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En/gendering a Trinitarian Church in a Plural Society: A Jamaican Reflection

Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission as the Law says. (1Cor.14.34)

Anyone who has ever lived among women of African descent knows that it is inconceivable to even imagine invisible or voiceless black women. Wherever one looks in the black world, one finds in black women a living working, struggling, nurturing presence—the primary source of life itself. And their voices—their prodding, probing, commanding, caressing, captivating, caring, melodic, and melancholy voices—are omnipresent realities in black families and communities everywhere.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship [koinonia] of the Holy Spirit be with you. (2Cor. 13.3)

I would like to frame my thoughts this morning using two Caribbean short stories. The first will speak to the plural nature of our Caribbean reality and the challenge that presents to the Church. The second points us to the reality of women's experience within Caribbean plurality and the call that places on us to respect plurality by engendering Church. In "Cloud Cover Caribbean" Puerto Rican novelist Ana Lydia Vega narrates a story that stands out for me as a metaphor of plurality and the destructiveness and divisiveness of a certain way of viewing this difference. It speaks of similarities of history, class, race, colour and experience that can bind Caribbean people together while paradoxically threatening the very bonds that exist.

It is September when hurricanes whip the region and Antenor, a Haitian man, is floating at sea on a makeshift raft escaping from the wretched memories of his island, threatened only by the seeming lesser dangers of seasickness and an encroaching thirst once his meagre water rations run out. Antenor takes pity on a shipwrecked Dominican man, named Diogenes through "a neoclassical baptismal flourish," brings him on board and shares with him his meagre water rations. Vega comments that as Antenor did so "a mocking, derisive spirit, the type that lived in Caribbean trade winds, blew over the little skiff. It was so violent it nearly tipped the two men overboard." Clearly, this wind bodes ill for the tragic duo. Nonetheless, together they managed to keep the craft afloat and they launch into an extended discourse speaking in words that neither understood. "They told of the endless pain of being black, Caribbean and poor; of deaths by the score; they cursed clergy,

the military and civilians; established an international brotherhood of hunger, a solidarity of dreams.”

Their discourse was interrupted by the cries of a kinky headed Cuban, Carmelo, who, after a brief hesitation, they haul aboard. Their litany of woes begin afresh this time with the language of Cervantes dominating, and soon both Carmelo and Diogenes turn against Antenor as they rake up the underlying racial tensions and hatreds that are the subtexts of such relationships in the region. They forget his kindness and even his very humanity. They roughly dispossess Antenor of his hard-gained rations and devour them without a thought. In a struggle for the remaining water they capsize the boat and find themselves in the water. Vega remarks tongue in cheek that how they kept the sharks at bay must have been a miracle organised by the Virgin of Altagracia (patroness of the Dominican Republic), the Caridad del Cobre (Cuban orisha?) and the Seven African Powers (probably referring to Haitian voodoo). Eventually they are rescued by an American boat whose Aryan Apollo-like captain orders that the niggers be put in the hold to let the “spiks can take care of ‘em.” The Caribbean brothers are thrown into the hold sans tender loving care. The tale ends with a Puerto Rican voice growling at the trio through the gloom of the hold: “If you want to feed your bellies here you’re going to have to work, and I mean work. A gringo don’t give nothing away. Not to his own mother.” [Then] a black arm thrust through the crates to hand them dry clothes.”

In the second story, Jamaican writer Olive Senior weaves another intriguing and likewise troubling tale entitled “Country of the One Eye God” in which Ma Bell, a grandmother who finds in the Lord Jesus “a comforting presence,” had a life-threatening encounter with Jacko, the grandson whom she had raised. The last of her grandchildren, Jacko robbed her and ran away from her home in the countryside to the city where he’d become “the rapist, the thief, the hired gun, the murderer,” as Ma Bell referred to him in her frequent conversations with Jesus. One night Jacko returned to

her house. This did not surprise Ma Bell since she had expected his return as he was on the run from the police, but, more importantly, because she knew that the call of blood was strong! But Jacko did not come back to seek solace, succour or even forgiveness! No, Jacko came back to rob his grandmother (again!) of the money he was sure she has hidden somewhere.

