

**A CARIBBEAN  
THEOLOGY OF  
THE  
ENVIRONMENT**  
(Part 2)

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Introduction

**Gullies: From The Ridge To  
The Reef**

Roper (2013) believes that there is a strong link between poverty and environmental destruction. He argues that:

*Poverty is the greatest threat to the environment. The case in point of the gullies . . . is similarly indicative of poverty, a poverty of economic and mental proportions. I speak specifically of the squatter settlements along the banks of the gullies in Jamaica. The persons who dwell there have no land ownership, typically have illegal water and power connections and in many instances either have no sanitary bathroom facilities or where those are constructed the effluent is released directly into the gully. Solid waste from these settlers are [sic] predominantly dumped into the gullies.*

There is a view among the residents in such places that the garbage trucks do not come into their communities often enough to collect the solid waste. I can personally attest to this in one such community in particular. On the other hand though it needs to be

said that even when the garbage collection occurs more frequently many residents along the gully banks simply find it more convenient to throw their garbage into the gully. We need to ask ourselves whether there are any vested interests in keeping such squatter settlements operational. Likewise, we need to ask ourselves what factors determine the inequitable distribution of garbage trucks across the city. The solid waste from the gullies makes its way to the Kingston harbor and outer waters.

Information gathered from the Mananuca Environmental Society indicates, “Plastic bags breakdown in 50 years, plastic bottles in 150 years, and cigarette butts in 75 years, paper in 1 year and batteries in 200 years. These all take so much time to breakdown to the detriment of creatures that live around us. If a turtle encounters a plastic bag, which looks similar to jellyfish, he may swallow the plastic bag and choke on it. Batteries leak poisons as they breakdown and can contaminate the fish we eat, as well as kill corals and other marine life.” There are further threats associated with plastics in the oceans.

According to a report in The Guardian Newspaper by Milman (2015), “Pieces are ingested by fish and then travel up the food chain, all the way to humans. It is expected this problem will worsen due to the rise of throwaway plastic, such as drinks containers and food packaging, with only 5% of the world’s plastic recycled at present.” Milman (2015) quotes Dr. Hoogenboom, “In my opinion we need a general focus on cleaning up plastic pollution, to clean up beaches and reduce the amount of plastics in the waterways and into the oceans. It’s a significant problem globally.””

The phrase ‘from the ridge to the reef’ was used by Roper (2015) to describe the interconnection between what happens inland and what happens to the corals. In this paper it is what happens in the gullies that is in view. At the local level, Martin Henry, Communications Specialist with the Scientific Research Council of Jamaica speaks to the importance of our coral reefs. “The highly productive coral reefs provide significant benefits to the human population. The reefs are sources of food. They are a major source of sand as they erode. As buffers, they provide protection to coastlines from waves and currents. The reefs are important to the Jamaican tourism product as a source of sand in the sun, sand-and-sea formula. There is increasing interest in reef species as sources of biologically active compounds for medical drugs. Henry describes the role that algae play in destroying corals, “The growth of large algae, if not kept in check, smother existing coral and prevent coral larvae from settling to form new colonies. The algae are kept under control by herbivorous organisms which graze on them. The parrot fish, a Jamaican dinner delicacy, is one of the most important grazers, and over-fishing of parrot and other reef species allows the algae to flourish.”

The raw sewage from gully bank residents makes its way to the sea, creating a nutrient rich environment for algae to grow. Martin (Ibid.) sheds more light on the inherent danger of this reality. “Peter Edwards and Tatum Fisher identify sewage and agricultural fertilizers as the major sources of nutrient-supplying pollution affecting coral reefs. Additional nutrients mean additional growth. According to the S&T Conference paper, “a striking ... shift has taken place from a coral-dominated system to one dominated by algae. Algal cover has grown from 4 per cent to 92 per cent.” This gloomy picture is supported by a report from the National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA) in 2008. The report indicates that “The influence of natural and man-induced stressors on coastal ecosystems has in most cases resulted in a switch from

coral to algal dominated reefs. These stressors have resulted in a decline in coral cover from a high of 50% in the 1970s to less than 5% by the early 1990s.

