of scripture by the men to justify their position, is a cause for some concern.

However, in the inverted triangle model of the church, the women were described as assuming the role of nurturers and sustainers of the spiritual life of the church. They are involved in action which freed people from the bondages and ravishes of sin. They organised and took action to relieve the needy from want, and the bereaved from sorrow. The women are leaders, in that they determine the pace and much of the content of worship. In their role as pastors they are attuned to the spiritual and emotional needs of the individual and of the group. The question still remains however, about what is the model of theology the women hold?

Liberation Theology and Black women.

In recent years we have seen the development of what is commonly known as Theologies of Liberation. There are in the main three groups who are advocates of theologies of liberation; Black Theologians with their Black Theology of Liberation; White feminist women and their Feminist Theology; and Third World Theologians with their Liberation Theology. Each branch of the above has come to develop and/or appropriate Liberation theology from its various points of oppression. Taken together the three groups are said to

represent the contradictions and evils of racism, sexism and classism.

One of the criticisms levelled at the advocates of the above theologies, is that they have not always addressed the issues of race, sex and class as the interrelated triptych. Therefore they could not always appreciate the various ways in which racism, sexism and classism together, impacted upon the lives of black working class women. They have been further criticised for the ways in which they have ignored, or embraced some issues, while acquiescing over others.

"Just as most European and American theologians have acquiesced in the oppression of the West, for which they have been taken to task by liberation theologians, some liberation theologians have acquiesced in one or more oppressive aspects of the liberation struggle itself. Where racism is rejected, sexism has been embraced. Where classism is called into question, racism and sexism have been tolerated... where sexism is repudiated racism and classism are often ignored.'

Some of the leading exponents of Black liberation theology have recently confessed to their major sin of omission - that of leaving Black women out of their theologising.

"We have spoken of the Black religious experience as if it consisted only of our male experience with no distinctive contributions from Black women... Do Black women, as women, have a distinctive contribution to make to our definition of Black religion that is as significant as we claim our Black experience is in the context of North American Christianity? Unfortunately the silence of Black male theologians on feminist issues seems to suggest a negative answer on their part... Some male

Cont..

theologians are blatantly sexist... others regard the problem of racism as the basic injustice and say that feminism is a middle class White woman's issue... others make the controversial claim that the Black woman is already liberated."²

American Black sisters and women scholars, were not surprised by either the omission nor later, by the confession. Jaquelyn Grant among others responded calmly, but nonetheless in peracute words. While not denying the sexism which black women suffer from white men, she focused her attention squarely on black theologians, with the following:

"In examining Black theology it is necessary to make one of two assumptions: (1) either Black women have no place in the enterprise, or (2) Black men are capable of speaking for us. Both of these assumptions are false and need to be discarded."³

Black men are not capable of speaking for Black women. Black theology slighted Black women's experiences and the reality of their oppression at the hands of white and black men, both in, and outside of the church. The indifference of Black theology to Black women's position and continued oppression means, Black theology and the Black churches cannot profess 'to be agents of divine liberation', where the black woman is concerned. Further:

"If the theology, like the church, has no word for Black women, its conception of liberation is inauthentic."⁴

Black theologians developed a black theology opposed to racism, but

not to patriarchy, male control and supremacy. White women too developed a feminist theology of liberation which mainly addressed white middle class women. White feminist theologians and sisters were in sororities of white women academics, but did not open the doors to their black sisters. It followed that the agendas of the above, were either informed by black men's preoccupation with race issues and white women's concerns which did not include those of black woman. Commenting on the situation in Britain, two Black women feminists, Valerie Amos and Prathiba Parmar argued that:

".. the priorities of white feminism concerned issues which in the main have contributed to an improvement in the material situation of a small number of white middle class women often at the expense of their Black and working class "sisters", e.g. short term gains such as equal opportunities and job sharing."⁵

There was always the danger that as long as white women did not address their own racism, they could always use their 'power' to further discriminate against black women. Or, to 'colonise' Black women's issues, thus rendering Black women powerless to address their own concerns.

It was in the face of this omission from Black theology and the obvious inadequacy of white Feminist theology, that Black women began to search for a theological voice of their own.

In June 1988, groups of Black church women in Birmingham and mixed groups in London, had a series of discussions with Dr Kelly Brown, Assistant Professor of Theology at Howard University, and a member of a group of Black women theologians who were developing a Womanist Theology. At these meetings, Dr Brown outlined the developments that were taking place in relation to Womanist Theology in America and discussed some possibilities for women in Britain. Much of what follows is based upon the paper which she gave to this group of women in Birmingham.

One of the first points to be made by Black American women scholars and church women, highlighted the fact that black women suffered oppression from a variety of different sources. It followed that if black women focused on one and not the other, they were only addressing part of the problem.

... "While black women are certainly victimised by racism, our oppression involves so much more than that. Feminist theology as it is done by white women, is also inadequate for black women because it emphasises God's concern to eradicate what they have labelled as patriachalism, a system where men rule and women are subordinated. To be sure, black women are victimised by a patriarchal society but not in the same way as white women are, and again our oppression involves so much more than that."⁶

In the light of the above, black women theologians, and church women, have been grappling with, and:

"trying to describe a theology which attempted to understand the meaning of God's revelation in the light of black women's experience and concerns."⁷

The writer, Alice Walker had coined a term 'Womanist', taken from the Black American cultural expression 'Womanish'. This usually refers to any behaviour which was outrageous, audacious, courageous, or wilful. A similar saying, in the form of a question, is to be found in Jamaican Creole: 'A woman you a turn?'. The meaning is the same. Walker said:

".. a Womanist is a woman committed to the survival and wholeness of the entire people. A womanist is not a separatist, except periodically,... a womanist is traditionally capable, as in Harriet Tubman saying: 'Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me', and her mother saying: 'It wouldn't be the first time.' "⁸

A womanist is also concerned for her own survival. She loves herself in a positive and not self-deprecating way. The person she loves is encapsulated in black womanhood.

