

NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Rastafarianism: A Nairobi Case Study

BY

CURTIS D. REED

A Thesis submitted to the Graduate School in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts In church history

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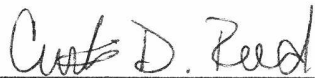
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Student's Declaration

RASTAFARIANISM: A NAIROBI CASE STUDY

I declare that this is my original work and has not been
submitted to any other College or University for academic credit

The views presented herein are not necessarily those of the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate
School of Theology or the Examiners

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Curtis D. Reed". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Curtis D. Reed

July, 2001

ABSTRACT

The origin of the Church in Africa is often associated with the coming of Western missionaries sometime in the nineteenth century after the birth of Christ. This, however, is a misnomer, for there have been African expressions of Christianity dating back to the fourth century A.D. Egypt, Nubia (Cush) and Ethiopia (Abyssinia) each had Christian religious statements as direct informants to their respective cultures. In particular, Ethiopian Christianity and history survives as an ideological source for the emergence and sustenance of several modern African Christian cults, sects and denominations.

One of the most popular African Christian expressions is that of Rastafarianism. Since its humble beginnings in the 1930's on the island of Jamaica, Rastafarianism has risen to become a universal phenomenon, captivating the hearts and minds of millions of African people all over the world. In addition, many whites have also embraced Rastafarianism as its beliefs have been drastically modified over the past thirty years.

The African Evangelical Church and African governments have been at odds with Rastafarianism from the time of its inception. This conflict, however, is more than theological, it is also socio-cultural and socio-economical. The city of Nairobi, Kenya is an interesting microcosm of the relationship between Rastafarianism, the Evangelical Church and African government. As such Nairobi serves as the geographical locus of a case study approach to Rastafarian analysis and dialogue with other societal institutions. The story of Rastafarianism is an important one, having many implications to current African society and its institutions, namely the Church and State. That is the nature of this study, and it is pursued from an African perspective as distinct from the missionary or ecumenical approaches to the telling and interpretation of African history.

I stand on the worn yet steady shoulders of the past and live in the shadow of the ancestors. I offer the libations of love and respect to each person who has illuminated the way to meaning and purpose within my spirit. Among these are David Walker, Nat Turner, Harriet Tubman, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, William Bentley and my great-grandmother, Ruth Watkins. This effort is dedicated to their memory, and to those who would live and wrestle with all earnestness toward the building of an authentic African Christian faith.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge each of the following:

- My mom, Connie, and sister, Deanna, for sacrificially releasing me with their blessing in order that I might fulfill a very important segment of my spiritual journey on the continent of Africa. May you receive back one-hundredfold that which you've sacrificed.
- Sankofa Student Ministries for graciously absorbing my mistakes and supporting the vision to carry the gospel of Love to Black folk in the diaspora and the African continent.
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place as any.

Historiography

The information acquired and presented in this research will not be objective in regard to human mental attitudes. A perspective is both necessary and unavoidable. Traditionally there have been three major schools of historiographical thought in terms of how African Church history is presented and interpreted. These three schools could be categorized as the missionary, nationalist and ecumenical approaches, respectively.

The missionary approach to African history focuses on the work of the missionary, who is almost always Western, acting in Africa and upon Africans. It is therefore basically Western history existentially acted out on African soil. There are obvious limitations with this perspective since the indigenous African contribution is virtually ignored. Essentially, the missionary approach writes the African out of what should be his own history, which could also raise claims as to the morality of the missionary approach since it may very well serve to dehumanize Africans who would read such works.

The nationalist approach attempts to show the indigenous contributions made to Christianity, often to the exclusion or near exclusion of Western missionary efforts. It takes very seriously the role of the African as an actor on the historical stage. Its weakness is that it often does not highlight the interaction of Western people and ideas with the Africans who attempted to adopt and apply Christianity toward their own specific reality.

The ecumenical approach is the proposed mid-point of the mission-nationalist spectrum. The ecumenical view of history attempts to show the missionary and his version of the gospel while giving equal attention to its contextualization within the African continent. It would not appear to have an ideological agenda, unless the commitment to balance is perceived as such.

Each approach has strengths and weaknesses, as every perspective, by definition, has limitations. The topic of Rastafarianism, however, could only with very great difficulty be realistically approached from a missionary or ecumenical perspective. This is because Rastafarianism does not claim to owe its

origin or sustenance to any Western concept or person. Indeed this is one of the most significant reasons why the Rastafarian religio-social statement was forged. The nature of Rastafarianism demands an approach that is nationalist, in keeping with the goals and aspirations of its members, and it is the nationalist approach that will be offered throughout this work.

An African nationalist approach is, however, inadequate in explaining the perspective offered in this analysis. An *African-centered* perspective is more befitting to the true character of this endeavor. For the sake of clarity it is important for the reader to understand something about the ontological basis inherent in the interchangeable terms “African-centeredness” and “Afrocentricity.” It is not merely the elaboration or analysis of an aspect of African phenomena by an African person. This is one of the most frequent errors in regard to Afrocentricity. This is part of Afrocentricity, but not its core, for Afrocentricity denotes an understanding of the world from a profoundly African perspective. The African-centered approach presupposes a “centeredness” in African culture as a point of reference.¹ Therefore one could be African in phenotype and genotype, but not culturally grounded in a framework of African philosophical thought and experience. One may be African but not African-centered.

Methodology

This thesis is a work of historical analysis. It will employ the use of standard historical narrative. It is not scientific in the sense of a laboratory inspired re-creation of the past, but rather, it attempts to tell a story about an aspect of the African past in the hope that the Africa of the present will gather more information concerning who she is and should endeavor to become. The story of Rastafarianism is told not merely for the acquisition of “facts,” but to give clearer meaning and direction to the nature of African religion, and to the African Church in particular.²

As a qualitative research method, the case study of Nairobi is a significant aspect of this thesis. It is needed to provide ideological clarity and focus to the abstract concepts articulated in this work. To aid in the process interviews were conducted in order to apprehend the opinions and behaviors of various persons and groups within Nairobi. The interviews obtained toward the contribution of the Nairobi case

study will be limited in scope and presented in chapters four, five and six.

The main sources of research data were attained through literary means, but the interviews conducted were obtained orally and within the space of eighteen months prior to the compilation of this work. This was important for the sake of timeliness and relevance to the situation in Nairobi at the time of this writing.

The purpose of the interviews was to discover and highlight the tenets of Rastafarian beliefs and relevant experiences within Nairobi from a variety of perspectives. To attain this variety, different Rastafarians ranging from international leaders to new converts were interviewed. In addition, Rastafarians were interviewed individually and collectively as a way of adding further diversity to the overall interview process. Also, Rastafarians from different socio-economic backgrounds were interviewed, although most were from the lower economic spectrum. This was unavoidable since the overwhelming preponderance of Rastafarians in Nairobi and elsewhere are found in the lower economic spectrum. Parenthetically, this phenomenon is integrally related to Rastafarian belief.

The neighborhood, Jericho, in East Nairobi is the acknowledged geographical center of the Rastafarian movement in Nairobi in terms of both ideas and population. For this reason Rastafarians from this area were interviewed, although not exclusively. It is also for this reason that the African Inland Church (AIC) of Jericho was focused upon as an object of inquiry. Two meetings were conducted and recorded from AIC Jericho, which could be categorized as "youth" and "elders". It was important to account for the generational differences in the Church population in regard to their attitudes concerning their Rastafarian neighbors.

The interviews of Rastafarians were collected by attaining the general background information of each person, including their understanding of Rastafarian religious belief. Of considerable importance was the Rastafarian experience and nature of interaction with the Kenyan government and the Evangelical Church, particularly AIC Jericho. Information regarding the motivating reasons behind Rastafarian conversion and the Rastafarian connection to the African past were also discussed in each Rastafarian interview, whether individual or collective. The interviews were conducted in an informal, free flowing

style, provoked by lead questions that were open ended.

The interviews of AIC Jericho were conducted in similar fashion, with a shift in the nature of lead questions. The goal of these interviews was to determine the level of understanding the Evangelical Church has in regard to the Rastafarian movement. To provoke this response, the Church was asked questions regarding its ability to enumerate and discuss critically certain Rastafarian beliefs. Several members of AIC Jericho also gave their experiences with Rastafarians in Jericho often accompanied by an interpretation of those experiences. It should also be noted that several of the people interviewed at AIC did not attend that Church, but did attend other Evangelical Churches within the Jericho area.

END NOTES

1. Molefi Kete Asante, *Afrocentricity* (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 1980), 1.
2. Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought*, Carl F. Braaten, ed. (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1968), xvi.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The presentation of this work presupposes consultation from a plethora of literary sources. In addition, several works from different subject areas have been necessarily surveyed. The various areas will be classified as the following: Ethiopian history, Ethiopianism, Rastafarianism, Kenyan history and African-centered theory.

Ethiopian History

Ethiopianism, and Rastafarianism by extension, draws off of an ideological interpretation of Ethiopian history. A chronicling of and interaction with Ethiopian history is thereby necessary as a prerequisite to Rastafarianism. Historically, Rastafarianism has been more or less aligned to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The mystic element of that religion finds deep expression in Rastafarianism, elevating Steven Kaplan's *The Monastic Holy Man* to a level of importance in this work. *Kebra Nagast*, an ancient Ethiopian book of history, is also an important piece to the analytical puzzle due to its claims and ties to ancient Jewish civilization, an association that Rastafarianism draws heavily from. Ryszard Kapuscinski's *The Emperor*, is an extremely useful account in terms of highlighting the flaws in the regime of Ethiopia's Haile Selassie I, undoubtedly the key figure surrounding the Rastafarian religion and for whom it is named.

