Our Origin

The Baptist Movement had its source in the pattern and the experience of the Christian community of the New Testament Era. As a denomination, however, Baptists emerged as a part of the Protestant Reformation which took place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Britain and Continental Europe. This historic phenomenon, received its name from the attempts by some to reform the beliefs and practices of the then Established and Universal Church which was closely linked to the State, and from the subsequent protests by various persons when such attempts were registered by the authorities.

The Reformation

Though it took on many shapes and forms varying with time and place, The Protestant Reformation - at its religious core - had two essential inter-related items which were always present on the agenda for change. One of these was the capability and right of every person to relate to God, this made possible through Jesus Christ. Since this meant that everyone has a basic equality before God and therefore with each other, this belief was seen as a threat to the hierarchical nature of the then religious and secular society. The consequent right of such persons who held to experiences 'direct access' to God to regulate their own affairs without interference from 'outsiders'. The outsider was variously defined, again depending on the time, place and circumstances: civil authorities; other religious groupings; other nations. Whoever it was however, the effect of this belief was to give a line of independence to persons previously not holding such freedom.

Needless to say, these developments caused tremendous disturbances, as the very fabric of Western European Society seemed to be coming apart. As a result, many persons either chose or were forced to leave their churches and/or their countries in an effort to preserve their beliefs and their lives.

The Coming of the British Baptists

By the start of the nineteenth century then, Baptist work which had started a scant seventeen years before had spread islandwide. Baptists themselves were increasingly becoming an important element in the Jamaican society, this along with members of other non-conforming groups, namely Methodists and Moravians.

This missionary influence led, among other things, to a reaction from white planters who saw this rise in religion and growth of independent churches as a dangerous development. Thus from 1802 laws were passed with increasing frequency prohibiting preaching and teaching to negroes whether freed or enslaved and threatening imprisonment, with hard labour, whipping and death, if they were violated. It was for this reason that the British

Baptists, with whom the Jamaican Baptist leaders were in communication, were invited to enter into partnership for the development of Baptist work in the country. For with civil pressure increasing, assistance from the 'mother country' could add legitimacy to the cause, at least from the standpoint of the planters. Furthermore with the aging leadership and the increased membership, it was felt that there was the need for more and better educated leaders.

Hence in 1814, the first British Baptist, sent under the aegis of the Baptist Missionary Society of London, arrived in the Island. He was John Rowe, and accompanied by his family, he settled in Falmouth, Trelawny, where he established a school and later, a church. Others came in quick succession, among them Lee Compere - who worked in St. Dorothy (now Old Harbour Bay), James Coultart - who worked in Kingston, Port Royal and Mount Charles in St. Andrew, Joshua Tinson - the first British Missionary to be directly in charge of education for the slaves. During Leile's absence on an extended visit to London, England in 1822, he gave pastoral oversight to the Windward Road Chapel, and its second breakaway daughter church, Hanover Street Baptist Church. Thomas Gooden and James Phillippo (who worked in the Spanish Town area); Thomas Burchell (who worked in the Montego Bay area) and < ="knibb"> William Knibb (who succeeded Rowe in Falmouth and other areas of Trelawny.

The First Known Baptist Congregations

The first known Baptist Congregation was formed by a number of these fleeing separatists in Amsterdam, Holland in 1608. It was largely made up of British persons led by John Smyth who along with Thomas Helwys, sought to set up the group according to New Testament patterns. As they saw it, it was important to 'reconstitute' and not just 'reform' the Church. There was emphasis placed on personal conversion and on baptism, which was to be given to individuals who had personally professed faith in Jesus Christ, that is, to believers only and on mutual covenanting between and among believers. Though taking some years to crystallize, the reconstituting efforts of Smyth, Helwys and others gave distinctive shape not only to the group's belief and practice, but the various others which emerged from it. Some affiliated groups started when members of the Amsterdam group went back to Britain and took the name 'Baptist' to identify themselves. This had to do with the distinctive approach to the meaning and mode of baptism.