### **A Caribbean Theology of the Environment**

Dr. Rolf Hille, chairman in 2004, of the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance expressed the view that “Environmental questions have become real-life questions for humanity.” This opinion was expressed in his foreword for Gnanakan’s book “Responsible Stewardship of God’s Creation.” (Gnanakan, 2004, 5). Hille continues his foreword making salient observations, “ God created this world with great love and perfection and commanded man ‘to work the garden and preserve it (take care of it)’... It does therefore, matter to God, how we handle His creation, water, air, raw materials, soil, animals and plants. When a theologian takes a careful look at the ideas behind ecology and when Christian churches become concerned about the environment, then this is not simply a favorite hobby... Rather how we deal with the creation is also essentially a matter of being a faithful disciple of Jesus and obedient faith.” According to Weaver and Hodson, “When the concerns about the environment began to emerge two people related it to the Church. Dr Lynn White attacked the Judaeo/Christian tradition for having taken the notion of ‘dominion’ to mean liberty to take from nature whatever and whenever we please. Francis Schaeffer, on the other hand, expounded the theory that the local church should be the ‘pilot plant’ setting before human society a picture of the way life was meant to be.”

Taylor (2014), argues with conviction that the Wisdom Literature call us to the sustainability of the creation. He writes “there is a growing note of urgency presently, about the subject, to the extent that it is not unusual for the language of crisis to be associated with

it. There is often reference to the pending or actual environmental or ecological crisis faced by the world in general and more so in some places in particular for varying reasons.” (Taylor 2014, 140). Further, negligence towards these matters and basking in the bliss of ignorance are luxuries that the Jamaican church can no longer afford.

I am an ardent advocate for Caribbean Theology. In this section we will make a case for the inclusion of a theology of the environment in the discourse of Caribbean Theology as a necessity. The words of Francis Schaeffer offer some opening pointers in this regard, “If God treats the tree like a tree, the machine like a machine, the man like a man, shouldn't I, as a fellow-creature, do the same -- treating each thing in integrity in its own order? And for the highest reason: because I love God -- I love the One who has made it! Loving the Lover who has made it, I have respect for the thing He has made. (Francis A. Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man*, Ch. 4: <http://www.rationalpi.com/theshelter/ecology.html>).

Along a similar vein he makes a compelling case for respect for the environment to be an intrinsic part of the life of a Christian:

The tree in the field is to be treated with respect. It is not to be romanticized as the old lady romanticizes her cat (that is, she reads human reactions into it). But while we should not romanticize the tree, we must realize that God made it and it deserves respect because he made it *as a tree*. Christians who do not believe in the complete evolutionary scale have reason to respect nature as the total evolutionist never can, because we believe that God made these things specifically in their own areas. So if we are going to argue against evolutionists intellectually, we should show the results of our beliefs in our attitudes. The Christian is a man who has a reason for dealing with each created thing

on a high level of respect.  
<http://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/44398>  
O-pollution-and- the-death-of-man

In stating his case for a Caribbean creation theology, J. Richard Middleton firstly identifies what I think is the fundamental cause of the absence of this kind of “think and talk” on environmental concerns in our churches. He argues that:

the indelible human footprint on the natural beauty of the Caribbean (our impact on the earth), combined with horrendous natural disasters (the earth’s impact on us), gives the lie to any romantic vision of what we moderns have come to know as “nature” (the realm of the non-human); but it also calls into question the sort of popular piety we find in the Caribbean church that imagines a separation between human “salvation” (narrowly conceived) and our earthly environment. Paradoxically, among many Christians, in the Caribbean and elsewhere, we find a decidedly otherworldly, and often individualistic view of “salvation” as the saving of souls from a fiery judgment to an eternity with God in the ethereal heaven, combined with a romantic view of nature as a special place to encounter God... Yet little if no thought is typically given to the possible connection – or better, to the disconnect- between an otherworldly salvation and a romanticized nature ( Ibid, 79 – 80).

Middleton pushes further with this when he recognizes that there seems to be an inherent lack of interest on the part of Caribbean theologians in what he refers to as creation theology. He states that “Caribbean theologians are right to express suspicions about any points of view that is [sic] blind to the reality of social inequalities,

especially if this blindness is combined with a romantic view of nature...Given the pressing human needs that face Caribbean people every day it might seem that a theology of creation would take away our focus off what is undeniably of prime importance.” There is also, argues Middleton a “historical reason for the suspicion of creation as a theological topic.” That is the fact that theologies, Caribbean theology included have been “decisively shaped by a western, Eurocentric habit of mind that distinguishes radically between history (people) and nature (the non-human). Given that predisposition he argues that theologians may be constrained “either to prioritize a concern for human flourishing over a concern for the earth, or to view creation theology with outright suspicion.” (Ibid., 81).