"And foremost Walker said a womanist loves herself regardless. A womanist then is one who is proud of, and loves her black womanhood, a womanist is one who is committed and engaged in the struggle for the survival of and the liberation of black people in general, and black women in particular."⁹

Both Black women in the churches and Black female religious scholars have adopted the term 'Womanist', to indicate the distinction between Black Woman's theology, that of Black males, and of white feminist theology. They claim that by adopting

Womanist theology:

"God's activity in human's history is to be seen and understood from the social and political vantage point of Black women as they struggle to survive and be free."¹⁰

The themes and issues that Black women theologians are putting forward are 'in the womb'. They are still being developed. Although much of the discourse on Black Womanist Theology is taking place in America, some Black church women from a cross section of churches (Black-led and historical), have tentatively embarked on a discussion of Womanist issues here in Britain.

Womanist Theology, the main themes

1) Womanist theology starts by recognising Black women's oppression as multi-dimensional. That is racism, sexism and classism as forms of oppression, are inter-related. They often impact upon the lives of Black women in inter-connecting ways. Any analysis of the oppression of Black women must include the triumvirate evils, race, sex and class.

2) Black women have been, and continue to be the key to the survival of the Black family. They have developed ingenious survival strategies to ensure that their children and families are nurtured and sustained. They consistently work against an

alienating, cruel, and oppressive society. A second concern then is, survival.

"A Womanist Theology emphasises God's role in the survival of the Black community. A Womanist Theology emphasises God as Black woman trying to sustain the black family.."'

3) Traditionally, theology has portrayed God and Jesus in such a way as to present them as alien to the Black woman, her concerns and her experiences. Recent developments in Christology and in Black Theology of Liberation have rendered it possible to know Christ as Black. Unfortunately, the Black Christ is mainly a male Christ.

"The Black Christ is still primarily the male Christ. The symbol of Christ has functioned to restore the dignity--the divine connectedness of Black men. God has changed in color, but not in character with respect to women. '²

Womanist Theology therefore challenges the traditional ways of imaging and understanding God and Jesus Christ. Particular attention being paid to those aspects that have aided the oppression of women in the church and society.

4) Womanist Theology will bring Black women to a confession of faith, 'I found God in myself and I loved her ~~fi~~ fiercely'.^{na}

5) The emphasis on Jesus as male. This emphasis has contributed to Black women's difficulties in the churches. Especially to Black women's ordination, as men have often argued that God chose Jesus, a male person, to reflect God's presence in the world. It therefore follows that leadership and ordained clergy must be male. A Womanist theology would seek to define the relationship between Jesus' maleness, and his universal qualities as the Christ of faith.

By using the model of Black Theology of liberation as outlined in the previous chapter, I will seek to apply the principles to the situations that Black women find themselves in Black-led churches here in Britain. At the same time it is intended that the issues raised by Womanist Theologians will remain central to, and inform the discussion.

Black Women in Black-led Churches some issues raised via Black Theology of Liberation and Womanist' Theology.

In the previous chapter I outlined the multiplicity of Black women's oppression in Britain. The outline provided a context in which Black women both in and outside of church organisations are living and operating. It was noted that in many ways the plight of Black women, especially working class women, has largely remained unchanged over the past thirty years.

Black Women and the principle of a) the underdog and b) a reflection

Black women in society and in the churches

Black women are still stereotyped in negative ways. Often the stereotyping, as well as the institutional practice, are of a racist/sexist nature. The stereotyping in the form of an abusive statement might carry the racist tag 'wog' as well as the sexist one of 'slag'. Both terms could only be applied together in reference to a Black woman. Black women face racist and sexist discrimination in various institutional practices. Take for example the way interviewing panels are constituted, without regard to race or sex equality. How does a black woman fare when her performance might be judged by men who are both sexist and racist? Interviewing panels consisting of white males who, 'inadvertently' do not put their company's Equal Opportunity Policy into operation, or are not themselves committed to women's equality or anti-racism, are often those before whom black women find themselves.

Although Black women within the Black-led churches have supportive mechanisms, in the form of meetings and other activities, this does not mean that they are exempt from sexist, racist or class oppression. What is clear however, is that they had learnt how to

survive. The survival mechanisms they have adopted have helped them to eschew confrontational and conflictual situations. Situations were avoided which called for a high profile in a patriarchal context, or which required 'male attributes' as for example, in political activities. Such activities would have demanded political skills, comparable to the levels of the 'host' community. Some activists such as Claudia Jones and C.L.R. James, had already achieved a level of political competence in America and the Caribbean prior to coming to England. But not many of the peasant and working class adults had been involved in party political activities before coming to Britain and were therefore not ready for such involvement. To compound the situation, many of the christians were of the view that, if you were a christian then you should not be involved in politics. They seemed more overtly concerned about the spiritual rather than the material well-being of their church communities and the wider Black community.

But have these survival strategies not resulted in, or contributed to, an acceptance of the status quo, rather than practical, organised resistance? Have Black-led churches not been exonerated by Black women, even though they, by and large remain patriarchal in their leadership structure and continue to deny women priestly roles? In this patriarchal structure, do Black women not remain the underdogs?