With the continuing religious and civil disturbances, and with the new awareness in Europe of North America, many persons, including those influenced by Baptists and related beliefs, practices and groups, crossed the Atlantic to build a 'New World'. They sought not only to establish dwellings, but their faith as well. In time the entire continent, but particularly the Eastern section, was affected, Baptist Churches, being among the many institutions, which sprang up in the seventeenth century. All these shaped not only the new American Environment, but eventually impacted beyond it as well.

The Mounting Pressure

Between 1816 and 1828, Baptists now led by the members of the Baptist Missionary Society, formed themselves into associations and later unions. Not only were scattered congregations gathered into more cohesive groupings, particularly in the eastern and western areas of the island, but pastors, missionaries and other interested persons also came together. Behind these formations was a need for greater co-operation, co-ordination and consolidation in light of the mounting pressures brought upon Baptists by the Government and the Established Church to conform to the accepted practice of slavery and to an organized stylized (conventional) approach to worship. There was greater insistence on compliance in these areas because, in the first place, of the increasing dissatisfaction with the institution of slavery in Britain, partly due to the changing economic interests of the members of Parliament and partly due to the intense lobbying and agitation of the newly formed Anti-Slavery Societies, which in turn greatly impacted on the diverse Jamaican society.

In addition, the growing leadership between whites and blacks, including slaves of African descent attracted to the Baptist Church, encouraged spontaniety and freedom in worship. Many slaves entered into the British-led Baptist congregations or formed native-led Baptist-type congregations, which among other things, held indigenous beliefs and practices as central. The simple fact was that by 1930, the non-conformist groups, but particularly the Baptist were seen as a political threat to both the Established State and Church of Jamaica.

This potential threat became overt, with what became known as the Baptist War of 1831. This was led by a Baptist deacon from St. James, Sam Sharpe, who on the basis of justice and scripture, decided to stage a sit-down strike at Christmas time. This was to highlight the plight of the slaves and force the planters to pay them wages. Despite superb organization, the strike became a riot and was treated by the government, who had caught wind of it before hand, as an insurrection. As many of the participants were Baptist members and adherents, the whole grouping was suspected. Baptist and Methodist chapels and dwellings islandwide were vandalised, burnt and destroyed by religious government troops called the Colonial Church Union. Some of the leaders of the Baptist movement - black and white, were either killed on sight or arrested. Sharpe himself was later hanged in the town square of Montego Bay, while Sharpe's Pastor, Burchell, Knibb and others were arrested but later released.

The impact of this revolt against slavery was to accelerate the pace for the total abolition of slavery in the entire British West Indian colonies. Thus from 1832, the Baptists developed international links with Christian and other humanitarian communities overseas, particularly the Anti-Slavery Societies of Great Britain and of the United States. Knibb and Burchell were the two most able representatives. Appealing to conscience, economics and plain good sense, their efforts served to galvanize the anti-slavery cause.

These efforts contributed in no small way to the passing in 1834 of the Act for the Abolition of Slavery and, four years later the total emancipation of all slaves in all British colonies, on August 1, 1838. As a result of this involvement, Baptist work in Jamaica became an enduring symbol of the Church's opposition to slavery and all other forms of injustice.

The Continuing Struggle for Social Justice - The Baptist Contribution

With the deepening poverty in the country and with the resultant mood of despair, Baptists along with others, again began to challenge the Government to take its responsibility towards alleviating the plight of the poor seriously. This stance was encouraged by Edward Underhill, the Baptist Missionary Society's General Secretary who, having come to Jamaica at the invitation of the Jamaica Baptist Union, gleaned information on conditions in the island and on his return in 1860, brought this forcibly to the attention of the British Government. The real effectiveness of these "Underhill Letters" as his pieces of correspondence were later called, was to be seen not only in the number of debates it sparked off in the British Parliament, but also in the level of agitation it generated at every level of Jamaican life.