Having set out the status quo here in Jamaica it is my hope that the eyes of the church would be open to see the obvious, that if we continue to only sing a “Sankey” there may be no land left for us to stand on to do our singing. It is further hoped that Caribbean theologians would recognize that, as Middleton says, “this anthropocentric focus, which separates human well-being from concern about the earth, is an artificial polarization, since people only exist, live and work somewhere; that is, any socio-cultural analysis would show that people both impact and are impacted by their environment.” (Ibid., 82). Such a view is supported by Scripture, as the writer has shown. Middleton supports this position by pointing out that: “It is an artificial polarization from a biblical point of view as well, since humans are consistently understood in the Scriptures as part of the wider cosmos, which is not only created by God, but is the object of God’s saving activity.” (Ibid., 83).

Weaver and Hodson provide a list of factors that help to further understand this lack of interest of the church in the care of creation. They suggest that: “There are several possible reasons for the neglect and indifference to the biblical challenges for us to engage in Creation Care.” These include:

- the emphasis on personal salvation and the neglect of collective redemption
- Western theological tradition, which has had a singular view of the nature of being
- the misunderstanding or misinterpretation of “dominion” and its perceived conflict with the idea of stewardship.
- the dualism that separates Body and Soul, the material and the spiritual.
- the perception of matter as evil, despite Christ’s interaction with the physical world.
- the failure to understand the nature and significance of incarnation.

Middleton argues further that “the Scriptures consistently interpret the connection between humans and the earth in a manner that positively contributes to a vision of human flourishing – at both individual and societal levels. The Bible is a powerful , and often untapped resource on this topic. This suggests that the time is ripe for a biblical Caribbean theology that grounds human liberation in God’s intent for creation and envisions a role for the earth within God’s purposes.” His call is particularly relevant to this paper because he goes on to indicate that he is not calling for a mere theologizing at the realm



of public theologians but one that is:

serviceable, not just for an elite cadre of Caribbean intellectuals, but for ordinary Caribbean Christians...These points are integrally connected, since the major mode of access to theology for most Caribbean laypeople is precisely the Bible. We therefore need to develop a robust creation theology through a careful engagement with Scripture that would address the pressing need of ordinary Christians to internalize a vision of being humans in God's world. Such a vision would integrally connect people and their social needs to their bodies and their physical environment- and would connect salvation with God's creational intentions for this world." (Ibid., 83).

The way Taylor (2014) sees it is that "the adverse impact that human life-style and action are having on the natural environment brings into sharp focus biblical teaching with special reference to the doctrine of creation. The conclusion here is that properly understood, the Old Testament doctrine of creation, with special contribution from the Wisdom Tradition, can do much to put into proper perspective the human response and responsibility in relation to the related issues." (Ibid., 140). Quite intuitively he makes a very poignant observation that there are some strong dissenting voices on this matter. The argument made is that it is in fact the Old Testament which has helped to contribute to people's exploitation of the creation. He states, "The story of the creation recorded in Genesis 1: 1-2:4a, is regarded as the chief source and foundation of the wrongdoing. This story is said to have granted human kind the right to rule over the creation for their own good pleasure and fulfillment, and so this has been exploited to the full.... It is

said that human beings are seen to be given absolute freedom to dominate the rest of creation, particularly non-human creatures. At least that is how some have interpreted it, much to the detriment of the natural environment and other life forms.” (Ibid.). Douglas (2009) discloses the views expressed by Gary Harriot on this matter, “Our faith requires us to pay attention in how to take care of the environment. Creation theology states that God has created this earth and has placed man in charge to manage and not to abuse.”

Of course, this is a gross injustice to the proper understanding of the text, which Taylor exposes as such. It does show itself up though in the current climate of entitlement and materialistic dominance that permeate the word of faith/prosperity narrative that has taken root in the region. Taylor rebuts this interpretation by indicating that “the understanding of the words and the related practice that have resulted in the exploitation and oppression of creation are neither necessary nor inevitable and are in fact, a misappropriation and misuse of the words themselves.” (Ibid.).

To drive home the point, he quotes John C. L. Gibson’s comment on the argument that man has been given a special case in creation:

It is a delegated status, not something inherent in his nature. ‘Man’ is God’s representative on earth, his ambassador and possesses no intrinsic rights or privileges beyond those conferred by his divine master, to whom therefore he has to render account. It is not Genesis’ fault if Christian theology has torn these verses from their context and read into them what is not there ... (Ibid., 142-143)

In view of this, what Taylor proposes is a balanced perspective.