The aforementioned works along with their respective authors, with the notable exception of Kapuscinski, are not critical of Ethiopian history and its claims, particularly its claim to the legal possession of the Ark of the Covenant as asserted in *Kebra Nagast*. General Ethiopian history, which, of course, is extremely useful in the chronicling of Ethiopian history, tends to be told by Western authors, but more importantly, written from a Eurocentric perspective. The glaring exception to this is the African-American historian, Chancellor Williams, and his work *The Destruction of Black Civilization*. It is for

precisely this reason why Williams' book is important within the context of this discussion.

Ethiopianism

There is no single book known to the author which addresses the topic of Ethiopianism in the exclusive detail in which it deserves. There are, however, excerpts on the subject to be found within larger volumes. *The African Church 1450-1950* by Adrian Hastings and *Christianity in Tropical Africa* by C.G. Baeta, are the best works on the topic of generalized Ethiopianism to date. Other works, such as F.B. Welbourne's *East African Rebels*, give more detailed accounts of Ethiopianism acted out in history through particular individuals and institutions such as John Chilembwe and the Zionist Church of South Africa.

The most detailed account of an expression of Ethiopianism is undoubtedly John Henrik Clarke and Amy Jacques Garvey's *Marcus Garvey and the Vision of Africa*. It is also the most significant since it shows the nature and extent of Garvey's Christian Pan-African ideals so crucial to any understanding of Ethiopianism in the 20th century. Of all the Ethiopianist ideas and movements, Garveyism had the most profound impact in the formation of the Rastafarian cult, and Garvey himself is acknowledged as the first prophet of the Rastafarian movement.

Rastafarianism

Rastafarianism is not a monolithic entity, rather, it consists of four major sections in terms of organization and belief: The Ethiopian World Federation (EWF), The Twelve Tribes of Israel, the Niyabingi and the Boboshanti. Several works were consulted to gain an understanding of general and more specific Rastafarian belief, culture and history. Due to the conspicuous absence of material on Rastafarianism from an Evangelical perspective, every work consulted within this discussion was written by a Rastafarian from one of the four organizations mentioned, with the notable exceptions of Tracy Nichols in her important work, *Rastafari: A Way of Life*, and an abbreviated version of Christof Putzel's master's thesis, *The Evolution of Rastafari*, the latter of which is as yet unpublished. This does not mean that the Rastafarian authors are uncritical of their own movement, for this would be far from the case. They are critical, at least as critical as Nichols and Putzel, but from a position of commitment to Rastafarian belief. Dennis Forsythe's *Rastafari: Healing of the Nations* is a superb work exposing the

underlying philosophy of Rastafarianism, while Leonard Barrett's *The Rastafarians; Sounds of Cultural Dissonance* highlights the specific distinctives of Rastafarian belief and behavior. In terms of pure historical analysis, clearly Horace Campbell's *Rasta and Resistance* is the best overall work which is adequately supplemented by Douglas Mack's *From Babylon to Rastafari*. Mack's most significant contribution is that he is an international leader of the Rastafarian movement and was instrumental in communicating with former Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie in the Shashamane resettlement project.

Depending on how Rastafarianism is defined, one may include Walter Rodney in the list of Rastafarian authors. He was certainly in extensive dialogue with the Rastafarian community in Jamaica and other Caribbean locations, and these Rastafarians also claim Rodney as one of their own. In any case, Rastafarianism, like all religious statements, has a socio-political and socio-economic element to its belief. Rastafarians acknowledge this element and are unapologetic in its expression, which is often a distinguishing feature between Rastafarianism and Evangelical Christianity. Rodney's works, particularly *The Groundings with My Brothers*, are extremely helpful in articulating Rastafarian views on the political, social and economic level.

Kenyan History

The city of Nairobi, Kenya serves as a case study in this thesis. There is an apperceived link between the Mau Mau uprising, Kenyan independence and the associated ideas of Rastafarianism among Kenyan Rastafarian converts. The role of the Kenyan government and its laws affecting the Rastafarian movement of Nairobi is also of importance in illuminating the unique nature and history of Rastafarianism in Kenya. For this reason the Kenyan Constitution will be consulted at a certain juncture, along with an extremely important analysis conducted by Jeff Haynes in his book *Religion and Politics in Africa*. Haynes takes a detailed look at Africa in her relationship between the church and state, but he does not seem to go far enough in his conclusions, perhaps because he writes from a Eurocentric perspective and not an African nationalist one.

Afrocentricity

Rastafarianism is an African religion, having developed among the diasporan African people of Jamaica. More importantly, it makes the claim of being a Christian and African-centered religious

statement. The author of this work makes the claim of offering a Christian and African-centered critique of the Rastafarian movement. Certain works have been invaluable in the aiding of this process, including Willie Abraham's classic work, *The Mind of Africa*. Molefi Kete Asante, the founder of modern African-centered thought and who originally coined the term "Afrocentricity," contributes invaluable to this discussion, although, like Abraham, most frequently from behind the scenes. Marimba Ani's work, *Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior*, is also invaluable. In critiquing Western thought and behavior Ani manages to reveal much concerning the nature of the world the way ancient and modern African-centered persons conceive of it.

Since Rastafarianism is an alleged African-centered religion, it draws from a complex matrix of symbols and ritual drama. Carl Jung's *Man and His Symbols* offers clues in the decoding of archaic symbolic reality which will be applied to the specific phenomenon of Rastafarianism. Mircea Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane* provides the historical support for the sacred nature of the ancient world view in juxtaposition with the modern view of reality. Rastafarians identify much of what would comprise the modern view with "Babylon," a term used in Revelation of the Bible symbolizing an inter-related system of decadent ideas and behavior which would find its most profound expression in the last days before the return of Christ. Although both Jung and Eliade are Western scholars, they aid in the reclamation of Afrocentricity because of their commitment to the amplification of archaic values and perspectives which, arguably, find their deepest expression in ancient African cosmology and religion, which is what Rastafarianism is, or at least claims to be.

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CHAPTER 3

THE ROOTS: ETHIOPIA AND ETHIOPIANISM

Introduction

The story of Ethiopianism, the ideological inspiration of Rastafarianism, owes its existence to the persons and events that make up Ethiopian history. It is to this history that we now refer in an attempt to understand something of the nature of Rastafarianism. Obviously, there is a seemingly infinite amount of Ethiopian history that will not be covered in these few pages. The goal is to uncover enough of it that pertains in some way, whether directly or indirectly, to Rastafarianism. Of particular interest is the religious history of Ethiopia in her relationship with Israel, Judaism and subsequent Christianity.

King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba

Ethiopian religious history has its roots partly within the Jewish order. To this day Ethiopians consider themselves largely a Semitic people. Ethiopian-Semitic relations go at least as far back as Abraham of the Old Testament. Moses also lived in Ethiopia and in all probability took an Ethiopian as his wife. But the Biblical account that is most important from an Ethiopian standpoint to Ethiopianism as an ideological force is the story of the Israelite King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, believed by Ethiopians to have been in Ethiopia.¹ It is this myth on which the Ethiopian religious, ethnological and biological ties to Israel are primarily based. As Ethiopian history records, the Queen of Sheba, upon her visit to King Solomon, bore him a son named Menelik. Upon becoming King of Ethiopia, Menelik then introduced Jewish blood within the royal family which established Solomonic rule in Ethiopia.²

The account of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba must be understood if one is interested in understanding Ethiopian history. There are, however, many accounts of this story. It is found in Arabic Christian literature, European literature, Coptic Egyptian chronicles and *Kebra Nagast* (Ethiopian Book

of Kings). There is some discrepancy between the nature of these accounts, but they are not recognized by Ethiopians since *Kebra Nagast* alone is viewed as sacred and serves as the authoritative source.

The account of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba is quite brief within the biblical text, but despite this it has been significantly embellished and codified in Ethiopia through *Kebra Nagast*. Within that book it is claimed that a Queen of Ethiopia, Makeda, was the Queen of Sheba mentioned in the Scriptures.³ Makeda had a baby boy by Solomon, and the boy was named Bahnah-Lehkem, later named Menelik I upon his crowning as King of Ethiopia.⁴ It is recorded that the Israelite Priest, Zadok, anointed Menelik I at the proper occasion. King Solomon also ordered that the first born of all the Israelite nobles be sent to Ethiopia to serve King Menelik I. In doing so, the sons stole the Ark of the Covenant so that the presence of God would accompany them.⁵ From this moment on Ethiopia, not Israel, became the people and nation of God.

Christianity and Aksum

Ethiopia and its pre-Christian heritage with Israel also extended itself to the A.D. era in the form of its religious statement. An Ethiopian kingdom emerged in the name and form of Aksum in the first century A.D. The conversion to Christianity by one of its early kings, Ezana, effectively transformed the kingdom of Aksum into a Christian one by the fourth century.⁶

The historical record indicates that the Syrian brothers, Frumentius and Aedesius, came to Aksum and that Frumentius was asked to teach young Ezana and help him to rule until he was old enough to rule alone.⁷ It was through Frumentius' teachings that Ezana became a Christian convert. The same Frumentius was later appointed bishop to Aksum by the Patriarch of Alexandria. Frumentius preached mostly in the court of Aksum and helped to evangelize the flourishing kingdom. Missionary groups also came into Aksum for the purpose of evangelization, the most noteworthy of which were the Sadqan and the Nine Saints. The Nine Saints were responsible for the founding of several monastic communities within Aksumite borders. The Sadqan, however, had trouble relating with the people of Aksum and some of them were killed, leading to the conclusion by some that the Sadqan were the first martyrs of the Ethiopian Church.⁸

The powerful influence and dominion of Islam challenged Aksum in the seventh century, effectively isolating Aksum from the rest of the Christian world until the tenth century.⁹ During this period Muslim forces successfully conquered most of Aksum to the point where Ethiopian chronicles suggest that as many as nine out of ten Ethiopians became Muslims. The Muslim invasions and influence did not deter the Aksumite Kingdom from asserting its own rule for its own people even if it was in name only.¹⁰

The Zagwe Dynasty

The Islamic siege over Aksum was loosened by persistent Aksumite resistance until 1137, when the Zagwe dynasty took firm command of the Kingdom. The Zagwe dynasty consisted of rulers from the Agew, a Cushitic people within Ethiopia. Despite their piety, religious reforms and advances, many of which were made by the most exceptional Zagwe king, Lalibela, the Zagwe dynasty was overthrown in 1270.¹¹

The Zagwe were never considered to be legitimate rulers by the Ethiopians themselves.¹² They were not part of the Solomonic line, but they were also too “Black”¹³, that is, their ancestry and culture was more directly centered within the interior of Africa itself. This may indeed have been the real reason why Zagwe rule was declared illegitimate. It is well known that Ethiopia, the name given to the region of Abyssinia, was ruled by a people of mixed blood who not only did not consider themselves African by race, but who maintained a privileged class society based on color.¹⁴ To them all Black-skinned Africans were “Bantu,” and to these they felt superior due to their “white blood.”¹⁵ The discriminatory practices by Ethiopia were just as real as the whites’ in later centuries.