Nowhere was this agitation more amply demonstrated than in the life and work of two Baptists, George William Gordon and Paul Bogle. Both, like other Baptists of the time, were disgusted by and spoke out against the generally negligent attitude of government towards the creation of a more just society. Both, however, were attacking the problem in different ways.

Gordon, as a member of the planter-merchant class, was able to help establish a financial institution, the Jamaica Mutual Life Assurance Society, to underwrite expenses incurred as a result of damage to life and property caused by the now increasingly common natural and human-made disasters. Furthermore, he was able by virtue of his property holding in St. Andrew to run for public office and thus, when duly elected, Gordon used his position in the Jamaica House of Assembly to good effect, seeking against the desires of many of his fellow parliamentarians, the speedier amelioration of conditions for the Jamaican people.

Bogle, on the other hand, was a member of the peasantry who hailed from Stony Gut, St. Thomas. A gifted preacher and Baptist Deacon, he was able to command tremendous respect from the members of his church and community. As such, Bogle emerged as spokesman and leader for the poor people of St. Thomas and by extension Jamaica. Several times, Bogle, along with his compatriots sought audience with the Governor and other Members of the Assembly, both in Spanish Town where the Assembly met or in Morant Bay, where the parish governing body, the vestry, met, but to no avail. For not only were they never in any instance granted the courtesy of a personal reply, but the

conditions which these suffering persons sought to redress remained unattended to as well.

In 1865, the paths of Bogle and Gordon, who had known of each other's work, were to cross decisively. The restless mood of the country was increasing and not for the first time, Baptists found themselves at the centre of maelstrom. Underhill's letter was forwarded for comment to the then Governor, John Eyre, who in turn sent it out with a circular letter to most government officials and ministers of religion. In that letter, and in later correspondence, Eyre, while admitting that distressing economic conditions existed, stated that this was due to the "idleness, improvidence and vice of the people". Baptist ministers led the way in protesting this assessment by holding a number of "Underhill meetings" in which they continued to press for social justice. They refused further to read in churches a government document issued from Kings House but purported to be from Queen Victoria, the then ruling Sovereign in Britain. The "Queens Advice" as it was officially known, was a curt, harsh and indifferent response, to a petition written by the people of St. Ann describing the hardships being faced by the majority of the Jamaican people. In light of these protests, Eyre accused Baptists of vouching for Underhill's allegations, and subsequently had them and other dissenters under continuous scrutiny.

Matters came to a head when, in early October 7, Bogle and his colleagues while attending a court case at the Local Vestry in Morant Bay, wrested the accused from what they considered an unjust sentence. Carrying him off to Stony Gut, they returned four days later to lodge a formal complaint about the miscarriage of justice and to ask for a retrial. This request was promptly ignored and while the Riot Act was being read to the recalcitrant body, volunteer militia-men were ordered to fire on the group as soon as the reading ceased. This duly executed, the people led by Bogle, fought back by setting fire to the Court House and by wounding with sticks and machetes those who had attacked them, eighteen (18) of whom subsequently died.

Upon hearing this bit of information, Eyre and his advisors panicked and an islandwide state of emergency was declared in an effort to quell what became known as the Morant Bay Rebellion. With the declaration of Marital Law, Eyre had several persons arrested, jailed, tried and executed. Among these were Gordon who was illegally brought over from Kingston on the charge of being architect of the revolt and who was found guilty of treason, and Bogle who was accused of being the instigator of the rebellion. Others, including Baptists, were held for varying periods, but were subsequently released.

The Morant Bay Uprising had far reaching effects on Jamaican society in general and Baptists in particular. On the national scene, Governor Eyre was recalled and replaced by Sir John Peter Grant, who presided over new social reforms. The Representative House of Assembly was dissolved with Jamaica now ruled directly from England, via the Governor, as a Crown Colony. In addition to all this, the Church of England (Anglican) ceased being the national church, and new freedom was allowed for other religious

groupings, including the Baptist, other non-conformists and Roman Catholics to legally and freely practice their faith and to receive governmental grant-in-aid.