He argues that the Wisdom Tradition's emphases and insights enable a "more balanced perspective as well as a more explicit exposition, on creation in its totality." The starting point, he argues is that there is in the Wisdom Tradition a centeredness on God in relation to creation, while there is no "over-centralized" focus on human-kind. This diminishes the risk of human subjugation of the rest of creation. (Ibid., 144). Tracing his way through the book of Job as a case in point, Taylor (2015) examines God's response to Job after Job's scathing and searching questions. He lifts from the book important elements for consideration of a theology of human-kind's relationship to the environment. Taylor states "To be a human being is to be a creature who is God-addressed and whom God confronts with the rest of creation vocationally. This really sets the stage for a right and proper attitude to be displayed by human-kind toward the rest of creation and the created order. Humility, restraint, respect and responsibility are some of the virtues that are implied." (Ibid., 149).

Roper's (2013) seminal work on Jubilee adds to the sentiments here. As he sings the praises of the Jubilee principle, he writes, "Life, increasingly, is challenging us to give a value to mother earth; and it is calling us to remember that when God made humankind, He placed the human being in a garden, not a grocery shop. Some things are with us for their own sake not just for our consumption. It is being made clear that the future of mother earth and future of the human family are bound up together." (Ibid., 11).

In underscoring the celebration of the awesome and the delight of the creation that the Wisdom Tradition, such as Job reveals, Taylor (2015) makes a very profound point for our consideration here. He surmises that the grandeur of the creation, which points to the worthiness of creator places a serious challenge upon those who behold the creation, a challenge which ought to rule out the

propensity to abuse the creation. He writes:

[W]ith the evidence presented in relation to the delightfulness of creation...there is a great challenge involved... With the great pleasure and delight expressed in creation as the marvelous and significant handiwork of God, reflective of the Creator's own creative delight, it must be a matter of gross delinquency and arrogant presumptuousness for scant regard to be paid to the integrity and God-given intrinsic worth and value of creation... That which is the focus of divine delight and in turn reflected in human response, calls for care and responsible treatment, being the kind of divine handiwork it is." (Ibid., 155- 156).

The care of the creation is in and of itself a form of reverence for and worship of God, the maker of all. This is certainly a case that needs to be made increasingly from the pulpits of our churches if we are going to facilitate the change that this situation demands of us.

Taylor (2014) provides what I believe is the clearest charge to Caribbean Theology on the matter at hand. He is reflecting upon the tension between the push for economic growth in a developing state as ours and the preserving of the integrity and sustainability of the environment. He puts it bluntly, "A Caribbean Theology project must have a part to play in this in a not insignificant manner. Earlier, theological projects in dealing with the matter of justice and economic issues did not give any attention or gave just little attention to the environmental realities that were involved. A Caribbean Theology Project will have to give a more central place to this subject...This is so not the least because of the entire

orientation of the theology project itself, that is, its commitment to address the lived experience of the people in their social as well as the created order.” (Ibid., 160 – 161).

It is quite evident that there is an undeniable link between the false dichotomy that prevails and our abject lack of concern with environmental affairs in Jamaica. Cope (2006) hits the nail on the head, “The Christian church today is a huge church and a weak church because we have lost most of the gospel message. We can say that the social, economic, and judicial issues of our communities are not our concern because we have a split view of the world. We are ‘spiritual leaders’ and do not need to concern ourselves with secular matters. We do not need to stop bringing the message of salvation, but we desperately need to regain the essential truths of the rest of the gospel message of God’s Kingdom.” Middleton speaks to this as well in what he describes as ‘The Human Calling to Image God on Earth.’ He presents a startling perspective in worship: “[T]he distinctive way humans worship or render service to the Creator is by the development of culture through interaction with our earthly environment in a manner that glorifies God. That is our fundamental human calling.” (Ibid., 87). The words of Ashley Smith, hailed by many as the Father of Caribbean Theology, are fitting to close this section. He is quoted here by Middleton in reflecting on what the key question before the Caribbean church is: “[W]hat kind of ministry it might exercise, in the name of him who continually makes all things new, in order that the purpose of his creation might be fulfilled?”(Ibid., 83).

