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Book Review:

***THE STORY OF
JAMAICAN MISSIONS
How the Gospel Went
from Jamaica to the
World***

By Lloyd A. Cooke
Arawak Publications
(2013) Kingston, Jamaica

***Review by Dr Billy
Hall***

From Columbus to Cooke

Usain Bolt has immortalized in sports Jamaica's unique greatness. The nation's unique greatness in religion is there but is yet to be well known, much more immortalized. Certainly this is so in regard to Christianity from the perspective of the cross-cultural aspect of the church's witness.

However, this month a giant step forward toward Jamaica's greatness

in religion immortalized has been taken with a new book highlighting Jamaica's greatness in the spreading of the Christian message worldwide from Jamaica, by Jamaicans, beginning from shortly after Emancipation until today.

The author of this impressive documentation is a true 'son of the soil'. He is Lloyd Aloysius Cooke, whose father was an Anglican priest. Cooke did not become an Anglican Church Army Captain as he had seriously contemplated but providentially he became instead a cross-cultural missionary and today he has written in his mature years the most significant book on Jamaican involvement in cross-cultural missions.

He describes his book as "a labor of love" (page 632) and it would be difficult to deny that as a fact considering the nearly seven years it took him from conceptualizing to completing the challenge.

In this book his focus is defined clearly and argued persuasively. The book is about the work of the church when engaged in "the

pioneering task of planting the church in other cultures” (page 633). He sticks to that strongly stated steering position tenaciously and by so doing thereby his book ought to be regarded in the same category as that of Jamaica’s most eminent church historian, Baptist Pastor Horace Russell.

To refresh memories, Russell is the former Pastor of East Queen Street Baptist Church who in 1972 produced his trailblazing doctoral dissertation for Oxford University entitled: *The Missionary Outreach of the West Indian Church: Jamaica Baptist Missions to West Africa in the nineteenth century*.

Surprising but true, no other Jamaican or any writer of any nationality worldwide seems to have since published any substantive work on the same subject. In this review, sticking to Russell’s purposeful direction, the only Jamaican academic writing on matters relevant to the church that bears any reasonable comparison is that of Dr. Las Newman, President of the *Caribbean Graduate School of Theology (CGST)*, in Jamaica.

Dr. Newman’s highly significant doctoral dissertation was successfully submitted to the University of Wales Oxford Centre for Mission Studies in 2007. Incidentally, this dissertation is currently being edited for publishing. The title is, “*A Critical Analysis of West Indian Participation in the Western Missionary Enterprise in Western Africa in the 19th century, with special reference to their conception of mission*’.

So what is Cooke’s book about? The blurb on the back cover says that well. Cooke’s book is about “...how Jamaicans just out of slavery and their descendants, supplemented by others of immigrant stock from China, India and Europe, aided by their missionaries in Jamaica and their British Mission Societies, blazed a trail in a number of African countries”.

Cooke's swathe is wide for he includes in that blurb how enterprising Jamaicans "later also went to other Caribbean nations, to South and Central America, to the Panama Canal Zone, even to India, China and other parts of Asia and into Europe itself, preaching, teaching, healing, translating the Scriptures and printing books, all because of the love of Christ".

"For the love of Christ" indeed for Cooke's book is an enormous undertaking. It is about three times greater in length than what would be required normatively to produce a doctoral dissertation of say 100-thousand words. Cooke's book is 710 pages (including the introductory pages in Roman numerals). In regard to words, it is by rough estimate more than a quarter million words.

In addition the book has about 250 photographs (appropriately placed) a list of 95 abbreviations explained, and as well about a dozen Charts and Tables. The work is further enhanced by an apt and noteworthy scholarly feature and that is 'Time-lines' that frame concisely and cogently significant historical events and turning points in missions developmental history.

In regard to relevance historically, this book fills a tremendous historical hiatus or gap. The engaging story Cooke unfolds with distinctive focus creates for him a unique niche in historical writing on cross-cultural missions universally. Further, by the parameters described, of time period surveyed, and research depth explored, and research extent pursued, the work of Cooke exceeds in scope and span and substance the excellent pioneering dissertation of Russell; building on Russell's work while exceeding it by extending it.

Of course, much more work needs to be done regarding Jamaica's involvement in cross-cultural missions in the last two centuries. For example, Cooke indicates the need for more study and analysis of

Jamaica's foreign-field or cross-cultural missions neglect by churches today on the closing page of his Postscript (634).

He states further in his Postscript that while therefore he is impressed that "so much was done with so little for so long" he regrets current low involvement in cross cultural missions. He relates the weakness to far too many members in churches being "not aware of the present advance in world evangelization and thus are still uninvolved" (page 634).

Cooke's book certainly is a strong corrective measure to that declining reality in the 21st century and ought to be accorded due attention for among other things the diligence that went into the seven years of compilation. Cooke brings to this genre of missions history writing the rare contribution of an author having cross-cultural missions experience, as well as his wife in partnership professionally prepared and cross-culturally involved in Africa.

And apart from all factors already mentioned Cooke has brought to his writing an unmatched qualification beyond all other Jamaican writers of this kind of production and that is a lifetime of dedication to his missions vision, sparked initially by the late Dave Ho, perhaps the Caribbean region's most dynamic and accomplished missions organizer and motivator.

Not surprisingly then, Cooke dedicates this book to Dave Ho, who is described as his missions 'mentor'. He names Ho for this honor, along with his own family members who evidently would be integral to his sacrificial labors in serving on the field, and in the researching and writing of this book for decades until his 71st birthday last month.

However, the book while excellent is not perfect for there are some relatively minor matters. For example, the photos are on the whole

of poor quality, spelling errors occur, noticeably in the headline pages of 'Moravian missions' (Moravian), David Ho is in a caption Donald Ho (p.583). The reference to the bookstore ministry on page 576 should be 'Christian Literature Crusade' (CLC), the reference to Swallowfield Chapel ought to have been a Sunday morning attendance of 1500 and not 5-thousand persons, and Arminian theology ought not to be 'Armenian'.

But all such aside, this book is a monumental work that accounts for the impressive surge of Jamaican missionaries from shortly after Emancipation (1834-38), even though that initial surge in cross-cultural missions has had significant 'cooling off' in contemporary times.

What impresses much about Cook's book is the research. His research work as he describes such in the book is impressively extensive, intensive as well as investigative. He brings into focus a wide array of documents of vintage historical value that embellish his research with the many contacts he made with both living and literary sources as well as electronic. Not to mention his searching for artifactuals such as graves, signposts and building remnants, not found on any map.

Clearly this book is one of preeminence in the field of cross-cultural missions from Jamaica to the rest of the world; a monumental work of Jamaicans reaching out in cross-cultural missions during the last 160 years particularly, within the broad time span from Columbus to Cooke, and within the narrow academic perspective aspect and strategy necessary for cross-cultural missions.

Dr Billy Hall is a veteran Jamaican Journalist, Evangelist and Social analyst.