Interestingly, this “white blood” possessed by the Ethiopian is undoubtedly why more than one history text refer to them as a handsome people.¹⁶ The implication is not lost by those who have traditional African features and who have been consistently depicted in negative terms. It was the Black-skinned Cushite that Ethiopians sold into slavery above everyone else.¹⁷ This practice was stopped only in the 1930's when the League of Nations forced Haile Selassie I to end slavery as a prerequisite to Ethiopian membership, and even then slavery continued in Ethiopia just as it did and does in the Sudan.¹⁸

Furthermore, the Cushites may also represent a threat to the Ethiopian claim to Solomonic rule. It is known that the story central to Ethiopian culture and religion, King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, could very well refer to the Black-skinned people of Nubia, in which "Sheba" was apparently another name for that region.¹⁹ In addition, the other Biblical story crucial to Ethiopian claims of religious and cultural legitimacy could also be a reference to Cush (Nubia)- not Ethiopia (Abyssinia). Luke's description of the Ethiopian eunuch's encounter with Phillip highlights Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians.²⁰ Candace is a historic Cushitic title given to the mother of the king, a very powerful position in Cush.²¹ Luke calls her the queen of the Ethiopians, not the Cushites. Yet it seems quite clear that Luke is referring only to the Cushitic Kingdom. From this perspective the Cushites are the Ethiopians- not the Abyssinians. The very name "Ethiopia" is a Greek term meaning "sun-burned people," obviously this could not be a direct reference to the nation-state of Ethiopia with her heavily Semitic ancestry and phenotype. The ancient term "Ethiopia" as the Greeks conceived of it referred to a people and not a specific geographical location. This is an important point, one that will be revisited later, for this is the same concept of Ethiopia that is reclaimed in Ethiopianism.

The Return of Solomonic Rule

The Zagwe dynasty was followed by the reign of Yekunno Amlak, who effectively reestablished the Solomonic dynasty in 1270. He was succeeded by Yagba Seyon (1285-1294).²² Amlak reasserted the Solomonic line but it was Seyon that is credited for establishing the unification of the Kingdom of Ethiopia. This was a major turning point in Ethiopian history, but it was not destined to last despite the reigns of great kings dispersed throughout mediocre ones.²³

The perennial problems of Ethiopian governance were twofold. The first was the task of achieving the political unity of many different people of many different regions with many different cultures. The second problem was that of legitimate succession after the death of the king. Even when it was clear who the successor should be, this by no means guaranteed his ascension to the throne.²⁴ Power plays and political maneuvers were commonplace to usurp the positions of the rightful rulers. Both of these setbacks greatly diminished Ethiopia's stability and left her susceptible to both internal and external

forces.

Christianity was a constant source of spiritual nourishment during this time despite constant threats from Islam on many levels. Ethiopian Christianity took on the monophysite form of doctrine. However, the Ethiopian Church was unique in many ways, including its Old Testament Jewish residue of practices, its ascetic monasteries, and its Bible translated into Ge'ez. The Ethiopian Church also drew the attention of Europe due to Europe's belief in a foreign Christian kingdom ruled by a mythical figure named Prester John.²⁵ Europe was led to believe that Ethiopia was the kingdom under the legendary Prester John's domain.

Ethiopia Restored

The resurgence of the Ethiopian state began in the nineteenth century. Tewodros restored Ethiopian nationhood in 1855, but it was Menelik II who established Ethiopia as a political and religious force.²⁶ His dream was "the reconstitution of the ancient Empire of Ethiopia."²⁷ To this end he worked with all his energy by understanding the need for technology for his people but denouncing the Industrial Revolution since he believed it would entail a social and economic transformation which he despised.²⁸ Brilliant! More than that- prophetic- for he knew then what many Africans still have not grasped- that with modernization, particularly capitalism and individualism, inevitably comes the breakdown of morality in any given society.

Menelik II also initiated religious reform within Ethiopia.²⁹ He was a devout member of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and served to reinstate Ethiopian Christianity to its former glory. He knew that if Ethiopia was to take her place among the nations of the world and still remain true to her past she would have to be informed by a spiritual force, namely Jesus Christ.

Menelik II's form of Christianity also embodied Ethiopian patriotism and resistance to the white foreigner. Apparently he had learned well from history and was determined not to repeat the mistakes of his forerunners. The "scramble for Africa" by several European nations had managed to carve out almost the entire African continent under European conquest and control during Menelik II's reign, and sure enough, Italy had a keen interest in annexing Ethiopia as one of its territories. At this Menelik was

prepared to fight to his death, for he believed the Ethiopian saying that “one recovers from the bite of a black snake, but. . . never. . . from the bite of a white snake.”³⁰ He understood very well that an Italian conquest of Ethiopia would threaten the very fabric of her existence.

As Italy invaded Ethiopia Menelik II’s troops fought valiantly to withstand Italian aggression. Although technologically outmatched, Ethiopia soundly defeated the Italian army as they attempted to capture the city of Adwa in 1896. This decisive battle marked the beginning of the end of the war, and it was one of the few times that African people had successfully defended themselves from European invasion in battle. Menelik promptly gave thanks and praise to Jesus Christ before and after the victory. The very morning of the battle was preceded by prayer, communion and worship by Ethiopian troops and Menelik II himself.³¹

It would take Italy almost four decades to attempt to conquer Ethiopia again. This time Ethiopia was under the rule of Haile Selassie I, formerly Ras Tafari Makonnen. In 1936 Italy was indeed successful in conquering Ethiopia and its young capital of Addis Ababa, founded during the reign of Menelik II. Selassie fled into exile and protested Italy’s aggression in a series of passionate speeches to the League of Nations and other international organizations. Selassie’s pleas for justice quickly won him the status of an international figure of human rights. It would, however, be five years before Selassie would reassert his throne in 1941. From there Selassie initiated a multitude of reforms alongside Christian virtues. With the exception of the five years of Italian occupation, Ethiopia and Liberia were the only African countries to maintain political sovereignty during European colonialism.³²

Ethiopianism

Ethiopianism as a historic movement occurred between the “scramble for Africa” (1884) and World War I (1914).³³ It emerged in part as a form of resistance against European imperialism and oppression. Inspired by the example of Ethiopian history, particularly its defeat of the Italians and maintenance of a Christian stance, Africans on the continent began to take courage and hope in the reclamation of a powerful African nation. Ethiopianism as an ideological force had and is having a

profound impact on the masses of African people, inspiring hope and injecting the possibility of freedom within the collective consciousness of those who embrace its meaning. The term "Ethiopianism" could be defined as:

A national sense of cultural and political identity of Black Christians anywhere on the continent [and her diaspora] drawing on the bible on one side and the surviving strength of a Black Christian state on the other, to inspire confidence at once religious and political over against the pressure to conform in all things to the white man, missionary or colonialist.³⁴

From this viewpoint as Hastings correctly asserts; "for the Protestant, strong in efficiency, civilization, and white control, Ethiopianism is the antithesis of all he had sought to achieve."³⁵

Ethiopianism is a Black Christian statement. The extension of the Ethiopian spirit to Africa and her diaspora is what makes Ethiopianism distinct from a more generalized Black nationalism. There is no Ethiopianism without Christianity, and protest and Christianity have often gone hand in hand in reference to African religious conceptions despite Marx's claims stating otherwise. Religion, and Christianity in particular, has not always served as the opiate of the masses, in fact quite the opposite, for African people have used their Christian understanding as a main ingredient and inspiration toward the struggle of freedom.³⁶

"The Ethiopian Church became the most important symbol of the identity and independence of the Ethiopians, and it developed a biblical and Christian ideology which kept the indomitable spirit of the Christians still intact throughout the long history of the country."³⁷ This symbol was simply extended to include all African peoples. Ethiopianism, in reclaiming the original Greek understanding of a generalized Africa, played an enormous role in Pan-Africanism by giving revolutionary religious expression to a notoriously religious people. Christ was interpreted as the liberator of mankind and the Lord who sided with the poor, downtrodden and oppressed.³⁸ Africans the world over identified themselves within these categories. Ethiopianism was designed to meet the needs of these Africans on many different levels- including spiritual, political, economical, social and psychological.

As an African initiative in Christianity, Ethiopianism has been a vital component in the fulfillment of the African quest for identity and authentic meaning. The first half of the twentieth century

witnessed the emergence and growth of African Independent Churches. These churches were formed for a number of reasons, namely African church heritage, African spirituality and African cultural identity. To the extent that missionary-colonial churches could not meet these African aspirations, the only viable alternative was separation.

In the Union of South Africa, for example, there were one hundred twenty African separatist churches in 1918, by 1932 there were 322 churches, and by 1948 there were an amazing 900 separatist churches.³⁹ Clearly this speaks to the influence of the Ethiopianist movement within only one country in Africa.