The Jamaica Baptist Union for its part, reacted in various ways to the Morant Bay Uprising. For one, there was a definite attempt to distant itself from the violence associated with the event, a move which isolated the leadership from some Baptist members. Recognizing this and seeing the needs in St. Thomas which gave rise to the protests, the Jamaica Missionary Baptist Society backed by the British Baptist Missionary Society began to pay more attention to that parish. From 1865 more churches and schools were formed in the eastern end of the island, while specific attempts were made to relieve the severe economic distress. This new missionary thrust was later extended to other areas of the country, using other forms of ministry such as funding schools and targetting other groups such as the new immigrants from India and China. In effect, the social upheaval of the 1860s stimulated within the Jamaica Baptist Union, new zeal and greater purpose.

It was outside of Jamaica however, that the major creative energies released from this renewed impetus for the mission was to be most evident. Jamaicans as a distinct national group, began to travel overseas regularly from the 1870s onward, often to seek better opportunities. In the 1880s for instance, many thousands had emigrated to the Isthmus of Panama to work on the construction of the Panama Canal, while from the 1870s and well into the 1890s, others had gone to Cuba and to Costa Rica to grow sugar cane and bananas under the aegis of the United Fruit Company.

The Jamaica Baptist Union, seeing an opportunity both to present the gospel and to help maintain cultural identity sought to establish fellowships wherever these migrants went. Through the Jamaica Missionary Baptist Society it was able to make these vital links, beginning with Haiti in 1879 and Cuba in 1886. The Jamaica Missionary Baptists Society's missions and missionaries were also present in Costa Rica, particularly in Port Limon (1888) ; British Honduras (now Belize) particularly its offshore island of Rutan (1889); the Cayman Islands, particularly Bocas del Toro (1894); and Nicaragua, particularly Corn Island (1904). During this period, contact was made with the Turks and Caicos Islands whose churches were to receive considerable assistance from the Jamaica Missionary Baptist Society in the next century. The Missionizing spirit which was present elsewhere, was very much in evidence with the Jamaica Baptist community of the late nineteenth century.

Baptists in Jamaica: The Early Years

It was a partly indentured servant George Leile (also spelt Lisle) from Georgia in the United States of America (U.S.A.) who began Baptist work in Jamaica in 1783. He was an ordained Baptist Minister (being the first black person to become so), having been called and commissioned by a Baptist Church in Burke Country near Savannah, in 1775.

The fellowship which was pastored by Matthew Moore, and under whose ministry Leile became converted, was also attended by Leile's then Master, Henry Sharp, who was one of the deacons. Sharp later granted him his freedom thus allowing him to freely exercise his ministry.

Leile came to Jamaica an experienced evangelist, pastor and church planter, having had converts in the Augusta community, Savannah and Tybee Island areas of Georgia and in Silver Buff, North Carolina, the last named being the first organized Black Church in the United States of America. So although he left his native land as a result of the threat of illegal resettlement of his family and himself by his previous owner's family, Leile's coming to Jamaica was to continue what he had been doing for years - the proclaiming of the Good News of Jesus Christ to all, but particularly to his own kind of people.

Liele started preaching in Jamaica at the Kingston Race Course (later called National Heroes Circle) in 1783, this after obtaining a job in order to ultimately secure release from his indentureship and to support his family. The subsequent conversion of a large number of persons - slaves, freed blacks, and creoles, i.e. persons of mixed race - led to the establishing of fellowships of believers wherever possible. Congregations were founded and churches built - the first directly organized by Leile, being the Windward Road Chapel in East Kingston in 1789, in the foothills of St. Andrew.