Ma Bell, like my grandmother and many other grandmothers living in the Caribbean, carried her savings in a long piece of cloth tied around her waist (a long long tread bag). For many years she had been saving so that she would have the most beautiful coffin the undertaker could provide when she died. No one but Jesus knew about her plan or the money she had been saving. [And if anyone had asked her if she had any money saved she would have sworn blin' seh she nuh ha nuh money, as we would say in Jamaica.] Ma Bell had arrived at the decision to save for a beautiful coffin very late in life when she realised that none of her secret longings would ever be fulfilled. (What those longings were we are never told.) Ma Bell used to say to the Lord, "Poor people just come into world so and is just so they must leave? Well I ent leaving that way and I don't care if you don't like it." So there was no way she was going to give up the one dream she had it in her power to fulfil. Ma Bell was willing to die to protect her burial money. The story ends with these words: "Ma Bell prayed and prayed as the boy [Jacko] carefully lifted the gun." [We hold our breath and Olive Senior leaves us holding it. We really don't know how it ends or maybe we do?]

This story is called "Country of the One Eye God" because that was how Jacko described his grandmother's God. After he trashed the house and was unable to find the money which was hidden on her person, he threatened his grandmother and poured scorn on her relationship with God. He said:

Nutten change, eh? Same ol foolishness bout God and judgement. That is the trouble with the whole lot a unoo. All unoo think bout is judgement and future life. But from morning me study seh in this country fe yuh God is a one eye god. Him only open him good eye to people who have everything already so him can pile up more thing on top of that. Him no business with rag tag and bobtail like unoo. God up a top a laugh keh keh keh at the likes of you. Fe see you, so poor and turn down think you can talk to the likes of him so high and mighty. Keh keh keh.

Jacko lashed out at his grandmother for presuming to be able to talk to a God whom he considered to be partial, discriminatory, high-handed...high and mighty. This God played favourites with the rich and the already powerful, giving them more wealth and power while he only ignored or laughed derisively at those who were poor and powerless—especially women like Ma Bell, poor Haitians like Antenor or many of the inhabitants of Gonzales in Trinidad or Tivoli Gardens in Jamaica. In his bitterness Jacko wanted to silence his grandmother and rob her of her ability to talk back and continue to talk with a God whom she clearly experienced as a close personal presence in her life and to whom she was not afraid to speak her mind or to give a piece of her mind, for that matter. But even at the end with his gun pointed at her head she does not remain silent. She continued to speak by praying. Clearly, Ma Bell just did not know how to remain silent. Her resistance to Jacko's control was in her voice and her ability to talk back even in the face of potential violence.

The flip-side of being forced into silence or being robbed of one's voice in the face of violence is the choice to be silent in a way that perpetuates and perpetrates violence. Increasingly, Caribbean society, of which Jamaica is perhaps the worst case, sees women who offer tacit support to the Jackos of our community, young men between the ages of 19 and 35, who are involved in most of the violent crimes that afflict the people of our nation. Those women refuse to talk back or talk it out and others die. Similarly, there are women in the Church who refuse to speak out and required changes go undone.