Black women in the ministry

It is clear that discrimination of a sexist nature takes place in Black-led churches. In terms of the ministry we see overt sexist discrimination being applied in the ordination of women, which disallows them from undertaking 'priestly' work, and be in juridical positions in the churches.

Many churches still maintain that women can be pastors, but can never be ordained to take on the priestly functions of baptising converts, giving the Lord's supper or leading the ceremony of the Washing of the Saints' Feet. In churches where membership to the executive council is based upon whether or not a person is ordained, then women are automatically disqualified from taking any part at this level.

Although at closer inspection most of the women, and some of the male pastors are aware of the inequitable position that women are in, there seems a reticence on the part of either group to challenge the traditions and the interpretation of the scriptures that have given rise to these discriminatory practices in the churches.

One of the few female pastors interviewed, was clearly angry about the position she had found herself in. She reported that she had

carried this anger for years, but felt she would not be listened to if she were to articulate her thoughts. So although she is unhappy about the situation, she had resorted to being 'quietly discontented', afraid that she might cause offence if she were to openly confront the powers that 'keep her in her place'.

"For many years I have pent up anger... ..because I don't see the reason for having women ministers if they are going to stop at a certain point. They can't marry, (couples), they can't bless babies, they can't baptise candidates...If they are called like anybody else is called, then I think the calling does not just stop where man says it should stop. They have got a calling to the ministry...I would love to see women do everything. I do not see what rule or biblical foundation says women should only go so far.....If we look at the teachings it's the men who are making the decisions, they say what women should do. The ordained men on the floor decide with a show of hand."

It seems that one of the ways in which the oppressors secure their position against the oppressed, is by presenting oppressive situations as God given. Although this might be against their better judgment and suspicion, they argue themselves into accepting the existing situation. Notice for example the use of 'if' in what another female pastor had to say:

"If it does operate that there is discrimination in the church then it is because of a misunderstanding of the scripture in a lot of ways....."

Having applied the principle of suspicion to the use of scripture, she then went on to say:

"I just basically think it is because of the way things were done in the early church and from the beginning. One cannot alter that situation, the male being priest of the home, male being one that does the teaching and preaching and ministering in the Old and New Testament...even though women did help and did a lot."

As the conversation developed, and the contradictions became more and more obvious, the pastor again applied the principle of suspicion, but still with some caution:

" Women were prophets, in the bible prophets married to prophetesses, but they (the women) were never completely the dominant....Come along to the New Testament, Jesus chose 12 disciples. Yet he had many women followers, many women were doing things....He did not treat women badly."

One of the younger women interviewed said categorically:

"...as long as women are right with the Lord they should be ordained."

There are certain conclusions which could be drawn from the above. The first is that women like men are called to the ministry, but there appears to be something different in the call each sex receives. It could be that men are more right with the Lord than are women. If this is the case what makes men more right than women? Is it possible for men to share this recipe for rightness with women? Why should women who are called to the ministry be denied ordination? It is possible that what we are seeing in Black-led churches, is advantage being taken of oppressive and

discriminatory practices which have been built into the system and preserved through tradition and the uncritical use of scripture. Coupled with this is the fact that no one, once in a position of power, wants to surrender that power. Further, in a racist society it is difficult for Black men to become leaders and have positions of power in areas such as industry and politics. Black-led churches offer them both position and power.

Black men in Black-led churches appear to have taken their position without questioning the sexist, and patriarchal basis on which this rests. Their failure to question or challenge the oppression of their sisters, to see that they are a part of the problem, means that they too have become oppressors in their own right. On the other hand, the sisters who keep the churches going by their presence, their tithes and their untiring support and work are the under dogs when it comes to sharing the juridical and priestly roles of their church.

Women, charged to be circumspect in dress and behaviour.

Another way in which women are kept in positions of servitude, is by the demands made upon them to be circumspect in their dress and behaviour. Ruth Borker in her discussion with evangelical church members in America, cites three principal meanings church members drew from the Bible, on the wearing of hats.

"1) subordination, 2) dignity or modesty, and 3) formality."¹³

In her summary Borker concluded that the wearing of hats functioned to indicate membership and inclusiveness, to give women a particular status amongst other women and church members, as well as to express the nature of a relationship between husband and wife or males and females. Further, by applying Durkheim's notion of organic solidarity to the situation, Borker was able to outline how the wearing of hats by women in these churches, could be justified as a way of recognising social differences and interdependence and the creation of order. This may be the case, however are these social differences, and the ordering of relationships not man-made? Borker reiterates, the dominant meaning church members gave to her for the wearing of hats was:

"the subordination of woman to the man, both within the church and in the home."¹⁴

In the above we see the roles and responsibilities but also woman's gender being defined as inferior to that of a man.

In the chapter 'Defining the Black Church Sister' I suggested that some Black women did not overtly agree with the notion of their subordination in relation to dress and circumspection. They preferred instead to see these as ethical and moral constructs designed to delineate between what is the church and what is the

world. But even so, why ~~should women~~ be made to feel that they must bear the brunt of the responsibilities in maintaining the lines of demarcation between the church and the world?

On the other hand, other women have subverted these requirements and are dressing and behaving in ways they feel are right and appropriate for them. As one sister said:

"People are making their choices, they dress, look and go where they want to."

This subversion may be judged as disobedience to the rules of the organisation, or even as disobeying scripture, as another sister pointed out:

"It's wrong that we should go against the doctrine, when we go out people associate us with the world by the way we dress."