Liele also started schools wherever his congregations were, with classes held within or adjacent to the chapels. In Leile's mind for persons to fully appreciate the Gospel they had to be educated. These schools were started initially for members of his congregation and their families, many of whom were either slaves or poor freed slaves. The concept of the church-school was to be one of Leile's enduring contributions as it set the precedent for subsequent Baptist and other denominational involvement in education in Jamaica, and it contributed significantly to the ongoing development of the life of the community and in particular the poor and the enslaved.

Some who were converted and nurtured under his ministry and who, in a few instances had worked with him in the early days, later began to exercise their own ministries elsewhere. Among them were Nicholas Sweigle, George Gibbs and Moses Baker. Sweigle, a Jamaican-born creole school teacher, was once a deacon at Leile's Windward Road Chapel. He left along with others because of a violent difference of opinion with Pastor Leile and later formed congregations in Kingston, St. Andrew and eastern St. Catherine (then St. John's) among them East Queen Street Baptist Church, Clinton Mount (either the present Constitution Hill Baptist or Canaan Mount Baptist) and the St. John's Chapel in Spanish Town (which later it seemed merged with Leile's Chapel to form the present Phillipo Baptist Church), respectively.

Gibbs, like Leile, came to Jamaica from the Southern United States and was one of the founding members of Leile's first congregation. Directing his evangelistic efforts to the

eastern end of the island, he was instrumental in organizing congregations in St. Thomas and St. Mary, often building chapels on land he bought privately. Some of Gibbs' converts in turn carried the Gospel as far as St. Ann and Portland, doubtless forming church fellowships in the process.

Moses Baker was also a native of the United States being from New York. As a result of a long and deeply moving spiritual experience he was introduced to Pastor Leile, who instructed and baptized him, later bringing him into the young Baptist fellowship. About that time Lascelles Winn, a Quaker planter on whose estate in Liguanea the Baker family lived and worked, needed a Chaplin for his estates in Western Jamaica, and asked Baker to fill this position. After some consideration Baker took up the offer and in February 1788 arrived, with his family, at Winn's estate - known as Set and Stretch - in the Adelphi region of St. James. Making full use of his office as well as the continuing instructions of Leile, Baker was able to develop a work centred in Crooked Spring, St. James. This work later spread to nearby communities including the Salter's Hill, John's Hall and Montego Bay areas. These in turn became the nuclei of the Baptist work in the parishes of Hanover, Trelawny, Westmoreland and the rest of St. James.

Free Villages

In the immediate Post -Abolition, Post Emancipation days, the Baptists took seriously the mandate of working to improve the lot for the majority of persons in the country. Consequently from 1834 onwards they initiated the development of what became known as "free villages", or more accurately "Freedom Villages". These new settlements were created on abandoned or run-down estates which had been acquired by the Baptists and other members of the Anti-slavery Societies who in turn sold them in plots to groups of ex-slaves at inexpensive prices. As land of a certain size entitled the owner to a vote in the House of Assembly, the Baptist made sure to sell individual plots at or above regulation size. Though the then Government found ways of undermining the rights of newly freed black peasantry, it was an important step in the acquisition of political power by the children of slaves.

There was also a conscious attempt in setting up these villages to ensure that each recipient of a plot was a church member in good standing. Thus there was a rash of baptisms and marriages in the period. Furthermore each village had a church and school, and so a greater number of moral, spiritual and educational opportunities were provided to complement the new found economic independence of these farming folk. In fact, in 1837, the Baptist formed the Jamaica Baptist Education Society to develop and deepen their involvement in education in light of the current intellectual regeneration in the country.

In their gratitude, the newly settled villagers named their districts and institutions to commemorate this meaningful movement of change. August Town (First-of-August

Town) in St Andrew, Sligoville (after Lord Sligo, Governor of Jamaica in 1834) in St Catherine, Freetown in Clarendon, Victoria Town (after Queen Victoria, Monarch of Britain in the then British colony, Jamaica) in Manchester, Sturge Town (after Joseph Sturge, the English Quaker who worked arduously with the Baptists for the end of slavery) and Clarkson Ville (after Thomas Clarkson, the English scholar who also worked alongside the Baptists) both in St Ann, are examples of this.