Talking back and the desire to en/gender Church

This notion of talking back is an important theme in my reflections on engendering a Trinitarian Church in a plural society. I undertake this reflection inspired by and paying special homage to my African foremothers and with deep thankfulness also for the contribution made to my quest by other women of faith from various racial, religious and economic communities. I am further emboldened by Jamaican theologian Theresa Lowe Ching's charge to Caribbean Christians to consider ourselves especially equipped by our experiences and specific circumstances to be committed enough to facilitate the development of appropriate strategies for giving concrete expression to the values and attitudes of the alternate vision which the world [and Church] desperately needs. (How unique these circumstances and experiences are has come home quite forcibly to me these past few days as we have learned more about the plurality in Suriname and the beautiful mosaic which it forms.) The specific circumstances of the Caribbean to which Lowe Ching refers have been variously described. Kortright Davis, an Antiguan Anglican theologian, highlights the impact of Euro-American colonization which led to persistent poverty, cultural alienation and dependency being endemic factors in the region as was so sadly demonstrated in the Antenor-Diogenes-Carmelo triangle. There is a search for true emancipation afoot in the region—emancipation still comin'—and in many of our nations the primary focus is on the experience of the majority black population whose ancestors were torn from their native land, cut off from ancestral ties and cultural roots but, nevertheless, survived the most inhuman conditions. The search for meaning and identity also embraces the quest of Caribbean people of Indian descent; their experiences contribute to the richness of our current societies. (The peculiarities of the Indian situation is important and requires further reflection, but is not the focus of this discussion.)

The results of these specific circumstances has been highlighted by Trinbagonian theologian Gerald Boodoo who maintains that the specific nature of the Caribbean is rooted in its existence as a “forced context” and a situation of dislocation. This reality of dislocation, particularly forced dislocation, spawns complex relationships and forces people to inhabit multiple worlds and religions, often at the same time. Grappling with such circumstances has made Caribbean people a “strong people, people who are able to live in increasingly pluralist societies.” He suggests that, “in increasingly more ways the rest of the world is becoming more like how we already are.” Boodoo’s attention to plurality highlights the importance of other voices in the formation of a Caribbean identity without denying the primary place of the African experience in shaping it and the black experience as an important point of reference in the search for true emancipation. Even as Boodoo’s analysis appears to emphasise the discontinuities and brokenness in the experiences of the Caribbean people, his argumentation around a theological method that is open to the experience of dislocation, confrontation, complexity and plurality is important for the attention that it places on the forging of our identity as Church in a process of encounter and engagement that takes seriously the brokenness in our lives and in the lives of others. To take seriously this brokenness demands a careful reflection on the phenomenon of violence as it scars our Caribbean reality and is exacerbated by our plural existence.

En/gendering Church

Before continuing further it is necessary to “break open” the key terms framing this discussion: “engendering/en-gendering” and examine how that is linked to a search for a Trinitarian Church that reflects and treats of the plural nature of society and reality.

What does it mean to engender? And what is it that we hope to engender? The term is used in two primary senses: 1) *engender*, to give rise to or bring about, and 2) *en-gender*, to bring women and

their giftedness into the work of bringing forth Church, bringing forth life. It is no mistake that these definitions resonate with sounds of new life, of childbirth and of midwifery, tasks that are uniquely associated with women. Our task, therefore, like that of Ma Bell and our foremothers, is to open up a real space for women to contribute in bringing forth the church and by so doing we will be giving rise to a true Church. Importantly, it must always be kept in the forefront of discussions such as these that the Church that we seek to engender is not a human creation; it was created by God, redeemed in Jesus Christ and continually empowered by the Spirit. It remains a yet to be fulfilled promise which requires our active participation.

A Trinitarian post-Vatican II Church

The Church of which we speak and which is often called the World Church has a Trinitarian form that was reaffirmed in a special way by the Second Vatican Council. Lumen Gentium from its very first chapter notes that the inner life of the triune God is within the Church itself: thus, the Church has been seen as “a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (4). The communion of the Church is based on the communion among the members of the Trinity; the Trinitarian communion of the persons of the Trinity is the highest expression of unity for Christians. Practically, that communion calls for a different way of being and living as church in the world. According to Karl Rahner, the significance of the Second Vatican Council was that it marked the beginning of the period in which the Church’s living space is from the outset the whole world (*oikomene*). It is also the *oikos* (household) of the People of God. Indeed, with the Second Vatican Council Christianity began to transition to a Church of the whole world rather than one remaining captive to a Western Euro-American particular culture. Such a Church not only understands itself as a worldwide organisation, but also sees itself as a church *in* the world, *with* the world and *for* the world with its various peoples and cultures, its pluriform political and economic

structures, and its different world-views, religions and confessions. In this sense, the church as catholic both embraces the whole earth geographically and is theologically open and inclusive. As J-M-R Tillard reminds us: “difference has a special role in ecclesiology. This is true at the level of each community and at the level of the communion of churches.” According to Tillard:

Difference is intrinsic to the communion which constitutes the church; difference is one of the components of this communion. The church is neither abolition nor addition but communion of “differences.” Abolition levels everything to a single feature. Addition does not necessarily presuppose that the elements are assembled in view of the common good: an addition is a sum of individuals. On the contrary, communion demands that a common reality, a unique value be present in all members and that all have part in it, albeit in very diverse ways. There is a radical unity on which their difference flourishes. By simply adding up differences, one creates a crowd. By causing the common reality hidden under differences to emerge, one manifests a communion, one reveals the riches of unity, one acknowledges the nobility of difference.

Undoubtedly, Vatican II brought about a significant change in the ecclesiology of the Roman Catholic Church, but that change has not been substantial or far reaching enough. As Norbert Greinacher and others charge, such a new post-conciliar Catholic communion has only been partially established largely because the Church has neglected to undertake a corresponding reform of the institutional church. Greinacher asks pointedly, “What does this new theological definition of Church mean in practice if the real power relationships in the Church have remained the same?” Clearly a thorough structural reform of the Church along the lines of the theological statements of the Council is an urgent necessity. Without such reform there will be no conciliar church, no Trinitarian Church, no Church truly responding to the plural nature of Caribbean and wider global society. Greinacher’s claims find echo in the reflections of Caribbean theologians like Diane Jagdeo and Theresa Lowe Ching. Lowe Ching in particular posits that the lack of change in the post-Vatican II Church is the result of the curtailing of women’s creativity and potential in both

Caribbean Church and society. She asks: “Is the freeing of women’s potential perhaps the missing link that has prevented, up until now, a real transformation in our ecclesial and societal structures?” The Church’s call to embrace its Trinitarian form in the plurality of the world, of which Caribbean society is but a microcosm, while incorporating more fully the often-ignored world of women, reverberates in the voices of Caribbean women and men as they talk back.

Reflections on Talking Back

Talking back is part of the giftedness that Afro-Caribbean women like Ma Bell, Nanny and Anastasia have bequeathed to their offspring and it continues to form Caribbean culture around resistance in a fashion that has much to say to our desire as Catholic men and women to engender the true World Church. Historian Jean Besson establishes that women’s lives were and continue to be a central part of an Afro-Caribbean peasant culture of resistance established in the face of the plantation system. Afro-Caribbean women’s cultural resistance is rooted in the slavery past where they responded to enslavement not as passive recipients, but as active resisters who used their voices to force slave owners to take notice. Such women participated in many modes of slave resistance, some similar to men but others peculiar to women. The ways that were typically female included poisoning their master’s food and “using their tongues.” “Woman tongue” included answering back, satire, complaining, and ridicule. These typically female ways of resistance were a direct outgrowth of the closer relationship which women had with slave owners because of their roles as domestics and concubines. The dominant role of women’s resistance based on words was reflected in the fact that female slaves were often regarded as being more “deserving” of physical punishment than men. Also in the arguments against abolishing flogging, the focus was especially on the high rate of flogging of women. Slave women’s words not only took up the slave owners’ time and

disrupted work, but also forced on them consciousness of the humanity of the slave. According to Lucille Mathurin:

By refusing to accept slavery like dumb animals, by regularly raising their voices, women in their way, forced their presence on the consciousness of many: this was the thin end of the wedge in undermining the system of slavery. For once the slave is seen or heard, as a human being, it becomes increasingly difficult to justify his or her existence as a chattel.