Could it be that in fact, women who subvert these teachings are intuitively suspicious of their 'scriptural basis', with their anti-woman bias, and see them as 'man-made' or at least to have come from a male interpretation of females' reality?

Although all members are required to promote modesty, it is to the women that the majority of rules are directed. It is also the women who are expected to be of a 'meek and quiet spirit'. When modesty and meekness are taken together, and when they are not qualities

equally expected from male members of a group, then the end result is the subordination of women to men. It is only when these qualities are expected from both males and females that we could say the relations are based on equality.

Black women and Images of God

One area of oppression which has not been overtly questioned in Black-led churches is that of how God is portrayed. Can the black woman find God in the images that are presented to her? How does she identify with this God? God is portrayed in a number of ways to the black woman. He is found in songs and choruses, prayers and sayings. God is also imaged in a variety of different ways. At times God is overwhelmingly the male God, and directly referred to as father:

"Father I stretch my hands to thee..."

"Heavenly father I magnify you..."

"Father I love you, lay my life before you..."

The honorific titles frequently given to God are those which highlight God's maleness; God our master, overseer or superintendent, King, Lord our God. Many of these images are those, which when used in every day life, strike a chord of deference and submissiveness.

Some of the above titles seem to come from an era, perhaps of slavery, when the white christian God was portrayed as the overlord, master or overseer, a male person to be feared and venerated.

At other times terms such as father, far from meaning an ever present, loving, and supporting person, could for many Black families and young people, mean the absent one, the imprisoned one, the unemployable, the harsh and unloving person who takes out his frustrations on the rest of the family.

On the other hand, it is possible that the emphasis on the maleness of God is indicative of a people who long for the absent 'loving father'. Therefore, God is conceived in the minds of the people, and the women in particular, as the 'surrogate' father. To this God, are attributed all the qualities that an imaginary, even fantastical 'father/husband' would have.

At other times God is the familial God who is both father and mother, sister and brother. According to the chorus, and the re-written old Methodist hymn below:

"He's my father, my mother, my sister, my brother, He's everything to me everything to me..."

and

"Praise to the Lord, who doth nourish thy life and restore thee,
Fitting thee well for the tasks that are ever before thee,
Then to my need He like a mother doth speed,
Spreading the wings of grace o'er thee

Women and men both make much use of scripture where God is
portrayed as mother, as in Deuteronomy 32: v18:

"You are unmindful of the Rock that begot you
and you forgot the God who gave you birth."

and Isaiah 46: v3-v4 where God is a loving, caring mother:

"Harken to me, O house of Jacob,
all the remnant of the house of Israel,
who have been borne by me from your birth, carried from the
womb;
even to your old age I am He, and to grey hairs I will carry
you.
I have made, and I will bear;
I will carry and will save."

At times a woman's tender care for her child might cease, but as
the hymn reminds the women, God's love never ceases:

Can a mother's tender care cease towards the child she bears...
Yet she may forgetful be....

The above seem to suggest an intuitive understanding of the male
and female attributes of God. They are often referred to but the
implications are not fully assimilated into the structures and
practices of the churches. If the images of God as mother, father,

sister and brother are not 'aberrations' then they could be symbols of liberation?

Imaging Jesus

The maleness of Jesus is often used as the main stumbling block to the ordination of women. The argument goes that in the ordained ministry it is Jesus the male who is being re-presented. This is supported by a reference to those males who are desirous of the office of a bishop. That person, according to 1 Timothy 3: v1-v7 must be:

"...the husband of one wife... for if a man knows not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church?"

Further, as a woman cannot be ordained to become a man then, it follows that she has to be a man to become ordained. The arguments about equality in Christ through water baptism, baptism in the Holy Ghost a holy life and a calling to the ministry, seem not sufficient for female members of the churches, who need that other quality!

When women sing the chorus:

"To be like Jesus, to be like Jesus, that's all I ask, to be like Him, all through life's journey from earth to Glory, that's all I ask, to be like him"

Which aspects of Christ are they wanting to acquire? At the cost of being facetious, could it be suggested that the women want to take on Jesus' maleness in order to gain their full and equitable status in the churches? Or do the women in their wisdom see Jesus as their Jesus, with qualities which are often said to be female, but not exclusively so. The choruses and songs suggest this.

Jesus is gentle, pure and kind:

"Jesus, how lovely you are !
You are so gentle, so pure and so kind
You shine like the morning star:
Jesus, how lovely you are."

Jesus is the one who cares and understands:

"Standing somewhere in the shadows you will find Jesus, He's the only one who cares and understands, standing somewhere in the shadows you will find Jesus and you will know him by the nail prints in his hands"

Jesus is also the one who is a rock in a weary land:

"The Lord's our rock in him we hide,
 A shelter in the time of storm;
 Secure whatever ill betide,
 A shelter in the time of storm
 A shade by day defense by night
 A shelter in the time of storm.
 Jesus is a Rock in a weary land.. "

In chapter two, I suggested that the women in Black-led churches are the ones who, to a great extent, dictated the mood and gave direction to the services, by the songs and choruses they choose. These songs and choruses also bear evidence to what are the main and recurring themes in Black-led churches. Survival is one of the main themes and Jesus appears as central to it. Jesus appears as the one who protects, cares, shelters and who is "the rock". Here Jesus is seen very much as a reflection of the women themselves. The image of this Jesus is one which the women find in themselves, understand and affirm. How right of Womanist Theology to single out this aspect of black, saved and unsaved, christian and non-christian women's life as central to their understanding of God in Christ in them, and working through them. It is after all commonly held that black women have been, and continue to be, central to the survival of the black family and therefore the community.