With the task of aiding in the formation of a new society (comprising of former slaves and slave owners) facing them, the Baptists sought to bring as many of the population as possible under distinct Christian influence. This was felt to be urgent as with the new-found freedom, many ex-slaves had begun to openly practice some aspects of African religion, hitherto carried out secretly by them. During slavery, slave masters had considered these expressions threatening and subversive, and had, in the House of Assembly, declared all practice of African Folk religion illegal. By 1840, Myallism, the dominant folk religion of the time, came into fullview and spread rapidly across the country.

With the emergence of Africanism touching off familiar cultural and theological chords in the hearts of many of its members, much of the established Jamaican Baptist practice, polity and personnel was challenged in the name of the Spirit. Indeed by 1845, many Baptist congregations, particularly in the hills of St. Catherine and St. James, lost some of their members who in turn set up their own groups, some still being called Baptist. The decade after Emancipation 1838-48 then was spent in consolidating the work, firstly in establishing the notion of a national church with a mandate to evangelize the society; and secondly, in maintaining former and making new overseas contacts.

A New Century : New Developments

For Baptists, as for other Jamaicans, the twentieth century opened with a heightened international awareness and a corresponding openness to the innovations, inventions and ideas from overseas. In particular, there was new thinking on religion and society, and on the relationship between both. One of the areas in which the Jamaica Baptist Union responded to the wave of fresh thought was in its renewed interest on education, both public and church related. Though there was greater emphasis by Baptists on Primary Education in the latter quarter of the previous century, there was a sensed need for other learning opportunities and facilities to be offered. Thus Baptists had a hand in the founding in 1884 of Westwood High School for Girls in Stewart Town, Trelawny and had begun to experiment with the forming of a school in Kingston, adjacent to the East Queen Street Baptist Church School. By 1912, when the Calabar Theological College was moved for the second time to Slipe Pen Road, there was once again the attempt made to provide Secondary education for boys, particularly the sons of Baptist ministers. This venture, the Calabar High School, was more successful, and though not receiving much Baptist support initially, soon elicited enthusiasm as its contribution to the ongoing

development of the country became increasingly evident. It was also in the first decades of the twentieth century that Boys Scout, Boys Brigades, Girls Brigades and the Christian Endeavour Movements were introduced into Baptist and other churches as forums for training and fellowship in a much broader way than previously done.

With the increasing size and greater complexity of the movement as well as the increasing exposure of greater numbers of persons to more aspects of life, diverse opinions as to the direction of Baptist life in Jamaica began to be voiced. By the 1920s, there was some internal dissension regarding the roles and relative authority of the various committees, societies and institutions responsible for different aspects of the work. This all came to a head in what became known as the Calabar Impasse which dragged on into the next decade. Essentially, this was the out-come of a stand-off between the President of the Calabar Theological College, who was both the Baptist Missionary Secretary's representative to the island and an accredited minister of the Jamaica Baptist Union and the Calabar Committee which was composed of all the ministers of the Jamaica Baptist Union. The action led to a celebrated court case which split the Union, robbing it of many of its leaders and members. Some churches in St. Ann, St. Mary and Portland for instance, left the Jamaica Baptist Union and formed the Independent Baptist groupings. Various individuals previously associated with the Jamaica Baptist Union joined up with other denominational groupings, notably the Jamaica Evangelistic Mission (Tabernacle), Plymouth Brethren, The City Mission and the Methodists.