### **The Way Forward**

We have established the undeniable reality of climate change in the Caribbean and the continuing threats that human action both at the

community and commercial levels pose to the destruction of land and sea. We have also stated categorically that the Caribbean Theology project would be woefully incomplete if it does not lead the church in a right and proper view of the creation and its care. What then is the way forward? What shall we do? We should embrace Taylor's (2015) counsel, "change or perish". "In the face of the region's inherent sensitivity to climate, its growing vulnerability, and the threat posed to its future sustainability, *climate clearly demands change. But what kind of change is being demanded?* First, there is a demand for a change in how we perceive the issue of climate and in the importance we place on the issue."

This kind of robust seizing of the moment, as Dr. Martin Luther King famously put it, the fierce urgency of now, is necessary in all quarters. Of particular concern is that the church community gets on board. It may be a hard sell though, for the church has shown over time that it is a space where persons love to avoid the facts. The extent to which the church seems largely unmoved by the vexed social issues, such as climate change, would suggest that it is a space where the fact resistant strain of humans that Borowitz (2015) described abounds. In a stunning satirical piece he posits,

Scientists have discovered a powerful new strain of fact-resistant humans who are threatening the ability of Earth to sustain life, "These humans appear to have all the faculties necessary to receive and process information," Davis Logsdon, one of the scientists who contributed to the study, said. "And yet, somehow, they have developed defenses that, for all intents and purposes, have rendered those faculties totally inactive. Our research is very preliminary, but it's possible that they will become more receptive to facts once they are in an environment without food, water, or oxygen," he

said.”

The point is brilliantly made. We cannot continue to resist the fact. Continued actions of the present will only lead to an earth that is unable to sustain life. Let us hope that it will not take that to cause the church to wake up. We should not think that we can move slowly or try to change slowly. According to Taylor (2015) The creeping nature of sea level rise and ocean acidification, or the gradual warming of temperatures or the slow onset of overall drier conditions will make some of the resulting impacts discernible only after a time, especially when the affected system is making gradual adaptive adjustments to accommodate the changes as they are being experienced. This is particularly true of the impact on biodiversity: for example, the alteration in timing of growing seasons or changes in mating and reproductive cycles and the appearance of new invasive species or the decline in abundance or disappearance of species due to unfavourable conditions.

The projections of future climate make the clear case, then, for action which is – among other things – anticipatory and responsive, urgent and timely, and targeted and transformative. In light of this, climate change must be afforded more than passing attention and must be more than just a consideration in regional planning. Instead, there must be deliberate and sustained efforts aimed at the incorporation of climate change into the development plans of all the countries of the region “A change in approach is necessary if the change in climate is established as true for the region.” (Taylor 2015). This is supported by the argument made by Taylor (2015) that we humans are most to be blamed for climate change. He opines, “there is a case to be made that even if there were no climate change, climate is still deserving of more than passing attention in the Caribbean simply because of the inherent climate sensitivity of the region.”

In the epilogue of his paper, Taylor (2015) lays down the gauntlet: “If the kind of consideration needed is not given and action not taken the Caribbean region’s future sustainability is threatened in light of the future projections of climate. The accompanying demand is for sustained action which will build climate resilience through the mainstreaming of climate considerations into planning for development and the daily routines of Caribbean life. Action is required on the part of all. Achieving climate resilience will, however, require changes in both our attitudes and approaches to climate.”

Let us therefore consider some proposed changes that will help to begin the transition from ignorance and complacency towards intentional stewardship of the environment. These proposals span both the individual level and the corporate level with a heavy emphasis on the role of the church.

***A Change in the Attitude of Fisher Folk:*** A change is needed in the attitude of our people towards over fishing. Temporary economic gain cannot be traded for long term damage to the reefs. Delayed gratification needs to be encouraged. According to the NEPA (2008) report,

The dominance of algae on Jamaican reefs is directly related to the paucity of herbivores present on the reefs. The unsustainable harvesting of the herbivorous fish population is one of the main factors that has resulted in this reduction. As can be extrapolated from the data, the fishing population in the near-shore fishery has been on the decline for several years. This bleak outlook will continue unless the practices currently being employed are



changed. This is going to require a series of public education campaigns coupled with continued monitoring and effective management.