Other characteristics of Jesus like, love, obedience, faithfulness, mercifulness, compassion and humility, are the ones which the women seek to emulate, rather than his maleness. These qualities are not

exclusive to women and certainly it could be argued that anyone who would be like Jesus, should seek after them.

One cannot say that there are overt, intentional and systematic programmes set out by the women in the churches to combat their oppression. And if there are, the women have not named them as such. However, what is clear is that there are 'actions' that are indicative of freedom, and symbolically liberational. The actions include those taken:

to build up the churches as communities that reflect a female spirituality

to emphasise the survival of the family and the community as paramount

in the choruses, use of scripture and songs which emphasise Jesus' characteristics as non-sexually defined

in language which talks of God as the loving, protective and supportive father/husband.

Even at this early stage we can see evidence which suggest that many black women in the churches have over the years been in the position of the *Evangelically Poor*:

"They are all those who place themselves and their strength at the service of God and their sisters and brothers; all those who do not put themselves first, who do not see their security and the meaning of their lives and actions in profiting from this world and accumulating possessions, honor, power, and glory, but open themselves to God in gratitude and disinterestedly serve

Cont..

others, even those they hate, building up means of producing a more worthy life for all...."¹⁵

Presently, the above factors are only potentially useful to a British Womanist theology. As black women, we need to see how through our situations in our churches, in relation to other women in other churches and those who do not belong to any church, we can make alliances. Alliances which will lead to black, poor, destitute and alienated women questioning and finding ways to reject oppression as a norm and God given, and thereby continuing the process of transformation, so necessary to the creation of God's kingdom here on earth.

Scripture re-visited

Since much of the above forms of oppression and discrimination are presented as verified by scripture it is important for black women to re-visit scripture in the hope that there they will find elements of liberation, hitherto suppressed. Some of these elements may indeed point the way to further and future actions for liberation.

Taking the principle of suspicion as a starting point, black women might wish to begin by asking some of the following questions about

the scriptures, which are so effectively used to keep them in their place.

We already know there has been, and continues to be, wide ranging debate, claims and counter-claims about the authenticity of authorship, and difficulties with the translations and interpretations of scriptures. Much of this debate has not touched Black-led churches because of the doctrinal approach they have to scripture. In fact many church members might well see any such attempt to approach scripture with 'suspicion', resulting in one's loss of faith and of being backslidden.

Having found Jesus in themselves through for example, the theme of survival, the women could well ask, can we not find Jesus elsewhere in ourselves? To what extent has Jesus been hidden from us and why? Such questions might well lead to others; like in whose interest is it that Christ be hidden from black women? Given the historical experiences of African women in the homeland and in the diaspora, if the scriptures were written by them what would they want to include?

In order to begin to answer some of those questions black women might have to ask by whom, for whom and when and under what conditions were these scriptures written?

Boff and Boff suggest there are three levels of liberation theology that run alongside each other and are practised integrally, the professional, the pastoral and the popular:

"It is not hard to see what liberation theology is when one starts at its roots--that is, by examining what the base communities do when they read the Bible and compare it with the oppression and longing for liberation in their own lives. But this is just what professional liberation theology is doing: it is simply doing it in a more sophisticated way. On the middle level, pastoral theology uses a language and approach that draw on both the ground level (concreteness, communicability, etc.,) and the scholarly level (critical, systematic analysis and synthesis)."¹⁵

In their scheme, Black Womanist theology in Britain, appears to be operating at the popular, sometimes at the pastoral but not yet at the professional/ academic level. As one looks at the possibility of the development of a Womanist theology of Black women in Britain, it appears that such a possibility is a long way off. Until such time, black women will need to continue to borrow from those who are already doing such or a similar theology.

White women theologians such as Elizabeth Shüssler-Fiorenza has been seeking to address some of these very questions raised above from the point of view of (white) women and suggests that amongst other things:

"the realization that the *Sitz im Leben* or life setting of a text is as important for its understanding as is its actual formulation...Biblical texts are not verbally inspired

Cont..

revelation nor doctrinal principles but historical formulations within the context of a religious community."¹⁷

The above realization has contributed greatly to the 'methodological insight of historical criticism'. Fiorenza points out that it is through the study of the social world of women and men in early Christianity and of Israel that we gain a fuller understanding, and a deeper insight, of the context in which they lived. A thorough examination of the socio-historical context of early christian men and women could also serve to reveal the hidden history of women, their contributions, their power, their struggles, sufferings and hopes. How could black women benefit from this approach in their struggle for their liberation and for the transformation of church and community?

Let us take for example the question of the definition of the priestly ministry which excludes black women from ordination.

The model of the priestly ministry in use in many Black-led churches is one which suggests that the priestly ministry is the prerogative of males. Some ministers and women members argued, as in the example given in chapter two, that their position on the issue is scriptural. If the scripture is the word of God, then it is not open to interpretations that would in anyway detract from its message or its meaning. It follows that scripture is not only used

to justify a position taken, but scripture dictates the position that should be taken.

We find for example in the *Minutes* of the 1986 Assembly of the Church of God, (the New Testament Church of God in Britain) the following given as a justification for bestowing the office of a bishop on a member:

"The applicant for ordination must meet the Biblical requirements as set forth in 1 Timothy 3 v1-ff:
The saying is sure: If any one aspires to the office of a bishop, he desires a noble task. Now a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, sensible, dignified, hospitable, an apt teacher, no drunkard, not violent but gentle...."¹⁸

Here the description of a 1st Century "bishop" is transposed into a prescription for a 20th Century bishop. The above list of qualities is presented, as given, and therefore not open to negotiation or alteration.