The spirit of Ethiopianism, however, had been evident long before Ethiopianism as a historical movement was discerned. Ethiopianism, or it could also be called Black Christian nationalism, found expression where oppression was felt before the “scramble for Africa” through Richard Allen and Absalom Jones in the African Methodist Episcopal Church (1789) and David Walker in *David Walker’s Appeals* (1829), both born in the United States. Since then Ethiopianism has found a voice through John Chilembwe in the Chilembwe rebellion, the Maji Maji Rebellion, the persistence of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Marcus Garvey in the “Back to Africa” movement and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), Spartus and the African Orthodox Church in Uganda and Kenya, and scores of other means, far too many to name.⁴⁰

Arguably, the most powerful expression of Ethiopianism has come from Marcus Garvey and his beliefs in what has been called “Garveyism”.⁴¹ Perhaps there is no other figure in African history who has managed to influence as many people in the twentieth century. His ideas transcend the organizations he founded. Indeed, Garveyism is the precursor to the most potent of all the universal statements of Ethiopianism, Rastafarianism, and it is the story of Rastafarianism as a specific manifestation of Ethiopianism and Garveyism that demands attention.

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CHAPTER 4

THE ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF RASTAFARIANISM

Introduction

The sandy shores of Jamaica have witnessed the horrors of the Atlantic slave trade and serve as the home of millions of African descendants. One of the most powerful and influential Jamaicans on the international scale was Marcus Garvey. A fiery and eloquent speaker, Garvey spent the first ten years of the twentieth century traveling throughout the Caribbean, Europe, South America and the United States.¹ In each continent visited he was struck by the general plight of the African. The overwhelming majority of these respective Black populations were living in deplorable conditions even within countries of material affluence. As a consequence Garvey began to address these conditions and his speeches made great impact on Africans all over the world largely due to his emphasis for the Black race to reclaim her former glory. Garvey's words had the effect of speaking to the entire African being.²

“Back to Africa”

Garvey, however, was not a man of mere talk. He launched a series of programs from the Black “Mecca” of Harlem, New York designed to regain a sense of pride for Black people wherever they were found. The “Back to Africa” movement captured the hearts of African people living in the Americas who were faced with the residue of slavery and the reality of biting economic and political oppression. Garvey's dream was “Africa for the Africans”, a vision of Pan-Africanism which would enable Blacks in the diaspora to emigrate to the motherland.

The UNIA

Through the UNIA Garvey undertook concrete measures to initiate a shift in the collective consciousness of African people. He began the *Negro World* newspaper, which by 1919 had become the

most widely read weekly in the United States.³ He also founded the Black Star Line Steamship Company, which transformed the wildness of the back to Africa dream into a concrete possibility. In 1919 the UNIA purchased a steamship named the *Yarmouth*, which Garvey had intended to rename the *Frederick Douglass*, but never did. He also began payments on the steamship *Orion*, but never finished them and thus never acquired outright possession of the ship.⁴ Indeed, the Black Star Line was an economic disaster, but its long term appeal was to inspire the masses of African people with the hope that positive change for the Black race need not be relegated to dreams only.⁵

Black Christianity

Often neglected by historians when describing Garvey's views is his Christian belief. Like Menelik II, Garvey did not believe that the reclamation of an African world view could be attained without it being spiritually informed. Black people had to see themselves in God's image, meaning that God had to become Black for Black people:

Whilst our God has no colour, yet it is human to see everything through our own spectacles, and since white people have seen their God through white spectacles, we have only now started out (late though it be) to see God through our own spectacles . . . We Negroes believe in the God of Ethiopia, the Everlasting God, God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Ghost, the one God of all ages. That is the god in whom we believe, but we shall worship him through the eyes of Ethiopia.⁶

The image of the blond, blue eyed Jesus had to be ejected from the African psyche if she was ever to worship Christ in Spirit and in truth. Owing to Scripture, Garvey believed that the African would be redeemed world wide at every level, and he told his followers in Jamaica before he reached international prominence to "look to Africa for the crowning of a black king; he shall be the redeemer."⁷

The Origins of Rastafarianism

In 1930, Ras Tafari, an Ethiopian prince and son of Ras Makonnen, was crowned king of the nation of Ethiopia. This historic African Christian State, which had withstood the irresistible pressure to become colonized by any European nation, was the source of great inspiration for Africans. Furthermore, the integration of both the spiritual and political realm embodied by Selassie I made him symbolic of what Africans everywhere were trying to achieve. The history of Ethiopia, and its ability to trace its roots back

historically to Solomon and the Queen of Sheba through *Kebra Nagast*, gave them validity, both historically and spiritually, to exercise special authority as a nation. This was expressed in Article Two of the Ethiopian Constitution of 1955:

The Imperial Dignity shall remain perpetually attached to the line . . . [which] descends without interruption from the dynasty of Menelik I, son of Queen of Ethiopia, Queen of Sheba, and King Solomon of Jerusalem.⁸

It is not difficult to see why some African people, and particularly so in Jamaica, a people suffering through immense political, social, and psychological hardships, a people, in fact, desperate for answers and the need to reclaim their right to exist as human beings and to assert this right on the earth, would look to Selassie for inspiration and strength. Many Africans believed that Selassie would transform Africa from European domination to African self-sufficiency, and that he would bring expatriated Africans, the sons and daughters of African slaves, back to their homeland, Ethiopia. Hundreds more in Jamaica began to believe that Selassie was not only the one spoken of by Garvey as the “the Black King”, but God incarnate, the Black Messiah.⁹

By 1932, Leonard Howell was preaching the message of the Black Messiah to Jamaican citizens.¹⁰ Within a year he had audiences of up to 800 in different areas of Jamaica and St. Thomas, where he frequently visited and lived for several years.¹¹ The Jamaican government, however, viewed Howell’s message with considerable concern, as the implications of such were a threat to colonial establishment. Police officers were apprehensive as Howell’s message and popularity grew among the poor class of Jamaica as they would sing songs such as, “Day by day I see what Leonard Howell is doing for my soul.”¹² Howell was later arrested on charges of sedition, his accusers stating that he abused the Sovereign and Governor of Jamaica:

Thereby intending to incite hatred and contempt for his majesty the King of England and of those responsible for the government of the island, and to create disaffection among the subjects of his majesty in this island and to disturb the public peace and tranquility of the island.¹³

Howell was sentenced to two years hard labor for selling pictures of Haile Selassie and for claiming that Selassie was the king of Black men. Afterward Howell was continually in conflict with the Jamaican government and was committed to an insane asylum in Kingston.¹⁴

Original Rastafarian Beliefs

It was the end of the messenger but not the message. The Jamaican worshipers of Haile Selassie began to call themselves Rastafarians. According to Rastafarian historian Leonard Barrett, they had six basic beliefs:

1. Haile Selassie I is the living God.
2. The Black person is the reincarnation of ancient Israel, who, at the hand of the white person, has been sent to exile in Jamaica.
3. The white person is inferior to the Black person.
4. The Jamaican situation is a hopeless hell; Ethiopia is heaven.
5. The invincible Emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie I, is now arranging for those of expatriate African origin to return to Ethiopia.
6. In the near future Blacks shall rule the world.¹⁵

Rastafarian Symbols

Looking to Ethiopia as its geographical and ideological source of inspiration, the Rastafarians adopted the colors of red, green and yellow which were interpreted to also represent the red blood of Africans everywhere on the earth, the green land of Africa, the motherland of the earth and land of the forefathers, and yellow for the light of the sun which never fails to shine on Africa.¹⁶

Dreadlocks

The other popular symbol of the Rastafarian is “dreadlocks”, the matting of the hair into several long locks achieved by washing, but not cut or combed.¹⁷ The partial inspiration for this process is obtained from the Bible and its restriction of the Nazarites, those who were set apart for God’s service. “They shall not make baldness upon their heads, neither shall they shave the corner of their beard.”¹⁸ Rastafarians also see dreadlocks as symbolic of their refusal to adopt Babylonian ways. Although Rastafarians thoroughly disagree with Babylon they do not always openly rebel against it, and when engaged with Babylonians they often cover their hair as a show of respect to them since they realize that dreadlocks are dreaded by the Babylonian establishment.¹⁹ Dreadlocks are usually covered with a wool tam with the colors of Ethiopia embroidered on it in some form of design. For the Rastaman, dreadlocks

also represent the covenant entered upon by Jah, the Rastafarian God and Father.²⁰

The "Spliff"

Another popular symbol of Rastafarianism has become the "spliff," or marijuana rolled into a cigarette. Many Rastafarians are users of the herb although it is illegal in many countries, including Jamaica. Rastafarians typically use marijuana for special functions. It is not merely a recreational drug, nor is the use of it required for membership into the Rastafarian community.²¹

The spliff is usually smoked communally in what Rastafarians call "reasoning" or "grounding" sessions. Rastafarians gather to assimilate new knowledge acquired or to receive special or divine revelations from God. Marijuana is used as a way of transcendence into deeper spiritual and metaphysical realities. The sharing during such sessions is allegedly beneficial to all those attending and most of the members participate in the discussion.²²

Reggae Music

One of the most important vehicles used to promote Rastafarian belief is reggae music. Bob Marley's musical genius gave reggae music an international platform and Marley became an international celebrity. From the ghettos of Jamaica, Marley managed to capture the spirit and the thoughts of Rastafarians and other African people. Marley is of vital importance to Rastafarianism since without him the movement may well have been more or less confined to Jamaica to this day. Over twenty years after Marley's death, his music is still on some of the most popular music charts.²³