This call came as early as 1994, when Broad wrote in the New York Times, “The only way of avoiding greater losses or repairing widespread damage, is if Jamaica adopts a policy that seeks to stop overfishing.” The return of mature herbivorous fish around Jamaica is seen as helping to fight the growth of fleshy algae that otherwise come to dominate the reef ecosystem and crowd out coral polyps. It must be noted that reefs take a far longer time to go than it takes for them to be destroyed. Broad mentions this: “Rebuilding the reefs will take far longer than the two to three decades it has taken to destroy them,” (Broad 1994).

***Reduce the Household use of Plastic:*** Schaeffer (1970) was quite correct in identifying the rise of the plastic culture and “...the hippies of the 1960s did understand something. They were right in fighting the plastic culture, and the church should have been fighting it too.” The writer suggests here that there be a church led initiative to lobby for a ban on plastic bags. These are highly popular in Jamaica, commonly referred to as ‘scandal bags’. In McCatty’s (2005) report on the speech from Pastor Gregory she indicates that he states, “an increase in consumption was putting the environment at risk, noting that plastics, which are being increasingly used in Jamaica, take at least 100 years to decompose.” It will take a widespread intentional approach to utilize less plastic, such as carrying our own bags to the supermarket to carry our goods.

***Climate Change Education for All:*** Taylor (2015) makes the following proposals on the need for mass education campaigns:

There should be dedicated effort aimed at finding all entry points to educate about climate change. Since the impact is on all, education must be for all and by all and not just left to governments. Advantage should be taken of opportunities for sustained education, for example, writing climate change into the curricula of the formal educational process (basic school through to university), into professional training courses, into continuing education credits and into Sunday and Sabbath schools. Advantage should also be taken of the occasional opportunities – community meetings, service and youth clubs, camps and company retreats. Multiple modes, media and messages should be employed. Contextually relevant material should be commissioned and made easily accessible and a special effort made to target the most vulnerable groupings.

The idea here is that there needs to be a pedagogic plan that involves mass education of the people along with practical actions that can be taken e.g., a church leading a waste recycling plant. It is not difficult to imagine the kind of witness churches will have as they begin to lead the way in projects such as this. At the school level there needs to be competitions that are age appropriate to motivate the students to implement activities that show their awareness of and appreciation for this education. Some further advice from Taylor (2015) are salient here:

Education is critical to ensuring buy-in. Since adaptation inevitably demands a change in behaviour and/or thought, response strategies must factor in public education and awareness. Awareness engenders change and it is a change

in attitude and approach that is being demanded. Since response strategies will target multiple levels of society, public education and awareness must similarly target all levels (such as government, community and individual) and all ages, and must utilize traditional (such as newspapers, radio, television and workshops) and newer communication methodologies (for example, cell phones and social media groups). Educating those most likely to be affected by a response strategy about why the strategy is necessary engenders buy-in and helps facilitate commitment to the effort and its eventual success.

Churches need to be leading the way on this as well as part of their Christian Education activities, in the mass gatherings such as conventions, conferences, convocations. Inter-denominational groups like the Keswick Committees should recognize the prime audience they have and seek to utilize that week of meetings to share information on the change that climate change requires of us. The narrative that needs to be carried at such gatherings must include themes such as fighting the pull of materialism, consumerism and individualism. An exploration of the Jubilee such as presented by Roper (2012) could be very useful in this regard. Roper states, for example,

The second thing that the Jubilee teaches is the interconnectedness of life. In the Jubilee year, the land was to rest, the worker was to rest, the animals were to rest, the trees were to be untrimmed and un-pruned and the stranger and alien were also to enjoy the Jubilee. This is a lesson to be rediscovered- the interconnectedness of life. God made us all, and each has its place, each must be preserved and protected, each

must be cared for. Do you see how this principle that gives a value to plant and animal is the basis for the preservation of human life? We have to learn once again, by taking the time by breaking the cycle that other things are important and our importance and significance are bound up with the importance and significance we to give to the simple things of life.” (Ibid. p. 12).

***The Strengthening of Community Groupings and Community Governance:*** Taylor (2015) is of the view that community groups are often the first responders to extreme situations and, outside of disasters, represent sustained capacity building resilience. This resonates well with me having seen this is at work first hand in the course of ministry over the last thirteen years. When these groups are guided and provided with the right kind of organizational support from stake holders they wield tremendous influence over the residents towards positive behavior. Let us harness this towards the better care of the environment. This may just be the way around the harmful uses of the gullies.