Similarly, in their public role as field slaves, women expressed their resistance through language and song. They were experts in the use of the Creole languages that they helped develop, and which, rich with double-entendres and dripping with satire, were frequently employed in subtle abuses of whites and those who wielded power in an oppressive manner. Through these channels Afro-Caribbean women helped generate and sustain a general spirit of resistance. Enslaved women's resistance spilled over into their family life where they reconstituted the family system and built viable communities, which in turn laid the basis for other forms of subtle resistance on the slave plantations. Their role in resistance did not end with emancipation but continued in a major way during colonial times and into the present. This talent for talking back links us with our sisters everywhere in the African Diaspora, and to women across the world whose voices are being raised in protest against a church and society that makes no real place for women. As Womanist theologian Diana Hayes says of black women speaking: "Each time a woman begins to speak, a liberating process begins, one that is unavoidable and has political implications..."

Of course, the irony of this woman-centred tradition of resistance is that this ability to talk back has often been subverted and turned against women. Caribbean women have been and continue to be silenced, rejected and ridiculed by a society which is ambivalent about women and

often values them too little. In that way, Caribbean society largely mirrors the wider global society and church of which it is itself an often-ignored part. Bernadette Little, a Jamaican Sister of Mercy, laments the formidable difficulties confronting Caribbean women's efforts to resurrect and affirm their selfhood in societies born out of brutality, destructiveness, rape, the destruction of native peoples, the assault on Africa, the uprooting and enslavement of the African; the guns, the whips, the authority of force. She is saddened by the fact that the brutality which went into forming our societies has taken a toll on both the Caribbean man and the Caribbean woman.

Little is joined by other voices like Diane Jagdeo who speaks of Caribbean women as having come out of the underworld of oppression, having broken the silence, having learned how to speak (up). She dismisses such use of language and words to degrade and discredit women as "words that lack wisdom." Such words serve, among other purposes, to camouflage truth through ridicule and put women down by dismissing their contribution to the building up of Church and society. Jagdeo calls upon the wisdom of women and turns the words used against women upon their heads. In Jagdeo's hands words of deprecation and dismissal—enchantress, seductress, homemakers—become metaphors for the divine Word and serve to highlight the impoverished nature of Church today. She therefore calls upon us to rediscover the meaning of Church as "home" (*oikos*) rather than as a private sphere in which women are imprisoned. Rather, a Church that is a home is experienced as a community where people can be nurtured and to which they feel a sense of belonging. Her call is for a movement away from a narrow vision of Church that is not deeply concerned with the needs of all people to belong.

Theresa Lowe-Ching contrasts the lack of regard for women as such in the social teaching of the Church to the specific option for the poor which has been a persistent theme in the corpus over the last one hundred years. She acknowledges that while it is commonly agreed that women are

among the most oppressed and marginated of the poor, an option for the poor must be inclusive of an option for women—not in an exclusive fashion but by way of preferential focus to correct past neglect. Women, like the economically poor, are in a privileged position to know dialectically the liberation that comes in Jesus Christ from their own experience of emptiness and powerlessness in a male-dominated society and church. Lowe Ching describes the option for women as involving an approach to reality from the perspective which women have developed and refined through their experience of bearing and giving life, of embracing the whole, of nurturing, of mutual giving and receiving. The style of leadership involved and which applies to both men and women is one based on dialogue, inclusiveness, and a non-violent way of relating to all creation.