Rastafarianism as an African-Centered Perspective

Rastafarianism is an African folk religion, drawing off the ancient African archetypes of the past.²⁴ Christianity is interpreted as the fulfillment of the deepest meaning of African primal religion. In this sense, Rastafarianism has a common heritage with Santeria of Cuba, Voodoo of Haiti, and other West Indian religions.²⁵ However, there is also the Bible as an informant of Rastafarian belief. As Garvey announced, the Bible is interpreted through an African lens, which is altogether fitting for Rastafarians, since they believe the Bible to be essentially an African book. The African religious statements of the Caribbean and the rest of the Americas bear a strikingly similar resemblance to religion on the continent

of Africa. Rastafarian belief and practice have commonalities with Yoruba religion of West Africa and the Akamba religion of Kenya.²⁶ But how could this have been? Although Jamaicans were the descendants of Africa, they had been historically and geographically disconnected from their source of origin for at least 300 years at the time of Rastafarian origin. The explanation given by many is that they “knew” without knowing.²⁷ The African in the Caribbean had kept much of the ancient African world view and perspective intact not through consciousness, but through unconsciousness, intuition, or as Ani Marimba has called it, “ancestral memory”.²⁸ This is why Rastafarians believe that their religion has no “origin” as such; neither do Rastafarians themselves. When asking one Rastafarian daughter her age, she responded quite sincerely, “I am as old as creation.”²⁹

The Meaning of Symbols

As an African religion Rastafarianism is mystical. It conceives of the world as a true cosmos, at once organic and interrelated.³⁰ The universe reveals by its very nature the modalities of God’s ways. It is essentially symbolic, along with everything in it.³¹ The richness of the universe is displayed by spirit manifested through matter. It might even be said that matter is the densification of spirit.³² These are difficult concepts to understand for the modern man who has tended to desacralize the world, converting it into a knowable quantity in the hope of controlling it, manipulating it toward his own end.³³ The Rastaman, in keeping with an African concept of reality, perceives the ambiguity inherent in the nature of human existence. He embraces it, is comfortable with the expansion of meaning through symbols, convinced that it is through symbols that an understanding of the ontological basis of God, the world and humanity is discerned. The symbolic, however, goes beyond the mere adoption of colors and other visible manifestations associated with Rastafarianism. True symbols are at once religious and sacred. They point to a reality outside of the profane and at the same time participate in the reality in which the symbols describe.³⁴ They are by nature ambiguous, serving in some way as the mediation between spirit and matter, the sacred and the profane, transcending both realities while having the capability of being completely immersed in either of them at the same time.

The EWF and Shashamane

By 1937, the Ethiopian World Federation was formed and led by a cousin of Haile Selassie, Malaku Bayen.³⁵ The organization had branches in many places in the Western world with the goal of fostering unity and partnership between the nation of Ethiopia and Africans of the diaspora. In the early 1950's, Selassie donated 500 acres of prime Ethiopian land for the residence and development of Africans from the West.³⁶ This land, Shashamane, currently has between 100-200 Rastafarians dwelling there.³⁷ The land, however, is only a tenth of its original size after Ethiopian revolutionaries reclaimed much of it upon the overthrow of Haile Selassie from the throne in 1974.³⁸ Contradictions in the Rastafarian perspective emerged after Selassie's death in 1975, for it was then revealed that the Rastafarians in Shashamane had obtained their privileged status as a result of the Emperor's patronage and not from the support of the people. They were divorced from the very African people with whom they wanted to identify.³⁹ The other and infinitely more important contradiction raised by Selassie's death had to do with the Rastafarian's object of worship in lieu of the death of their messiah.

The Evolution of Rastafarianism

Rastafarianism is a religion on the move. It is not the same movement today as it was during its conception. There are the same outward symbols of dreadlocks, the colors of red, yellow and green, and the "spliff". There is also the same generalized theme of Black Christianity, but there is a vast amount of Rastafarian belief that has changed over the years. Today there are white suburban kids in America becoming Rastafarians because of the one world approach taken by some segments of new Rastafarian doctrine.⁴⁰

Revised Rastafarian Tenets

New belief systems and tenets much broader than the original and aforementioned six are beginning to be more representative of Rastafarianism. A fourfold statement was given by one Rastafarian leader in Nairobi asserting that the basic tenets of Rastafarianism now include:

1. Respect for the Creator Jah- Respect for the Creator is a noticeable distinction from the earlier Rastafarian insistence that Haile Selassie was God incarnate.

2. Harmony- Peace and harmonic equilibrium should characterize the persona of the Rastafarian.
3. Respect for one's mother and other females- the "mother" is regarded as the common denominator of all human beings and must be honored as such.
4. Equality under the eyes of Jah⁴¹- A noticeable contrast with the third belief of the original goals stating that "the white person is inferior to the Black person."

A Redefining of Ideas

Many Rastafarians, although still committed to the resistance of Babylon, are interpreting Babylon and the struggle for freedom in different ways. The locus of the struggle is wherever African people happen to be, making life-affirming practices and beliefs possible in places outside of Africa.⁴² The contradiction of Shashamane has aided in the Rastafarian interpretation of Zion as no longer only a physical reality, but a sacred and cultural one as well. It is a sacred space in that it represents itself as something wholly other than profane, physical space. Zion, or heaven, is a primordial spiritual reality which can find expression wherever one exists, even in the heart of Babylon itself. Reggae artists often sing about Garvey's Black Star Line, not as a physical ship, but as an intangible vehicle toward a holistic freedom.⁴³ This does not mean that there is no longer a need for a physical African Zion, far from it, but there is the realization that the physical home is the manifestation of Zion, it is not the essence.

Walter Rodney

One of the most influential thinkers in the Rastafarian political and economic scene was the Guyanese scholar Walter Rodney. His analysis of the freedom struggle helped give ideological clarity to the total liberation of African people by focusing on capitalism and class struggle through Marxist analysis. Rodney was a Black nationalist, but his piercing analysis in works such as *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, showed the ideas which perpetuated oppression, and how these ideas were often embodied by whites, but could also embody Africans as well. Most African nations, including Jamaica, were politically independent during Walter's analysis, yet the social, political and economic realities had not changed for the masses of African people, and in some cases had actually gotten worse.⁴⁴ Rastafarians began to talk of the Babylon within. Rodney provided the perspective that was needed to make sense of the

new climate of oppression. Interestingly, although Rodney used Marxist analysis to expose the diabolical nature of capitalism, it is not possible to call him or other Rastafarians Marxist. Clearly Rodney, although using Marxism as a tool, transcended Marxist thought and Rastafarians understand Babylon to exist in either capitalist or Marxist form.⁴⁵

Rastafarianism as Millenarian?

Rastafarian origins have often been labeled by non-Rastafarians as escapist millenarianism. There is compelling evidence to this association; the worship of a man, Haile Selassie, that Rastafarians actually knew little about, and the adoption of the Ethiopian nation which seemed just as nebulous to Jamaicans as their respective leader.⁴⁶ Rastafarians in Jamaica were learning Amharic as a way of identifying culturally with Ethiopia, not realizing that Amharic was only one of several languages and subcultures in Ethiopia, and the one belonging to the elite of the society.⁴⁷

Today, however, the blanket classification of the Rastafarian movement as millenarian may not be accurate. This label does not take seriously enough the perceived sickness of Babylon as Rastafarians conceive of it, nor does it account for the immense psychological ramifications of slavery and the need for Africa to reclaim herself, especially culturally. It is clearly more than mere millenarianism as Rastafarian thought develops into something other than what it was. It was reactionary, defense oriented and a correlative, more or less, of white nationalist Christianity, but it is now emerging as something qualitatively different. Many Rastafarians are realizing that the "master" and "slave" categories of humanity are versions of each other; that they are correlatives, that both are in bondage and cannot, in fact, exist without their respective counterpart.⁴⁸ They are realizing that they should be free, and that the only way to achieve this is by transcending the categories of both the master and the slave.⁴⁹

Freedom is a work in progress, and that is precisely what Rastafarianism currently is. The latter four Rastafarian distinctives are barely distinct at all because of the major shift that is occurring in Rastafarian thought. This does not mean that Rastafarians are not producing wonderfully creative and distinct thought, but that these ideas cannot be considered to be characteristic of the movement in general.⁵⁰ What remains to be seen is whether Rastafarianism will be able to absorb such a transformation

from its original goals as stated by Barrett. Population wise, it is safe to say that there are more Rastafarians now than ever before, but this does not guarantee its future security as a dynamic religious movement. What it ensures is that Rastafarianism is here to stay as a social phenomenon, but this, in itself, does not translate into a qualitatively different existence in the lives of African people. What is clear is that Ethiopianism, and more particularly, Garveyism, still has tremendous impact on African people and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future, regardless of its particular expression.

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CHAPTER 5

THE EXAMPLE OF NAIROBI

Introduction

In keeping with the topic of this discussion, the case study of Nairobi is undertaken in the hope that it will illuminate the nature of the Rastafarian lifestyle, the impact Rastafarianism has on a major city and vice versa. Also of crucial significance is the nature of the relationship between Rastafarianism and Evangelical Christianity. The goal of this chapter is to reveal something of the interrelatedness of these often conflicting statements.

General Kenyan Characteristics

Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, is an important city for several reasons. It is the largest city in Kenya, with an official population of over three million (although most believe it is significantly higher than that) and serves as the central area for that region. It is also the largest city in the most economically stable country in all of East Africa. It has an international airport and is a true cosmopolitan metropolis, its members comprised of people from many communities representing scores of African and non-African ethnic groups.

Kenya also has a unique history which plays an essential role in terms of its current situation. As a former British colony, Kenya gained its independence in 1963, largely as a result of the efforts of the dreadlock wearing Mau Mau rebels. The Mau Mau waged a guerilla war against the British government and its own Kikuyu brothers and sisters. Its leader, Jomo Kenyatta, for whom Nairobi's international airport is named, became an international figure in the freedom struggle for African people and was the first president of the independent Kenya. Upon his death Daniel Arap Moi became the second president of Kenya, and he still serves Kenya in that capacity to this day. Thus Kenya has only had two presidents in

38 years, which makes it an anomaly to other African nations. Perhaps this also has something to do with Kenya's comparative economic and political stability.