***Promoting Values and Attitudes:*** These two have been twinned together and even politicized but they hold great prospects for sustained change. Taylor (2015) proposes a stewardship that is an “equitable and fair use of resources . . . [that constitute] important principles in sustainable development. These principles also provide, in the face of climate change . . . a justification for individual through to national response. An ongoing values and attitudes campaign can contribute to the resilience-building effort. There is the potential for faith-based communities to take the lead in this effort.” I would add to the list of values to be inculcated: simplicity, and contentment. In terms of our attitudes we should definitely be promoting an anti-consumerist attitude. The question of sustainability of energy for example boils down to a

matter of attitude. We all need to adopt a zero tolerance for wastage of electricity, and a demonstrable will power to embrace renewable forms of energy. It is here that the church may have her biggest battle, the battle against herself. It is the task of the Caribbean Theologian to repudiate the consumerist agenda inherent in the pervasive prosperity gospel.

*Always Considering the Environment:* This is another idea that Taylor (2015) proposes as the way forward. “The environment and the natural world are currently exploited for economic development, yet they are often secondary considerations in decisions related to economic development. A degraded environment only exacerbates the impact of climate change threats, and the environment is already among the most vulnerable groupings. Even when compromise on the environment is required it must not be such that it is unfairly placed at a disadvantage.” Thompson (2015) reports that Sterling shares a similar view: “It is time we stop making excuses that in order to have a strong economy we have to accept the devastation of God's creation. As human beings we were chosen by the Creator to tend his creation and we have failed miserably. Our consumption of the world's resources is nothing short of abusive. As privileged people we have become blind, deaf and dumb and we are experiencing a poverty of spirit unparalleled in history through our own doing.”

Weaver and Hodson propose that we can all “*Save Energy and Resources* – for example, by turning off electrical equipment when it is not in use and only using as much water as is necessary for making hot drinks or cleaning teeth.” I particularly like the idea proposed by the principals of the website “Carbon Fast Jamaica”. They indicate that “A carbon fast is a challenge to us all to look at our daily actions, to reflect on how they impact on the

environment and our fellow Jamaicans. It challenges us to take some small steps – some of which will reduce our carbon dioxide output while others will help the environment – for a more sustainable world. In the process we may come to rediscover a different relationship with God, with His Creation and with one another.” I think this is an excellent methodology to help the church be a part of the process of change that is demanded by climate. Some other very practical suggestions were preferred by Weaver and Hodson in their “Green Code”: *Cut Down on Waste* – by adopting a programme that secures a reduction in waste (particularly packaging), the re-use of materials (such as bottles), and recycling (finding ways of using materials in a new way such as PET, Polyethylene terephthalate, from beverage bottles for outdoor clothing).

***Fostering Innovation and Entrepreneurship.*** Here is a bit of advice from Taylor (2015) that is applicable to all sectors and not just the matter of responding appropriately to climate change. He suggests that “By having a vibrant and enabling environment for the development and quick deployment of new and creative solutions, the opportunity would already exist for responding to new challenges such as those that will be thrown up by climate change. New solutions also represent new opportunities for entrepreneurship. Fostering an enabling environment for entrepreneurship is, in effect, a resilience-building activity. The private sector has a critical role in creating such opportunities.” The way I see it, the door is wide open for young college graduates to get into the production and distribution of solar power, wind energy, recycling projects as income generating activities.

Taylor (2015) rightly points out the need to “Integrate adaptation with development, for example, policy options will have to be

considered for tourism infrastructure in a variety of areas such as: (i) designs may have to be encouraged to deal with alternative methods of cooling buildings in increasingly hot climates to counteract rising energy costs, and (ii) physical planning issues will require building lines to be moved back from eroding coasts.” Churches can also harness this by pooling investments from their members to fund such startups and sharing the earnings through benevolent societies. The time has long since come when the ministry of the church to the community needs to be accompanied by practical approaches to income generation for the unemployed. Here is another option to proverbially shoot two birds with one stone.

***Demonstrate and Teach Biblical Farming Principles.*** As much as modern agricultural practices yield mass crops there is also mass destruction to the soil. There needs to be a space for the church to lead the way in the demonstration and teaching of Biblical farming principles. Some of these have been mentioned earlier in the Jubilee. The proposal here is that we encourage the use of agricultural practices that allow the soil to renew itself and contribute to the water cycle. Crop rotation, mulching, along with no ploughing are foundational practices employed with great success in Africa, as popularized by a ministry called Farming God’s Way.<sup>1</sup> My own exposure to this in practice is South Africa tells me that there is much benefit to be gained from this in the regions of St. Elizabeth and Manchester that are plagued by droughts each year. I am sure that with the will to do so, churches can use their expansive land holdings to demonstrate these things incorporating jubilee principles and also generate income to improve communities.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.farming-gods-way.org/overview.htm>.