Despite these negative trends, several positive developments took place during this period. For one, Calabar College still maintained its excellence in Theological education and still managed to attract tutors and scholars of high calibre. The Jamaica Missionary Baptist Society too still continued to inspire the Baptist membership at large towards mission, and while it had given up most of the responsibilites for work in Central America to other missionaries agencies, there was a new thrust launched in the nearby Turks and Caicos Islands. There was also an emergence of organizations within the Union's ambit, specifically geared for the facilitating of association between and among its non-clergy members. Thus the Jamaica Baptist Women's Federation which was founded in 1922, had begun to spread rapidly across the island at this time, while the Jamaica Baptist Union Brotherhood, then known as the Jamaica Baptist Laymen's Association at its formation in 1934, was also forming branches and gaining members during this period. Two groups for young Baptists were formed. The Young People's Moral (later called Spiritual Rearmament Conference in 1938; and the Gordon-Somers Society, a forum for discussion among College and High School students, in the early 40's. These eventually all became a part of the Youth Department of the Jamaica Baptist Union, formed in 1940 and which also absorbed the previously established Sunday School Department.

Structural Adjustments

Two calamitous events which impacted heavily upon the life, work and development of the Jamaica Baptist Union, were the hurricanes of 1944 and 1951. Storms had in fact hit the island before in 1880, 1903 and 1912. These two however, devastated the North and South Coast Churches respectively. As had happened after the earthquake of 1907, these disasters prompted the Jamaica Baptist Union to request outside help from the British Baptist Missionary Society and American Baptist, with whom the Union was then renewing contact. Since the disasters also occurred at a time of new national awareness and self-determination, there was the added recognition that the Union needed to be re-organized in a way that would enable the Union to aid its members as Baptist Christians to play their part in the struggle for independent nationhood.

From the middle of the century then, deliberate attention was given to develop the infrastructure of the Jamaica Baptist Union with a redefinition of its goals and re-ordering of its priorities. In the first instance, more attention was paid to leadership training at every level. The Youth Department of the Union launched a dynamic programme of Camps and Conferences, while overseas post-graduate theological education began to be made available to graduates of the Theological College. Secondly, the Jamaica Baptist Union having reviewed its own sources and methods of financing, came up with co-operative budgets in an attempt to allow the churches of the Union to contribute to each other's welfare with a greater sense of fellowship. A revival and modification of an earlier central Sustentation Fund, it was later refined and became the Global Financing scheme. All these changes meant that there was the need for a full-time administrator to oversee operations, and so in 1960, the position of General Secretary was created to carry out the directives of the Executive as headed by the President.

During the time, the Jamaica Baptist Union felt the need to formalize the relationships between itself and the British and American Baptists, as both overseas groupings desired to sort out their own workings with each other in respect of Baptist work in Jamaica. Thus between 1959 and 1963 there were several discussions held which concluded with an amicable tripartite accord being arrived at. This accord provided for the British Baptists through the Baptist Missionary Society to respond to certain traditional education programmes as well as to respond to any other need on merit. It provided for the American-based Southern Baptist Convention through its Foreign Mission Board (SBC-FMB) to respect the integrity of the Jamaica Baptist Union as an entity in itself and to provide training opportunities in special ministries as the opportunity and need arose. The Jamaica Baptist Union for its part, pledged to consult with its colleagues to bear full responsibility for the progress of Baptist work in the country.

Several significant developments took place after this agreement came into effect. One was the upgrading and diversification of many of the ministering auxillaries of the Jamaica Baptist Union. The Youth Department for instance, was broadened to become

the Department of Christian Education. The Jamaica Baptist Union Evangelistic Committee, formed in 1958 to initiate and monitor outreach efforts within the churches, became a Department of Evangelsiom with the mandate to lighten the work of the Jamaica Baptist Missionary Society (JMBS). Later in 1986, both JMBS and the Department of Evangelism merged along with other committees, to form the Board of Mission and Evangelism (BME). A Communication Department, later absored by the BME as the Mass Communications Committee, was also established to produce radio programmes, the first of which was the "Christ for Today" broadcast. Furthermore, the Baptist Calabar Theological College was given a wider base as it became, in 1966, a part of the inter-denominational United Theological College of the West Indies.