However, the city of Nairobi, like all capitalist cities, has a great contrast between the rich and the poor. Nairobi is a city with several slums, some of them notorious for being among the worst in the world. *Approximately sixty percent of the population of Nairobi live in these economic disaster areas,* although the slums only comprise around six percent of the land in Nairobi.¹ Oppression and economic despair are concrete realities for most of the residents of Nairobi.

Officially, Nairobi is a Christian city. Some sources estimate that as many as eighty percent of the people living in Nairobi classify themselves as Christians.² Christianity was brought to Kenya through a number of missionaries in the nineteenth century, perhaps the most notable of which were Johann Ludwig Krapf and Peter Cameron Scott.³ Other missionaries came and established hospitals, schools and churches, often in collaboration with the British government. The second most dominant religion is undoubtedly Islam, and is mostly practiced by a substantial and economically successful Asian- Indian population. The Asians were brought to Kenya during colonization by the British to serve as intermediary *business traders.*⁴ *They did not relinquish the position, and found themselves with considerable financial security particularly after the goal of Kenyan independence was achieved.*⁵

Rastafarianism in Nairobi

There are only somewhere between 150- 200 Rastafarians in Nairobi.⁶ Most of them live in the slum areas, and city wide gatherings of the Rastafarians usually transpire in the largest slum in Nairobi called Kibera.⁷ These Rastafarians, however, are scattered throughout Nairobi, and a slim few of them could be considered middle class. It would be wrong to judge the impact of Rastafarianism in Nairobi based on the number of its members, for there are thousands of Rastafarian sympathizers in Nairobi who are attracted to certain aspects of the Rastafarian perspective and way of life. Often these young people are interested in reggae music, marijuana, anti-Babylonian beliefs, Black pride or other Rastafarian concepts and symbols.⁸ These young people do not choose to follow the Rastafarian lifestyle from a position of commitment, and this is often because they do not know or understand the informing philosophies and

spiritual directives of the religion. According to Rastafarians, these Rastafarian sympathizers make it difficult for the average Kenyan citizen to discern the difference between the two.⁹

The Vehicle of Reggae

There are a number of Rastafarian clubs in Nairobi, many of them downtown, perhaps the most popular of which is “Hollywood’s.” Thousands of Nairobi youth flood these clubs each weekend to gather and dance to reggae music, although the vast majority of them would not classify themselves as Rastafarians; neither are they considered such by the legitimate Rastafarian community. They are sympathizers, and most of what they know about Rastafarianism comes directly from the message of reggae music. In addition to hearing reggae in Nairobi clubs and personal music collections, there are a number of reggae television video shows which showcase both local and international talent. The same is true of radio, in which the most popular radio stations devote segments of time to the playing of reggae music. These reggae music radio programs include: KBC and “DJ Jeff,” 101.9 “Positive Vibes” hosted by the Dread Brothers and Citizen radio with disc jockeys “Nasty Dread” and “King David.”¹⁰

Rastafarian Lifestyle and Employment

The dreadlocks of the Rastafarian will not permit him employment in most businesses in Nairobi. This is assuming, of course, that a Rastafarian would accept a business job even if it were offered to him. The Babylonian mentality and behavior expressed by businessmen and corporations would coerce the Rastafarian to take on those ways as part of the implied job description.¹¹ To avoid this conflict, but more importantly, to foster an attitude of self-determination, the Rastafarian in most cases works for himself. He is the epitome of a “hustler”, meaning that he devises many ways to make money and acquires the necessary skills in order to do so. Many Rastafarians are mechanics, tailors, carpenters, painters, brick layers and shoe makers all in one.¹² This is so because he has to make himself marketable. He may also sell fruit or some other food commodity. There are two occupations of Rastafarians that seem unique to Nairobi. The first of which is the making and selling of African crafts and paintings. Kenya’s second largest economic sector is tourism (agriculture is the leading sector). As a result one will find Rastafarians at the leading tourist markets in the city (Maasai Market, City Market and Village Market) as craft

vendors. The other unique occupation is that of “matatu” driving and “tout” work. Nairobi has an elaborate system of private transportation consisting of thousands of minivans called “matatus”. These matatus have at least one person who works for the owner and collects the matatu fare from the passengers while the driver is en route. The collector is called the tout, and both of these positions, both matatu driver and tout, are popular Rastafarian jobs in Nairobi.¹³

Education

Most Rastafarians are not married, and the overwhelming majority are male.¹⁴ There are perhaps fifty Rastafarian women in Nairobi.¹⁵ Rastafarians raise their children in the Rastafarian way of life. Most do not allow their children to attend educational institutions, or they end up taking their children out of school once the curriculum is discerned, or due to harassment and discrimination by school staff.¹⁶ Education is one of the primary means by which a world view is acquired, and since Kenyan education is of the Western model, it exists to propagate and preserve the Western or “modern” world view, which, of course, is unacceptable to Rastafarians. Indeed, most institutions will not accept children with dreadlocks.¹⁷ Surprisingly, private schools will accept them more readily than public institutions, as long as these children do not cause any “trouble”.¹⁸ As a result, Rastafarian families take on the added responsibility of teaching their children what they think they should know about the world.

The Bible is the reference point for most of the Rastafarian belief system, and the Old Testament is consulted more than the New. The Bible is seen as the connection to the past and prompts the Rastafarian with the constant reminder and encouragement that he was not the first to engage upon a serious spiritual journey.¹⁹ The laws of the Bible must be obeyed if one is to exist in harmony.²⁰

Marijuana

In addition to the Bible, the Rastafarian draws off of his African culture. He perceives that he was African before he was anything else, and therefore brings his African-centeredness to the interpretation of reality, of which the Scriptures are a part. This accounts for certain practices in the Rastafarian community that are not explicitly stated in the Bible, such as the smoking of marijuana. The smoking of marijuana is an ancient African tradition going back centuries, perhaps millennia, but it was never for

trivial use. It was practiced by the Kikuyu, and many Rastafarians in Nairobi use it to “unknot” their lives.²¹ For some, marijuana is deemed as a necessary way of filtering the soul from the impurities acquired by living in a Babylonian society. Other Rastafarians, such as a female Rastafarian leader, Wambui, does not use the sacred herb at all, claiming that she does not need it as an aid to enlightenment.²²

Dreadlocks

Rastafarians in Nairobi, in keeping with other parts of the world, believe that they pick up the essence of other people better and quicker with dreadlocks.²³ They also provide for greater clarity of thought. In effect, they serve as spiritual antennae and denote wisdom and strength in proportion to their length. One of the questions normally asked repeatedly to a dreadlock wearer is, “How long have you been growing your hair?” Dreadlocks are not essential to Rastafarianism, as many members believe that they can pick up spiritual realities just as well without them. Mature Rastafarians believe they are able to move past the symbol straight to the reality they wish to apprehend.²⁴ For those who do wear them they are sacred, and as such they are not simply thrown into the garbage whenever cut. They must be buried as a way of disposing of them with honor.²⁵

Rastafarianism and the Kenyan Government

The relationship between the Rastafarians of Nairobi and the Kenyan government is most characterized by conflict. In almost every case is it the government inflicting its will on the Rastafarian community, usually unjustly. Part of this discrimination occurs in very fundamental issues such as worship. There was no legal opportunity for Rastafarians to gather in worship before 1990. Prior to that year a charter was required by the government in order to gather, and organizations and institutions which did not have a friendly relationship with the government were sure to be denied the grant to meet, and such was the case with the Rastafarians. Constitutional reform canceled article 2A of the Kenyan Constitution and eliminated the need for the charter as a prerequisite for worship, essentially opening up freedom of expression for Rastafarians.²⁶ However, discrimination is still a *de facto* reality for Rastafarians in Nairobi. Often Rastafarian meetings are dispersed by the police for no given reason,

especially in Jericho.²⁷

Many Rastafarians have had their dreadlocks cut involuntarily by the police. According to several of them, one is not allowed to obtain a Kenyan national identification card if one has dreadlocks.²⁸ Police will sometimes take Rastafarians or other dreadlock wearers out of the streets and into the police station for no other reason than that they are wearing dreadlocks. The locks are then forcibly cut at the police station, and a bribe of no less than five hundred Kenyan Shillings is often demanded for release.²⁹ One Rastafarian has had his dreadlocks cut on four separate occasions by the Kenyan police.³⁰

But what accounts for the government's apparent dislike of dreadlocks? It should be noted that the Jamaican government has also had reservations concerning the wearing of dreadlocks to the point of having them forcibly removed from people's heads.³¹ Still other countries have a history of discrimination regarding Rastafarians. Kenya, however, is partly responsible for the dreadlocks which Rastafarians have adopted as one of their symbols. Although the wearing of dreadlocks can actually be traced as far back as ancient Egypt, Rastafarians drew off the example of the Mau Mau freedom fighters in their adoption of dreadlocks in the 1950's.³² Pictures of the dreadlock wearing Mau Mau leaders entered Jamaica during the struggle for Kenyan independence. Rastafarians in Jamaica saw these images, admired these Africans and emulated the dreadlock hairstyle.³³

Much of the Kenyan government's dislike of dreadlocks and Rastafarianism stems from the Mau Mau movement. The Mau Mau were instrumental in securing Kenyan independence from the British because of their willingness to engage in violent resistance against the British colonial government and be treated violently in return, although it is more accurate to reverse this statement. Thousands of Mau Mau were killed in a series of battles for independence.³⁴ The Mau Mau tactics and beliefs were not welcomed either by the British or many African Kenyans. This is so despite the belief by most Kenyans, whether Christian or non-Christian, that there would have been no swiftness in Kenyan independence without the Mau Mau's efforts. To this day the Mau Mau have not been de-criminalized as a revolutionary fighting force fighting during a time of revolution.³⁵ They are still regarded largely as a group of violent men who were uncivilized, dirty and vicious. This lack of de-criminalization becomes of glaring significance when

compared to the revolutionary struggle of other countries in Africa. For example, the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa also engaged in military excursion in an attempt to force the ruling white minority out of power. The ANC, however, and particularly after the South African victory over apartheid, became an international symbol of freedom, and their leader, Nelson Mandela, besides becoming the first African president of South Africa, became an instant international celebrity.³⁶