Similarly, Dr. Glenda Simms, Director of the Bureau of Women's Affairs in Jamaica, comments on the latest "bawl-out" fad in some religious denominations worldwide, including some churches in Jamaica. She locates "bawl-out" in the use of the woman's voice to seek liberation from the strictures of patriarchal institutions and mindset. She claims that "bawling-out" is a very Jamaican description of what women do when they are in distress. She notes that men, on the other hand, rarely bawl out and they hardly remember how to cry when they are hurt. This does not prevent them from appropriating women's established strategies when it suits their purpose, however, as the bawl-out phenomenon demonstrates. Nonetheless, Simms urges women to continue to bawl-out in their unique way. In a practical turn, she references a recent study that shows that women who suffer in silence are at greater risk for heart disease than those who "bawl-out" and rage against their particular form of oppression. It is in the face of these and other findings that Simms questions why some women continue to keep silent in the face of indignities, abuse, inequalities and the lack of justice both in the public as well as the private spheres in every country of the world. She wonders too why societies are so harsh against women who bawl-out and

rage against the system barriers that are the building blocks of all patriarchal institutions. Nonetheless, she maintains that the hope for the erosion of the universal oppression of women must be apprehended not in our silences, but in the spaces in which individual women have defined popular culture and have “bawled out” and forced the entire world to take note of their actions. She encourages women to bawl out in order to maintain their physical and psychological health.

The need to no longer remain silent is echoed by a Mrs Billings who recently formed the group “Mother in Crisis.” Mrs. Billings claims to share the view held by many that Jamaican women contribute significantly to the crime rate when they quietly wash the blood-soaked clothes and turn a blind eye to the suspicious behaviour of their loved ones. Mrs Billings said, however, these women should not be chastised, but should instead be supported and shown that there is a way out...Nonetheless, she cautioned Jamaican women not to continue being silent, as soon, the blood-soaked clothes could be their own. Refusing to talk back or speak out in the face of violence is of ultimate consequence.

Talking Back as a Trinitarian Invitation to Conversation

It is clear in the reflections of our Caribbean women theologians like Lowe Ching and Jagdeo, women like Mrs Billings and Dr. Glenda Simms that while we grasp with gratitude the gift of talking back, of using the voice, and of making our presence known it is not merely to be understood only as resistance but also as invitation—an invitation to move beyond simply talking back but a movement toward true conversation. Conversation is the highest kind of dialogue in which human beings can engage. The notion of conversation has deep resonances for a Trinitarian

vision of World Church. Oliver Davies in his Theology of Compassion presents a vision of the Trinity which has much to contribute to our notion of talking back as an invitation to conversation. Davies describes the Trinity using the metaphor of speech. In the image of speech the Father and Son speak together, while the Holy Spirit—as the breath that passes between them—is the both the possibility of that communication and the point of access for the church in divine conversation. In this Trinitarian conversation there is a kind of *perichoresis* of utterance: the Father and Spirit speak in the voice of the Son, the Son and the Spirit in the voice of the Father, and the Father and the Son in the voice of the Spirit. In that way the persons of the Trinity inhabit each other's voices.

Human speech in its most intimate aspects provides some analogue to the structure of divine conversation since it is always dialogical; it addresses someone and thus invites a response. As women continue to speak they address themselves to each other, to men, men in power and to the wider Church community and they invite a response. Conversation, the highest form of dialogue, takes place when men and women behave as free agents in full mutual recognition. Conversation is the most complete realisation of the nature of language itself as communication and exchange. Conversation can lead to mutual interest, understanding, exchange and delight. “It is enrichment and delight precisely because we can encounter the other as the centre of their own world, and thus conversation with them becomes a disclosure of other worlds and other possibilities.” This disclosure of other possibilities is what Theresa Lowe Ching describes in her call for an option for women:

Women in our society share with the economically poor, who have been the preferred focus of our attention and service, privileged experiences for coming to know and to appropriate the transforming power and action of God in our midst. The challenge is for us to make a real option for women, as a valid, urgent and passionate specification, not to displace but to complement and clarify our traditionally accepted option for the economically poor. Such an option might well

unleash undreamt of creativity and possibilities such as we did not know the imprisoned “dragon” to possess.

It is only in acts of deception and concealment, denigration and destructive criticism that these dialogical implications of our attempting to speak are broken down. And it is in such situations that women need to continue talking back.