### **Redeeming Biblical Salvation**

In addition to the weight of evidence that Taylor presents, making a strong appeal for change on our part as climate changes, there is a powerful appeal for change that leaps at us from the pages of the Bible itself which is woefully missed by the church, inclusive of her leaders. Middleton advances this when he describes salvation as the restoration of God's purposes for creation. He argues that "The biblical affirmation of earthly life is further articulated in the central and paradigmatic act of God's salvation, the exodus from Egyptian bondage ... The Old Testament does not spiritualize salvation but understands it as God's deliverance of people and land from all that destroys life and the consequent restoration of people and land to flourishing." Middleton takes a similar trend into the New Testament treatment of salvation and its related benefits. He therefore argues that the:

eschatological restoration taught by Jesus and envisaged in Revelation has begun in the church...So when Paul describes Jesus' own resurrection from the dead as the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep..., he claims that the harvest of new creation has already begun... Then in the words of Revelation 11, 'the Kingdom of this world [will] become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah' (Rev. 11:15). At that time, explains Paul, creation itself, which has been groaning in its bondage to decay will be liberated from this bondage into the same glory God's children will experience – that is the glory of resurrection. The inner logic of this vision of holistic salvation is that the creator has not given up on creation, but is working to salvage and restore the world (human and no-human) to the fullness of shalom and flourishing intended from the beginning.



And redeemed human beings, renewed in God's image, are to work towards and embody this vision in their daily lives." (Ibid., 88 – 90)

If we are to side with Middleton in our understanding of salvation as being not just personal and spiritual but intrinsically wrapped up with the cosmos, it means we are duty bound to fight against climate change by changing our thinking and our actions. It means the church should be the vanguard of lobbying for the care of the environment. Sadly the opposite is found to be true, as is reflected in 'The Otherworldly Hymnody of The Church,' according to Middleton. He laments that "the tragedy is that this kind of holistic vision of salvation is found only rarely in popular Christian piety or even in the liturgy of the church. Indeed it is blatantly contradicted by many traditional hymns (and contemporary praise songs) sung in the context of communal worship. This is an important point since it is from what they sing that those in the pew (or auditorium) typically learn their theology, especially their eschatology." (Ibid., 90 – 91).

I am in full agreement with Middleton that the preachers are to be held largely culpable for the pervasiveness of this otherworldly brand of Christianity. In the same way that they are culpable it is in the same way that I am suggesting they need to lead the charge for the change that both the canon and the climate demand. Middleton does concede that there is an extent to which the root of this otherworldly focus of popular Caribbean Theology is to be found in our plantation history but insists that "to shift the burden of responsibility to others would be to let ourselves off too lightly. The Caribbean church must engage in serious self-examination and come to terms with the fact that its own leaders have perpetuated an escapist theology that entrenches ordinary Christians still

further in despair and paralysis, as they pine for a heavenly home distant from the everyday realities of Caribbean life.” When we get it right, when Caribbean Theology embraces creation theology in its rightful sense, Middleton argues, there will be no space to “simply baptize the present as God’s will”; we be active in helping to make all things new. Our vision will also be fixed. This is supported by Weaver and Hodson in their Green Code proposition, “*Care for Surroundings* - good environmental practice is not a catalogue of ‘don’ts’ but involves improving surroundings with trees and landscaping. The adoption of a Sustainable Lifestyle provides us with the capacity to ask others to do so and the consequence is good news for the planet.”

Middleton proposes that “A Biblical creation theology provides an empowering vision of God’s purposes for shalom that can energize church members- both as individuals and in community- to utilize their gifts and opportunities to make a difference in the world by how they live. A church that has its eyes firmly fixed on the coming of God’s kingdom from heaven to earth, rather than on leaving earth for heaven, will seize the moment (the *kairos*) and seek to contribute to healing, justice, and earthly flourishing in the whole range of human life and activities. In this way the church in the Caribbean may grow into a living foretaste of the coming of God’s kingdom to this our beautiful-yet broken and needy- earthly home.” (Ibid., 95). It is to such a place that the writer hopes the church can arrive if it is to lead the change that climate demands.

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