The other related occurrence was the development and diversification of the properties of the Jamaica Baptist Union. The office complex which became the headquarters of the Union, housing as well its Conference Room, Literature room (called the Book room) and Recording Studio, was built on premises in Half Way Tree, St. Andrew. A conference centre to be the focal point of youth work was built in Duncans, Trelawny, while the Horizon Home for the Aged was also started on Sullivan Avenue, St. Andrew. Both were in fact, supplements to the Ministry to homelss children carried out in the previously established Garllnd Hall Home in St. James. The Jamaica Baptist Union also furthered its long contribution to education with the creation (in 1961) amd erection (in 1966) of the William Knibb Memorial High School, near Falmouth, Trelawny.

With all of these occurrences taking place, the Union sought to formalize its status in the now independent Jamaica. In addition, there was a need to update and envelop results of the Trust law of 1873 in which all Baptist premises were constituted as a unit. Thus in 1969, the Jamaica Baptist Union was incorporated into Law, making it a legal executor of all Baptist churches allowing the right to hold on trust, the real property, particularly lands and buildings of all affiliated churches of the Jamaica Baptist Union Corporation. This gave the JBU the opportunity to consolidate and expand its work of mission and evangelism, as new areas could now be targeted for church developments. By the end of the 1980s then, the JBU had rationalized its operations, streamlining its resources and reorganizing its structures in efforts to make its committees, departments, congregations, pastors and members more effective in their ministering.

The Unfolding Story..The Unfinished Task

Entering the last decade of the twentieth century, Baptists of Jamaica, as part of the JBU, face many challenges. There is, for instance, a constant and growing movement of persons away from rural townships towards either the larger towns and cities and /or countries overseas. This means that a number of persons who were or would perhaps have become members of JBU churches, particularly in rural areas, no longer have the opportunity or in some cases the desire to do so. The growth of these traditional centres of faith and Baptists witness are not as predictable as they once were. There are two

competing systems of thought, those resembling the historic Christian faith in form but not in content, and others which have only to do with the interests of human beings and societies of this present age, without reference to the will and way of the God of the Bible. All of this is also taking place within a society which is experiencing a decline in social, economic, and political standards of living, diminishing material, natural, and human resources and a gradual erosion of a general understanding of what is considered right and wrong.

It is here that Baptists need to learn some lessons from their history and to use these insights as a base from which to act in the present and a guide for the future. Firstly, Baptists need to recover and expand upon the wholistic approach to christian life and service. Early Jamaica Baptists did not segment the human being and/or society, but ministered to the total person - body, mind, and spirit, seeking to ascertain the needs and circumstances of those to whom they ministered. Baptists in the 90's in emulating their forebears, must go beyond the usual areas of service, such as provision of food and education and become more concerned with other aspects of life such as health, employment, housing, culture and the environment. Consequently, as in the Abolition/Emancipation Era, Baptists must be prepared to address political, economic, social, and religious reality in a comprehensive manner, leading the way in creating consensus in matters of national development. All this of course is to be done in the name and Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Lord of all.

A second lesson to be learned and applied in the 90's is that of the historic Baptist balance between independence and interdependence. As at other times, modern Jamaica Baptists must continue to foster links with other christian groupings in Jamaica and overseas - Baptists and otherwise without a corresponding compromise of national or denominational Christian community must seek to become brothers and sisters of mutual convenanting, pledging to care for each other and transcending the regrettable and reprehensible tendency in Baptist history to dissent, divide and depart. We must strive for greater unity of purpose in the cause of Jesus Christ.

On the eve of the new millennium then, Jamaica Baptist need to make their own contribution to the rich heritage and the wider world of which they are a part. As members of the Universal Church, the entire Jamaica Baptist Union ought to be ADVANCING IN DISCIPLESHIP.