Concluding Thoughts: A Marian World Church

Davies describes compassion as the most radical form of encounter with another. Conversation then becomes a kind of compassionate speech, which is marked by care and concerned address to the other. At the same time it is characterised also by lending our voice to them, by speaking on the other’s behalf, as a voicing of their own reality. “We may make the case for them, pleading on their behalf, and call the community to address their need.” In much the same way, the persons in the Trinity speak on behalf of, through and about each other. This kind of compassionate speech has been modelled for the Church in the life of Mary. In this sense it is seen that a Trinitarian Church is also a Marian one, truly understood. Mary was the first to receive the speaking Word at the Annunciation and in the overshadowing of the Spirit which is the presence of God in creation, forming and preparing creation for the divine self-communication of the Word incarnate, Jesus. Her reception of the Word is marked by her own response of “Here I am, Lord. Be it unto me according to your word.” Mary’s acceptance and response give way to a new way of speaking as was seen at the Wedding in Cana. Mary’s speaks compassionately, she intercedes on behalf of the couple and initiates Jesus’ public ministry. Her intercession represents a deepening of the primary Word which she received and responded to at the Annunciation. This is not the act of a submissive woman, but of an active one who as presented by John’s Gospel is not afraid to

Speak out/talk back to her Son who was slow to see the significance of the Wedding as the beginning of his public work.

The Church is called therefore to be a Marian Church—a listening, conversing church that intercedes on behalf of others. When as Church we truly speak with others, we compassionately engage them and enter empathetically into the perspective of women, the poor, the sick, and the marginalised. As Davies puts it in a paragraph worth quoting at length:

The Marian Church is called to become a place of truth where the marginalized speak to society at large, and where their case is put. At all points the Marian church questions the complacency of society and its indifference to the sufferings of others, as through the Marian church those who do not conform in some way to the dominant norms of society find a voice. If society privileges men above women, then the Marian church speaks for the experiences of women, and allows women who are marginalized in their social access to speak through the church. The Marian church speaks for the developing world in the developed world. It speaks to those who are healthy and strong for the handicapped and the socially disadvantaged. It speaks for those who face persecution on account of their ethnic background or prejudice on account of their sexual orientation. It speaks for those without power, for children or the unborn. It speaks for the living environment, and for compassion towards animals in medical research and farming. Such intercessory, Marian speaking represents the solidarity of the church with the oppressed.

Yet care must be taken that the Marian Church does this without taking away their voice or their ability to speak for themselves, as has so often been the case with women and the poor. Our act of speaking on behalf of is more of a joining of our voices with theirs and openness to allowing ourselves to be vessels through which they can speak. In so doing we need to join our voices with that of groups like the newly formed “Mother in Crisis.” This group aims at empowering women to use their influence as mothers to bring their sons and daughters who are involved in crime back on track. “By so doing, the group is confident that the crime rate will be significantly decreased.” At the same time as we assume this intercessory stance it should cause us to question where women, the poor, the marginalised are. Why are they excluded from our Church communities, our societies, our homes? A true engagement and encounter with the brokenness in the lives of those on the

margins speaks to our own brokenness and calls into question the boundaries of membership in the Church. It poses further questions about who is Church and who decides who has membership in church? Paradoxically, the Church is called therefore to speak even for and with those who are excluded from the Church itself, such as divorced and remarried couples, gay people, women, women called to ministerial priesthood, victims of priestly abuse, men and women of other faiths and no faith, many black people and poor Amerindians. The Trinitarian boundaries of the Church are dynamic and conversations have to be maintained because those who fall outside the Church are always integral to the destiny of the Church. It is those who stand outside the Church that call us to truly become what we are: A Trinitarian Church responding to a plural reality that gives a privileged place to the voices and experiences of women and the marginalised.

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Howard Dodson, introduction, In Praise of Black Women 2: Heroines of the Slavery Era, eds. Simone Schwarz-Bart and André Schwarz-Bart (The University of Wisconsin Press: Modus Vivendi Publications, 2002) vii.