Because any interpretation of scripture which does not appear to have been 'inspired by the Holy Ghost' is suspect, it is possible that what follows might be seen as fallacious.

Elisabeth Fiorenza in her examination of the development of the ordained ministry, traces the ways in which 'ministry' evolved from one which Jesus defined as inclusive of all, to one which became an

adaptation of the stratified Graeco-Roman household and society. This latter model of ministry appeared to have been refined by Ignatius of Antioch in the 2nd Century and has been the blue-print for almost all subsequent developments in the ordination of people to the ministry.

James Dunn in *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* asks a question central to the debate around ministry and church: "Can we see the later Church already mirrored in the disciples gathered round Jesus?" He suggests that there is evidence in the affirmative and in the negative:

"The evidence most clearly in favour of an affirmative answer is as follows. (1) The use of *ekkle-sia* (assembly of God's people, later 'church' - Matt. 16. 18. 17). (2) He chose *twelve* disciples, and almost certainly regarded the twelve as in some sense representative of Israel (twelve tribes - note particularly Matt. 19. 28/ Luke 22. 29f.). (3) He spoke of his disciples as God's flock.... (4) Jesus thought of his disciple as a family....; the disciples were those who had converted and become as little children, members of God's family and sharers in his kingdom.... (5) At the last supper Jesus explicitly described their fellowship in terms of the (new) covenant.... (6) We should note also the degree of organisation among the followers of Jesus implied by Luke 8. 3. and John 12. 6... '9

On the other hand Dunn asserts that:

" (a) Discipleship of Jesus did not entail joining anything that could be properly called a community. There was no clear dividing line between those who actually left home to follow Jesus and the much wider circle of disciples which must have included many who stayed at home; membership of Jesus' family was dependent on doing the will of God, not on following Jesus (Mark 3. 35)..."

(b) The role of the disciples as the new Israel appears to have been reserved for the future, a role not yet entered upon. It would be a feature of the imminent end time, part of the new covenant, the new age which Jesus believed would be initiated by his death and vindication.... There is no evidence that they were regarded or acted as functionaries, far less a hierarchy, constituting a community gathered round Jesus in Palestine....

(c) It is important to realise that this movement centred and depended wholly and solely on Jesus himself. Discipleship meant 'following' Jesus. He alone was prophet and teacher. The only real authority, the only real ministry was his...²⁰

Dunn concludes that in the light of the conflicting evidence, it would be wiser not to speak of the community of Jesus or the community around Jesus. Any concept of ministry must also be derived from Jesus alone and not from those gathered around him.

What was clear was that Jesus' ministry was based on inclusiveness and wholeness. As Fiorenza points out Jesus proclaimed a new kingdom as in Luke 17 v21; *..for the kingdom of God is in the midst of you*; this kingdom was unlike any previous. It was a kingdom in which according to Luke 7v 22:

"the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news"

This new kingdom was also characterised by the 'festive table-sharing' at a wedding feast. It was a wedding feast which did not include people because of their aspiration to the priestly traditions of the Pharisees, neither did it depend on the guests' ritual cleansing. The guests were anyone who would come, as shown

in the parable of the Great Feast' of Luke 14 v16-v24. Those who came were the poor and destitute, the sick, the sinners, the tax collectors and prostitutes.

Women and Jesus' ministry

Women were a significant feature in Jesus' ministry. Women were among those to whom Jesus ministered. This ministry brought wholeness to women, as seen in the stories of Jairus' daughter and the woman with the haemorrhage, who when healed, had their life giving powers restored to them. They were forgiven of their sins, as in the woman at the well of Samaria and released from the bondage of evil spirits. Jesus' ministered to both Jewish and Gentile women and none was excluded.

Not only were women ministered to by Jesus they were also followers as seen in for example, John 4 v1-v42 the story of the woman of Samaria; Mark 14 v1-v8 the woman who anointed Jesus' feet; the three women, Mary Magdalene, Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, in Luke 8v2-v3 who ministered to Jesus of their substance; and the Galilean women, including Mary Magdalene in Mark 16 v1-v6 and 8a, who broke the story of Jesus' resurrection. So women were not only passive, silent disciples but they too were charged with proclaiming the word.

Both Heine and Fiorenza assert, with varying degrees of vehemence, that Jesus did not lay down any strategies for the dismantling of patriarchal structures. Instead he subverted them by preaching about a different future, and by promoting different forms of human relationships, so relationships which were based on a hierarchy of positions are eschewed.

The following are given as texts in which Jesus challenges patriarchal marriage structures (Mark 10v2-v9 and 12v18-v27); promotes an a-familial ethos in the Jesus movement (Mark 3v31-v35) and envisages domination-free relationships amongst the disciples as seen in Mark 10v29-v30; Mark 10v42-v45 and Mark 9v35-v37).

What if anything can black women in the churches learn from the above? Is there anything which can be applied to our circumstances today as we seek to follow Jesus? Susanne Heine suggests:

"....however, some major doubts arise as to whether these criteria can be transferred so easily into another context. What about women who do not travel but live at home? Who cannot be without possessions because they have children to look after? Who do not want to or cannot avoid the power of eros... The radical ethics of the itinerant preachers for the sake of the kingdom of God calls for an exodus from the ties which women mostly make."²¹

Women in the early church movement

Women were clearly involved in the early church and missionary movements, even though the emphasis on men and their contributions overshadowed that of the women. Some of the blame for this oversight must also rest with the fact that the 'records' were written and interpreted by men. ~~Heine~~ for example draws together some of the debate surrounding Junia(s) in Romans 16 v7. Was Junia(s) female or male? According to the research work of Bernadette Brooten and Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, Junias has been transformed from woman to man throughout the centuries.