In a strange irony among many the ANC was transformed from a violent revolutionary gang to a group of heroes, martyrs and justice seekers, while none of the latter descriptions are generally ascribed to the Mau Mau, only the former. The Mau Mau were not “knighted” internationally, but far more telling is that they were not declared heroes by their own people, and such is still largely the case today. It is possible that Kenya does not consider the Mau Mau as heroes because of the fact that the Mau Mau and their supporters killed Africans who were perceived as traitors to the freedom struggle.³⁷ In fact they killed more Africans than whites, but then, again, so did the ANC.³⁸

The contradiction, however, demands an explanation, and there seems to be only one explanation available that makes sense. The Mau Mau were ostracized in Kenya and the rest of the world because of the attitudes and world view they embodied, which is to also assert that they had a world view that was unacceptable to Kenyans and other countries. The Mau Mau rejected a Western defined idea of war, preferring the guerilla approach in the “jungle” to the more “conventional” war style.³⁹ They also rejected European clothing and hair styles, suggesting that they had adopted aesthetic values that were not European derived. Most importantly, the Mau Mau rejected the Western missionary and his Christianity as an authentic religious statement, preferring to worship the gods of the Kikuyu ancestors who were known to dwell on Mount Kenya.⁴⁰ Essentially, the Mau Mau had rejected Eurocentricism; they had defined the world according to their own terms and sought to have those definitions recognized despite the fact that they were diametrically opposed to European ones. The Mau Mau were too “African,” and that is why the negative labels stuck to them. These same labels stick to Africa herself in regard to her world view, even in an African nation such as Kenya.

Mau Mau objectives appeared to be more than what the overwhelming preponderance of Kenyans

wanted. The average Kenyan wanted freedom, but he had interpreted freedom as the license to take on the “modern” agenda and lifestyle from a position of master rather than slave. The Mau Mau, however, had not interpreted freedom in such fashion. They wanted to be free to reclaim themselves, their culture and all that belonged to them. Unlike Rastafarianism, the Mau Mau freedom struggle was not an example of Ethiopianism since it was not accompanied by any Christian statement. It was, however, an example of Black nationalism and Black self-determination informed by a profound sense of Black consciousness. Rastafarianism also has these characteristics and it is therefore disavowed by the Kenyan government even as Mau Mau has been.

Evangelical Church and Rastafarianism

The Church of Nairobi generally and consistently disassociates itself from even a position of dialogue with Rastafarians or Rastafarianism despite the enormous impact Rastafarian expressions have on the young people of that city. Many young Christians adore reggae music and listen to it, sometimes to the dismay of their Christian parents, or without their parents approval altogether since they assume that they would undoubtedly frown on such behavior.⁴¹ In Jericho, a neighborhood in Nairobi that is the acknowledged leader of Rastafarianism hosting twenty Rastafarians, there is no dialogue between the two religions. Indeed, the leaders of the largest Evangelical Church with approximately three thousand members, AIC Jericho, do not know what Rastafarians really believe, but they do understand that what they believe is wrong.⁴² Neither has the Church made any attempt to evangelize the Rastafarians in their own neighborhood.⁴³

Many of the youth at AIC Jericho are in the same position as the Church elders. Although many of them listen to reggae music, they hold negative opinions concerning Rastafarians in Nairobi. These opinions, however, do not stem from personal negative experiences with Rastafarians, in fact quite the opposite, for it would seem that most of the experiences the Church youth have had have been positive ones.⁴⁴

Upon being interviewed, a twenty year old church leader stated that Rastafarians were evil. She further noted that she did not know much about the movement, but when asked if she had encountered any

Rastafarians on an experiential level she told a story of a situation she faced in 1994 on her way to school. A stranger asked her for her watch and began pushing and shoving her in an attempt to take the watch by force when she refused. Since the man was much bigger and stronger than her, he would have probably succeeded in taking the watch from the young woman except that a local Rastafarian saw what was happening and warned the would-be thief to leave the young lady alone. The thief ran away and the young lady's watch was saved. However, the young woman, although acknowledging that the Rastafarian had helped her greatly, could not manage to even thank the Rastafarian out of fear of him. To this day, although she sees the Rastafarian that saved her watch at least once a week, she cannot bring herself to even speak to him, let alone thank him for his efforts on her behalf. She confessed that she was actually more terrified of the Rastafarian than the thief! And this she could not explain in the slightest.⁴⁵

Separation of Church and State?

This type of ambivalence toward Rastafarianism seems quite typical among young Christians in Nairobi, although most have not had incidents as dramatic as the one just described. Since their opinions about Rastafarians are not generally informed by personal encounters, the perceptions of young Christians concerning Rastafarianism probably comes from Christian teaching and overall societal values.

These same values are desired and propagated by the state. One really valuable aspect of Jeff Haynes' work, *Religion and Politics in Africa*, is his assertion that the "state" is not merely the institution of governance and its leaders, but the "interpenetration of state ideas within society."⁴⁶ These goals are often class based and designed so that state leaders are able to keep political and economic power. Although they have the ability to accomplish their will by force this is most undesirable. It is far better to have the masses accept the state agenda voluntarily to avoid bloodshed and international rebuke. The moral symbols of the nation are in the control of the Church. Therefore the Church is needed by the state in order for state ideology to appear as moral and legitimate throughout society.⁴⁷ The temptation for the Church is to embrace these goals not out of spiritual concern, but out of class interest.⁴⁸ The Church, by adopting state ideas, is included in the material benefits distributed by state leaders and institutions. This, indeed, has been the case, for the most part, with the Evangelical Church in Nairobi. The church's co-

optation of the state's agenda allows the status quo to be equated with freedom; therefore to resist the status quo, which is the case with Rastafarianism, becomes equated with the rejection of freedom itself.⁴⁹

The church and state have a symbiotic relationship in Kenya, and not surprisingly, both are in disagreement with Rastafarianism from a position of ignorance. They do realize, however, that Rastafarian belief is a threat to state ideological hegemony since Rastafarians do not tend to support the basic government agenda.

Meanwhile the Rastafarian movement continues to stir up frenzy and interest among Nairobi youth. The numbers of committed Rastafarians appear to be growing along with Rastafarian ideas throughout the slums and other sections of Nairobi. Many Rastafarians are just now beginning to establish international connections and may soon be in a position to avail themselves to resources that would aid in the greater dispensation of their message in Nairobi, which would be destined to exacerbate the conflict between Rastafarianism, the Church and the state.

END NOTES

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CHAPTER 6

LESSONS FROM THE PAST AND PRESENT

Introduction

The goal of this concluding chapter is to seek to discover solutions to the problems that have been raised concerning the three competing statements of Rastafarianism, the church and the state. In the process each will undergo brief critique in the hope that they might attain to their full measure, the fulfillment of God's ways and the aspirations of African people.

Rastafarianism

There is little doubt that Rastafarianism is a movement that will continue to have tremendous appeal among the masses of young people in Africa and her diaspora. It has earned this distinction through a steady commitment to an African-centered religious and social agenda. Therein lies a great part of Rastafarianism's appeal to Africa and other races. As Rastafarianism reclaims an African-centered view of the world and asserts this view, by extension it will also assert a spiritual and sacred perspective. This perspective is conspicuously absent from secular modernity in whichever nation it is practiced. Without the perception of spirit life is rendered meaningless and the ability to discern truth is dulled. The benefit of the secular world view is its technological fruit; its weakness is that it leads to moral and spiritual disaster.¹ African and non-Africans alike are looking to Rastafarianism as a way to reclaim purpose and meaning in life, and it would appear that they will continue to do so in the future.

African-centeredness and Black consciousness are not the only strengths of Rastafarianism. Its quest for righteousness must not be underestimated, for it is this aspect of Rastafarianism, informed by Ethiopian history and Ethiopianism, which gives it the spiritual force required to capture the longings of African people all over the world. Bob Marley's genius was his ability to articulate the African's

unquenchable desire to be free in her entire being and at every level of existence.

The Rastafarian movement has made great strides since its birth in the 1930's. It has gone from a mainly reactionary movement which was quick to act without knowledge, to the development of a more mature outlook on the freedom struggle. Frankly, Rastafarianism was not Afrocentric at its origin. One of the most fundamental aspects of the African-centered perspective is the quest for harmony as a way of establishing primary equilibrium.² Black superiority, or the belief that Blacks are superior to whites, is a decidedly non-African-centered belief. However, the more Rastafarianism has understood about Africa and the nature of oppression and spirituality, the more creatively and powerfully it has expressed the needs of African people. One only hopes that this phenomenon will continue and that Rastafarianism will continue to have a steady supply of informants in the spirit of Walter Rodney to aid it in the difficult analysis necessary to develop creative strategies for the concrete benefit of African people.