Ana Lydia Vega, "Cloud Cover," Her True-True Name: An Anthology of Women's Writings from the Caribbean, eds. Pamela Mordecai and Betty Wilson (Oxford: Heinemann, 1898), 105-111.

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Olive Senior, "Country of the One Eye God," *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Short Stories*, ed. E. A. Markham. (London: Penguin Books, 1996) 282. Later when his grandmother begs him not to shoot her because if he does he will not be able to leave the village alive since everyone will hear the shot, Jacko retorts: "Let me worry about that. Me sure no God going to hear yu. This is the country of the one eye God. And he a-see neither you nor me..." (283-4)

Diana Hayes talks of this as a womanist way of being in the world. It calls forth the Black experience of a personal God, one both transcendent as the bringer of justice and liberation and immanent as the one who walks and talks with us and tells us that we are God's own. Diana Hayes, *Daughters of Hagar: Womanist Ways of Being in the World* (NY: Paulist Press, 1995) 52-53.

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Greinacher 10.

Greinacher 10.

Besson 26.

Besson 29. Even today Jamaicans refer to animals as "dumb things" underlining their own humanity based on the ability to speak, to use words.

Besson 29. The iconic example of the enslaved woman who refused to remain silent is Anastasia, black slave and martyr from Brazil. Her story is told in In Praise of Black Women 2. Anastasia was possessed by the goddess Yemenja, queen of the deep water and mother of all gods, the very same one the whites called the Virgin Mary. The message from the goddess through Anastasia was for the slaves to flee and set up a land of welcome for the gods of Africa. Those who were unable to leave due to age, infirmity or the weight of their chains were to from then on look the white man in the eyes as if they were creatures just like him. They tried to silence her by placing an iron mask over her face but Yemenja kept speaking through her eyes, and those words were even deeper and more moving than the words spoken by her mouth. Imprisonment and a spiked iron collar eventually led to her death but even in death she continues to speak as she is revered as a saint. Black women in Brazil in particular address their most common and powerful prayer to her: Anastasia, holy Anastasia, You who were borne by Yemenja, our mother; Give us the strength to struggle each day So we may never become slaves; So that, like you, we may be rebellious creatures. May it be so. Amen.

Barbara Bush, "Towards Emancipation: Slave Women and Resistance to Coercive Labour Regimes in the British West Indian Colonies, 1790-1838," Abolition and Its Aftermath: The Historical Context, 1790-1916, ed. David Richardson (London: Frank Cass, 1985) in Besson 29.

Diana Hayes, Hagar's Daughters: Womanist Ways of Being in the World (New York: Paulist Press, 1995) 44. Hayes quotes from bell hooks's Talking Back.

Christine Gudorf would describe the situation of the Caribbean as "feminized"

Mary Bernadette Little, "The Role of Women in the Church and Society," Caribbean Quarterly 37.1 (March 1991): 69.

Diane Jagdeo 30.

Low Ching, "The Role of Women" 21.

Low Ching, "The Role of Women" 22

Glenda Simms, "Self-silencing vs bawling out," Sunday Gleaner, April 17, 2005, G8.

Simms G8.

Robert Lalah, "Moms take charge," The Sunday Gleaner, April 17, 2005, A1, 3

Davies is clear that Father and Son are simply gendered metaphors used to filter ungendered relations (259).

Davies 262.

Davies 264.

Low Ching, "The Role of Women" 22-23.

Davies 264.

To discuss Mary as a model for a Trinitarian Church does not dismiss the ambiguities of her person for women in the Church. The marriage of the Trinitarian and Marian models in the call for engendering Church is an attempt to reclaim Mary as a viable symbol and person for women and men in a Church that too often paints women as silent, docile and submissive.

Davies 279.

Davies 280-81.

Lalah, "Moms take charge,' A1.