Brooten found that:

"Junia does not now appear as a feminine name either in the critical edition of the Greek Nestle text nor in the translations. Instead, Junias is written, which would have to be a Graecized and abbreviated form of a male Latin name Iunianus. But there is no evidence of such a name even in non-biblical texts, while there is for the female name Junia. Junia is attested by the Chester Beatty Papyrus of the third century, in other words the earliest manuscript that we possess for the New Testament letters, but from the thirteenth century it is 'refantasized' into the male name Junias. The later history is also interesting. The much calumniated church fathers preserve the feminine form. Brooten cites John Chrysostom, ...who has more interest in dealing honestly with the tradition than in deleting women: 'There is something great about being an apostle. But to be pre-eminent among the apostles - think what marvellous praise that is. They were pre-eminent by virtue of their work and their honest tasks. How great the wisdom of this woman must have been for her to have been found worthy of the title apostle.' The last link in the chain of this historical development is that the latest edition of the Greek text of Nestle has deleted the feminine variant of the name from the critical apparatus altogether."²²

In spite of what could be called a 'cover up', a number of women who seem to span the continuum of feminist theologians, have been engaged in uncovering the role and involvement of women in the scriptures and in particular their involvement in the formation of the early church.

We now know that women were prominent Christians, some of whom like, Mary the mother of John Mark, (Acts 12v12-v17) and Nympha (Col. 4. 15) were leaders of their own house communities. Women were involved at every stage of the missionary movement. They were converts like the wealthy Lydia (Acts 16v14), and Prisca, who evangelised in Corinth, (Acts 18v2ff); others like Junia and Prisca suffered persecution with Paul (Rom. 16. 1-16). Phoebe was a deacon, and greeted as such by Paul in Romans 16 v1.

On the question of the position these women held in the missionary movement, Fiorenza points out that titles such as co-worker, in the case of Prisca, sister, as in that of Apphia, *diakonos*, as when applied to Phoebe and apostle as in Junia, all indicate equality and not subordination.

As the number of Christians grew in different localities, so house churches were organised. It would appear that these house churches were organisations of equals:

"However, basic for their organisational structure was that as a religious cult or private association the local church conceded an equal share in the life of the association to all its members. Membership in such an association of equals, therefore, often stood in tension to the traditional patriarchal household structures."²³

These organisations as they developed had to address a series of questions and tensions. They included the relations between males and females, the question of equality in Christ, *-neither male nor female, Jews nor Gentiles*, and those distinguishing features which marked the church from other religious communities and political/patriarchal institutions. Central to the discussions were the insights and opinion of Paul.

While Paul is credited with much thoughtful insight and exposition on the equality and interdependence of the total community, it is Paul who also introduces patriarchal images and metaphors into the language which subsequently became an influential part of the fundamentals for the organisation of church structures.

"Although Paul stresses his parental affection toward his "children", whom he has converted, he nevertheless opens the door for the re-introduction of patriarchal authority within the Christian community as the "new family of God" that has "fathers" here on earth, not just one and only one "father" in heaven....By claiming "to have given life" to his children he plays down the natural birthing power of mothers, and associates "fatherhood" with baptism and rebirth. Thus Paul makes it possible for later generations to transfer the hierarchy of the patriarchal family to the new family of God."²⁴

The first century church was organised on egalitarian structures,

with the possibility that positions and functions would be shared on a rotating basis by members of the organisation. The early second century saw a shift from charismatic and communal authority to an authority vested in local officers. In time these officers were to assume the role of decision makers as well as teachers of the community.

It is from the Pastoral Epistles that church organisation is advocated in terms of gender and age attributes, and is understood as a patriarchal structure. This structure is dependent on the 'superiority' of certain positions and functions, and conversely on the subordination and inferiority of others. While there are male and female presbyters, and deacons, women presbyters have a restriction placed upon them. They are not to have authority over men. Consequently they are rendered ineligible for the post of a bishop or overseer.

Florenza cites Ignatius of Antioch as the first century bishop, who accomplishes the theological task of the particularization of the church. Ignatius understood there to be only one bishop, who represented God on earth. He was to be assisted by presbyters and deacons. 'In this pattern the bishop represents God, the presbyters are the apostles, and the deacons Christ himself.' This ordering of roles and positions was derived from 'an archetypal relationship

between the one God in heaven and God's representative or *typos* on earth.'²⁵

It is the writings of the Pastoral Epistles and that of Ignatius of Antioch, which have determined the opposition to ordination of women. This understanding of 'church' / community is far removed from that which Christ envisaged.

The patriarchal structures the churches have become consolidated into are inequitable, depending as they do on the subordination of over half of their congregations. They are the embodiment of a transgression, a sin. They are founded on laws that contravene the message of equality of males and females, freedom and liberation from patriarchal structures, and service to the poor.

It would seem that any organisation that would want to replicate structures which are oppressive, which deny total involvement of the majority of its membership must be seen as directly opposed to emancipation from oppressive sinful systems. Especially so as they need not be so constituted.

Black-led churches in Britain could rethink their position, repent from the transgressions, both of denying women their ordination, and adhering to organisational structures which are based on patriarchy. To do this would further the cause of liberation which

the churches are embarked upon. To do this would be to practise the prophetic ministry to which the church is called. To create a church on the basis of egalitarian structures, would be to re-institute the authentic church.

