



# Statement on the Occasion of the Launch of the USPG/Codrington Reparations Project

*(Prepared by Archbishop Howard Gregory)*

The Church historian, Arthur Dayfoot, outlines three developments which shaped the life of the Church in the heyday of slavery and planter dominance in the West Indies as follows:

- (i) the revolution brought about by sugar cultivation and a social structure which virtually excluded slaves from the Christian community;
- (ii) the establishment of the English-speaking colonial era ... and the establishment throughout this area of the Church of England as the predominant ecclesiastical body; and
- (iii) the institution of direct royal government in 1660, under which the monarch as nominal head of the Church, together with the bishop of London and later also the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), maintained some shadowy authority in ecclesiastical and social affairs - an authority however which was resisted in a number of ways by the colonial plantocracy.

This brief extract from Dayfoot provides the backdrop, as well as set the foundation, for the alignment for the initiative between The Codrington Trust and the USPG that we are marking today.

The coming of the Church of England to the Caribbean in the seventeenth century was not grounded in a missionary thrust which was geared toward the fulfilment of the Great Commission of our Lord, as contained in St. Matthew 28:18-20. Instead, it was part of a transplantation of an imperialistic and colonizing movement, on the part of Britain, which was expressed ultimately in the most egregious crime against humanity, chattel slavery, for over two centuries.

The Church of England's involvement in slavery was particularly heinous in Barbados on the Codrington Estate, which Christopher Codrington owned and later bequeathed to be a college for the education of clergy. In an irony of contradiction, the training of clergy for the proclamation of the liberating gospel of God in Jesus Christ, was to be supported from the earnings from the labour of the enslaved who were regarded as less than human, and property held in trust by the SPG. The conditions that prevailed on the estate were horrific and are documented in the archives but kept alive in the collective consciousness of the descendants of the Estate, and the people of this nation. It remains a central symbol for Caribbean people of the complicity of the Church in supporting and benefitting from chattel slavery.

There still remains the pain and hurt which slavery inflicted and which still linger waiting to be engaged and assuaged. Our biblical and theological tradition is very clear in speaking to how such broken relationships are handled. Healing cannot be facilitated where offence caused is denied, neither is it something achieved by the offender engaging by himself/herself in a subjective process, and then assumes that the matter is resolved. So there needs to be acknowledgement of wrong that has been done, an expression of apology/regret, and an expression of reparative action.

Ultimately, forgiveness is the prerogative of the offended or victim and not the discretion of the perpetrator if there is to be healing and reconciliation.

This MOU marks a significant milestone, though not a destination, as we hear the USPG affirm that *“We own up to our historic past and unreservedly apologise for our actions. No amount of funding could ever repair the loss and damage the effect the slave trade had and still has on Codrington descendants”*. We Trustees affirm the focus of this Reparations Project while expressing the hope that its implementation may lead to a much broader dialogue and openness to possibilities and horizons of rapprochement not currently envisaged.

We have taken note of the fact that with the granting of the bequest for the establishment of Codrington College, the church - the Body of Christ - and the herald of the gospel, was to prepare those who would constitute the clergy supported by a system which was dehumanizing and devaluing of the people of God, and which constituted a negation of the message the church was to proclaim and embody.

Notwithstanding these painful dimensions to the formation of the Codrington Trust and the College, we are the inheritors and trustees of this historic institution and national treasure. In this light, there are those who have contributed to the development of the institution over the centuries as administrators and teachers making it a place which has impacted the life of the church and nations of this Caribbean Region in profound ways. Long before the University of the West Indies was conceived, this institution was training teachers and scholars through its relationship with Durham University, and who played a major role in developing secondary education in Barbados and the territories of the Caribbean, and who became some of the administrators and teachers when the University of the West Indies came into being. Likewise, the Church in the Province has been blessed with generations of bishops and clergy who have been nurtured in a process of priestly formation within the walls of Codrington College.

It is our hope that, through this Reparations Project, there will be serious reckoning with the history of the relationship between The Codrington Trust and

the USPG, but also a process of renewal and reconciliation that will be healing of the pain of the past, while positioning the institution to continue to be a positive force in the life of this nation, and the Church in the Province of the West Indies through the successful accomplishment of the following projects: -

- Community development and engagement, infrastructure
- Historical Research & Education
- Burial Places & Memorialisation
- Family Research

While slavery of the black race in these parts has ended, the philosophy which undergirded and justified the practice of chattel slavery continues to exist in racism which still treats the race as inferior, while restricting opportunities for equality in the various spheres of life in former colonial powers.