The growth of Rastafarianism has also created problems for the movement. It has grown so fast that it does not have a clear direction of where it is going. It does not currently have proven methods to employ, nor does it have a uniform system of belief. The most crucial question surrounding the movement is, "who is God for the Rastafarian?" The whole movement essentially rests on the answer to this question. Although most Rastafarians believe that Haile Selassie is the Black Messiah, many Rastafarians are no longer reaching this conclusion. It may have been feasible to promote Selassie's divinity when he came to power, but the abundance of his shortcomings as a leader are undeniable and have been widely documented by a menagerie of sources. Selassie's inability to keep his country politically and economically stable are interpreted as major weaknesses of his administration, but the most incriminating to the Rastafarian cause is the millions of people who starved to death during Selassie's reign while he and his administration lived in incredible luxury.³ Some Rastafarians claim that Selassie has been lied upon, and that he was ousted by political revolutionaries, exiled, and disposed of as a righteous king persecuted in much the same manner as Jesus Christ.⁴

Within the last few years a book has been published entitled *The Black Man's God?*⁵ It is written by a Rastafarian who asserts that Selassie could not have been God and that Rastafarians are called upon

to accept this reality. Indeed, several Rastafarians in Nairobi do not believe that there was any messiah other than Jesus Christ and they are using the term “Christafari” to distinguish themselves from Rastafarian Selassie worshipers.⁶ Indeed, one should not be surprised to find more and more Rastafarians who are born again Christians.⁷ With the loss of many Rastafarian distinctives mentioned in the preceding chapter, there is no longer a mutual exclusiveness between Evangelical Christianity and Rastafarianism. It could be that if the Rastafarian movement would ever find itself characterized by a commitment to and worship of Jesus Christ alone that it would be the most authentically integrated Christian cultural statement in all of Africa, her diaspora, and the world.

The African Evangelical Church

The Church should see the current theological crisis within Rastafarianism as a wonderful opportunity. Here is where the Church could prove to be most beneficial to the Rastafarian movement in Nairobi and around the world. Christians are challenged to respond to the dilemma of Rastafarianism precisely because Rastafarianism has been inextricably linked with Christianity from its most embryonic stages up to the present. It has not been part of the mainstream Evangelical, Roman Catholic or Western Church, but those religious statements have never represented the totality of the Christian experience. If the Evangelical Church could demonstrate the supernatural love of Christ on any kind of a consistent level the Rastafarian would be forced to take notice. Rastafarians are listening to their own members denounce Haile Selassie as God, but they are not listening to mainstream Christians because they have not earned the right to be heard. They have established very little credibility within the Rastafarian community because they have not engaged with any seriousness the claims and assertions of Rastafarianism or their means and ends to obtain freedom. Nor does it seem that the church has any intention of doing so. It has not engaged in dialogue, neither does it know the issues facing the Rastafarian movement. The reverse, however, is not true, for Rastafarians know a great deal about church doctrine and practice. In fact, most of the Rastafarians interviewed in the present analysis did not convert from paganism, atheism or even Islam, but from the Catholic and Evangelical Church.⁸ In most cases they were simply disillusioned by the implicit and explicit Eurocentrism of church doctrine and behavior.⁹

This is important, for the Rastafarians interviewed in this survey did not originally differ with the crux of Christian doctrine, it was its Eurocentrism which offended them. Rather than being life-affirming the church became life-denying, and thereby lost the effect of preaching a true gospel at all. This is undoubtedly what accounts for the ambivalence that current Evangelical youth hold towards reggae music and other Rastafarian expressions. They have been taught that reggae music is wrong, yet the message, rhythm and melody speaks to them in very powerful ways- in profoundly African ways. This ambivalence is destined to continue until the church organizes itself in a way in which an African world view is affirmed, internalized and expressed.

Christianity and Black Nationalism

This, of course, presupposes the fundamental question of whether or not it is possible for Black nationalism to have a valid Christian expression. Are the ideologies of Black nationalism (or any other form of nationalism) and Christianity diametrically opposed? The answer will depend upon how each are defined, and if this is true then it also stands to reason that Black nationalism and Christianity could possibly combine to form a mutually supportive statement. Black nationalism as a cultural phenomenon could refer to "a commitment on the part of its members toward its political defense, its survival, and its perpetuation."¹⁰ This could be interpreted as anti-Christian only if the goals of the culture are deemed anti-Christian. Even so, if the culture is interpreted as being anti-Christian the Christian can still be committed to the culture through prophetic resistance, and in such cases this becomes his only genuine option. Much of the problem revolves around the fact that nationalism is usually defined Eurocentrically, and European nationalism, historically, has meant "a commitment to its supremacy, to its expansion, and to the destruction of other cultures."¹¹ Sadly, the Western Church has often participated in this kind of nationalism, but regardless of how unfortunate Western nationalism has been, this does not make nationalism itself a universally negative phenomenon. To be African-centered is to seek to express and preserve African culture, for this is part of what culture essentially is. It is therefore imperative that the African Church accept this task if it hopes to speak to the entirety of the African being. Until then the African Church will be stuck with a glaring contradiction posed in the form of the question; how can

African Christians love God and simultaneously deny or be ashamed of that which God has put in them?

Christianity and Rastafarianism

It must first of all be acknowledged that Rastafarianism and Christianity must begin with all earnestness the process of mutual engagement in dialogue, and that the onus of this responsibility belongs to the church. Since Rastafarians have been predisposed to Christian belief and practice it is the church that stands the most to gain from such dialogue. Communication would expose both religions to themselves, both its strengths and weaknesses.

Having established this dialogue, it does not follow that the confessing Evangelical Church should swallow Rastafarian beliefs wholesale, or vice versa. The most crucial point is that the Church must never be co-opted into serving a God other than Jesus Christ. Perhaps this is so elementary that it does not need stating, but nonetheless the risk is taken for emphasis; Haile Selassie cannot be God for an Evangelical Christian, and allegiance to any organization or belief that claims another God other than Jesus must be rejected.

It has been implied up to now that the past must be reclaimed, but it must be critically reclaimed. If the use of marijuana is an ancient practice in Africa, then its correctness is discerned as the past is rediscovered and converted in the light of the gospel. African historians and theologians are now attempting to do just this, but in the meantime the African past remains unconverted. Even if one should want to reclaim Africa, there does not seem to be a consensus on what Africa is, and without this its distortions cannot not be perceived.

This serves as a prelude to the less important area of discussion involving the use of marijuana. The Evangelical Church would emphatically deny the use of marijuana for any reason other than medicinal use. Rastafarians, however, claim that the herb is sacred and that it is referred to in Scripture as the leaves of the tree that bring "healing to the nations."¹² Perhaps it is not the smoking of marijuana itself that should be the major area of concern, but rather the ideas informing the use or abandonment of the herb. It seems clear that Rastafarians do not have evil intent in smoking marijuana, and that it is an area of spiritual, moral and sacred concern. In other words, the smoking of marijuana is a perceived act of

faith. That is the essential point, for anything that is not born of faith is sin.¹³ Indeed, in regard to the use of marijuana, “right” and “wrong” may be inaccurate categorical structures. The more appropriate categories are “faith” and “doubt,” or “belief” and “unbelief.” Rastafarians seem to see it from this perspective, as the use or non-use of marijuana does not play a role in terms of membership or leadership in the Rastafarian community. Indeed Sister Wambui, who took marijuana before becoming a Rastafarian, does not take it now and is one of the central leaders of the movement in Nairobi and other parts of East Africa.¹⁴

The African Church and State

African government must also seek to be African-centered, especially since it, too, influences societal values through its institutions and ideas. It must look for creative African answers to African problems that are in the best interest of the majority of African people. However, this is idealistic talk, for national governments have not possessed the moral strength to consistently act on behalf of anyone other than those who are in power. How could they? Morality must be spiritually derived, and one of the finds of this research has been that the official religious statement of most modern African societies, that is Christianity, has more or less aligned itself with state goals.¹⁵ The co-optation of the Church onto the state’s agenda has left the state with no place to go for authentic spiritual nourishment.

It is not likely that national governments are going to act in the interests of African people until they are forced to do so. This being the case, the most powerful institution capable of ushering in political and social transformation within African society is not the government but the Church. Indeed, the Church is the only internal organization that could do such because it is the institution that the state needs the most if it hopes to rule without major dissent.¹⁶ In order for the Church to achieve this task it will need to divorce itself from degenerate ideologies and institutions so that it can present itself as a clear witness to the state and the rest of society. The Church’s refusal to be co-opted by the state will diminish its ability to reap the material benefits of society. It may also provoke a violent response by the government or other institutions, but it will not destroy the church, only weaken it. This weakness may then become its greatest strength, for with it will come the moral strength to liberate both the oppressed and the oppressor.¹⁷ In the

process of disassociation, the church can embark on the work of defining a new reality for African people so that an alternative and authentic *African* and *Christian* way of life is forged.

Conclusion

The goal of this inquiry was to give a historical account of Ethiopian history, Ethiopianism and Rastafarianism, with the understanding that through this account the interrelatedness and meaning of these movements would be discerned. The case study of Nairobi was adopted as a way of providing sociological data to the discussion for the purpose of analysis into the manner in which Rastafarianism interacts with modern African urban society.

Several themes emerged as a result of this study. The strengths and weaknesses of Rastafarianism as an evolving religio-social and socio-political statement became apparent. In addition, the nature of the Evangelical Church and its relationship with Rastafarianism and African government also came into clearer focus. However, despite whatever gains that may have come from this research, it must be added that there can be no rigid, static conclusions asserted concerning Rastafarianism, the Evangelical Church, or African government. Certainly these conclusions cannot be dogmatically imposed in considering the future of these statements, for history is a work of progress, is always evolving, and does not tend to yield itself to neat predictions, regardless of how rationally derived these predictions may be. In short, history is human, that is its wonderful dilemma.

END NOTES

1. Ani, 68.
2. Forsythe, 4.
3. Ryszard Kapuscinski, *The Emperor* (NY: Vintage Books, 1978), 7.
4. Twelve Tribes of Israel interview.
5. *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), 6 March, 2000.
6. Ras Leviticus interview.
7. *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), 28 July, 2000.
8. Rastafarians of Jericho interview.
9. Ibid.
10. Ani, 23.
11. Ibid.
12. The Bible, Revelation 22:2, New International Version.
13. The Bible, Romans 14:23, New International Version.
14. Sister Wambui interview.
15. Haynes, 12.
16. Ibid.
17. Friere, 48.

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