This is not an impossibility. There are examples of the first century church which was organised on egalitarian grounds with interchangeable roles.

"This was the case in the early Christian movement, insofar as all members of the community were spirit-gifted people of God who had received the power and endowment of the Holy Spirit for the building up of the community. Different members of the community had access to spiritual power and communal leadership roles. God's gift and election were not dependent upon one's religious background, societal role, or gender and race." ²⁶

If Black-led churches were to create such structures, 'the axe would be laid at the root' of restrictive and oppressive gender defined roles.

1. Grant Jaquelyn Black Theology and the Black Woman in ed. Wilmore and Cone op. cit., p.418
2. Wilmore and Cone op. cit., p.363
3. Grant Jaquelyn op. cit, p.426
4. Ibid., p.426
5. As quoted by Segal Lynne Is the Future Female? - Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism London: Virago Press 1987 p. 62
6. Brown Kelly Talk given to black church women in Birmingham. Hosted by Claiming the Inheritance and myself. The women were drawn from a range of Black-led and historical christian churches. The meeting was the first of its kind. Both our diversity and our commonality of experiences made for moving discussion and signalled the possibilities for action.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Grant J. Black Christology: Interpreting Aspects of the Apostolic Faith Shannon D. T. and Wilmore G.S. ed. Black Witness to the Apostolic Faith Grand Rapids Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company for Commission on Faith and Order National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA 1985 (edition pub. 1988) p.27
- 12a. Shange Ntozake For colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf. This edition London: Methuen 1984 p. 63
13. In Hoch-Smith J. and Spring A. eds. Women in Ritual and Symbolic Roles New York: Plenum Preee 1978 p.61 (American books in print)
14. Ibid.,
15. Boff L. and C. Introducing Liberation Theology Kent: Burns and Oates 1987 p.14
16. Ibid., p.48
17. Fiorenza E.S. op.cit., p.XV

18. Church of God Our Statements of Faith Cleveland Tennessee:
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19. Dunn J.D.G. Unity and Diversity in the New Testament London:
SCM Press Ltd. 1977 p.104
20. Ibid., p.105
21. Heine S. op. cit., p.80
22. Ibid., p.42
23. Fiorenza E.S. op.cit., p.180
24. Ibid., p.234
25. Ibid., p.293
26. Ibid., p.286

CONCLUSION

My research has confirmed my original suspicion, that the development of Black-led churches in Britain, was not simply a reaction to a hostile and racist British society. What I have found, is that at one level, Black women were convinced of their role as missionaries doing God's work and at another level, of their need to develop survival strategies for themselves and their families. This inevitably extended to the wider community.

While there is an understanding that we are one in Christ Jesus, the existing structures of the churches do not allow for equal participation at every level, for both men and women. Clearly these structures are maintained by a view of the scriptures as inerrant and secondly by the application of certain scriptures to justify these existing structures. Neither the men nor the women have yet attempted to ask the question - In whose interests is it to maintain these structures? It would appear that in the interest of maintaining equanimity, Black women are reticent to challenge the power that men wield as ministers in the churches.

In chapters 5/6, I attempted to look at Liberation Theologies, in the hope that I would find something that could be applied to structural forms of oppression in Black-led churches.

The work of Womanist and Feminist theologians, suggests that there is much that could be gained from revisiting the scriptures and of applying the principle of suspicion to them. However, as yet, we do not have the academic Black women theologians or radical women pastors needed, to open such discussion.

Black women are only now awakening to a definition of themselves as African-Caribbean women, who have a past steeped in racist and sexist oppression. As such, some of them are now challenging the view that this is God given and to be accepted with quiet resolution. This awareness is mainly located among younger professional women. They are faced with the task of reconciling this new awareness, with the possible destabilisation effect this might have on the existing church leadership.

There is evidence that a number of these young women have left and are continuing to leave the churches. Their radicalism will go with them, leaving fewer like-minded women within the churches, to further the cause.

There are a few churches comprised mainly of young, professional black people, where the issues of race, class and gender oppression are being addressed. One of these churches and its pastor, were described to me as being 'out on a limb'. As Black-led churches have a history

of growing out of schisms and fissions, is it possible that we might in the future, develop a separate church based on Womanist Black Theology? Such a church would need to ensure that it remains an evangelising and prophetic mission, so as not to become a sanctuary for dissident Black radical intellectuals.

With the emergence of a conservative and traditional thinking Black middle class in Britain, there is a danger that Black churches will become distanced from 'the world' and shrouded in self-righteous piety. This 'in the world but not of the world' position, is already prevalent in Black-led churches, in the ways in which they emphasise eschatology. Can these churches afford to become alienated and alienating from and for those working class Black people of the world, who are yet to be saved? We see this in the American Pentecostal and Holiness churches

The major limitation I experienced during my research for this thesis, was the lack of any documentation dealing with the significant contributions made by Black women. My work is miniscule compared with research that needs to be done in order to fully appreciate and understand Black British women's experiences of God.

British Feminist Theologians, when writing on these issues, have inadequately addressed Black women's concerns. This meant that I had

to be constantly referring to the American situation, which was not always relevant.

Areas for future research could include a comprehensive collection and documentation of Black women's experiences within Black-led churches in Britain. A second area could concentrate on the experiences and concerns of young women, spanning those who have left the churches and those who have remained. Thirdly, the special concerns of single women, could form another area of research. Finally, work on British Black Theology which includes a Womanist Theology is needed.

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