



Towards Greater Involvement of the British Black Church in the Secular Education of Black Youth: School Exclusion and British Black Males¹

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With special reference to the exclusion of young, Caribbean British (African Caribbean)² males from English State schools,³ I argue for greater involvement of the ministry of the British Black Church in the secular education of black youth. By British Black Church I mean Christian black organisations such as, black churches and black faith-based organisations (FBOs) on the one hand, and black, Christian leaders/ministers and laity, on the other. The paper thus examines

the interplay of black religion/spirituality, school exclusion, black British masculinity, education and black youth.

There are many social and religious issues arising in the UK that directly impact on black people. These are racism, concerns about the reluctance of Christian black youth to enter Church leadership, poverty, the interconnection of the penal justice system and crime and health concerns in relation to mental illness and sexually transmitted diseases. However, the school exclusion of young, Caribbean British males is poignant. Reasons for focus on this social problem and in relation to this specific racial and gendered group, shall be made clear in ensuing sections. The chapter notes the social repercussions of exclusions on society more generally and considers the psychosocial impact of school exclusion on the boys affected and their families.⁴

The findings are used to aid in the construct of my argument for greater black, religious organisational and Christian engagement in the secular education of black children. The involvement of Black Church ministries is intended to ameliorate the school experience of black children by attempting to combat school and social exclusion and black educational underachievement. The paper thus seeks to answer four main questions with regards to the involvement of Black Church ministries in the secular education of black children:

1. Why should the Black Church get involved;
2. What Black Church provision, if any, already exists;
3. If provision already exists, is it sufficient to address the specific needs of black children and their families;
4. And if not, how can provision increase?

The chapter starts with a brief discussion on the racial and Christian demographics in the UK. It then looks at Black Church and social action. The relationship between secular educational providers and black youth comes after this. This is followed by a section that questions the need for Black Church involvement in the secular education of black children. Issues of school exclusions in Britain and the position of Caribbean males are then addressed. The social and psychosocial impact of school exclusion and Caribbean British males are analysed in the next section. The importance of parental involvement in school exclusion is examined in section six. The final section concentrates on the Black Church engagement in the secular education of black children before a concluding summary.

Background: Demographics

The UK 2001 census records a total population of approximately 60 million people of which minority ethnic blacks comprise about 4.5 million. Of this 4.5 million, 1.7 million are of African and African Caribbean descent. This chapter is concerned with the latter group. Given the size of the total UK population this ethnic group consists of a very small proportion.

In terms of the total number of black Christians and Black churches, the estimates vary depending on the sources and the purposes for which these figures are gathered and used. A Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI)⁵ report records approximately 1.7 million minority ethnic Christians from numerous denominations. In his survey of Church attendance in England, Peter Brierley⁶ claims a total number of 1300 ethnic minority denominations where 50 headquarters exist of these. However, the CTBI report⁷ claims only 300 minority

ethnic denominations consisting of approximately 3000 congregations. Whilst these figures are arbitrary they allow an understanding of the possibilities for the Black Church's response to the scale of the problem of black boys' exclusion from school given the Black Church's size and capacity.

Black Church and Political/Social Action

In the British context Robert Beckford has long highlighted the limited response of the Black Church in political action.⁸ He argues that it has created a culture of serving its own spiritual needs whilst also focusing its attention exclusively on the conversion of unbelievers. By doing so, he maintains that the British Black Church fails to acknowledge and respond to the racial and class divisions and politics endemic in British society. Black people are essentially disproportionately discriminating against and issues relating to them are perceived as problematic and contentious yet, according to Beckford, the Black Church seems uninterested in direct combat where these issues are concerned.

Drawing on writings by James Cone, Beckford gives three responses to political engagement from the Church in his book *God and the Gangs*.⁹ Gun and gang culture among Black youths in Birmingham, England is the focus of his attention. He first asserts that the Black Church experiences chronic withdrawal symptoms to societal, social action. Instead, it prays for Divine intervention since it does not get directly involve. On reading Beckford, it would seem that the scripture "be not confirmed to the world: but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2) is taken to its extreme as congregants prepare for the

eschatology through their spiritual devotion alone. Secondly, Beckford flags up the church's generous project-works in which it acts as a satellite, providing 'good works', social action programs as an indirect and alternative response to specific social problems. For Beckford the Church excuses itself from being actively involve in social politics and thus justifies its social irresponsibility to society. Thirdly, through non-violent measures (peace and justice), Beckford argues that the church responds prophetically through a visionary and practical approach to social issues in society. It is this latter response that he suggests is most lacking in the Black Church but nevertheless, most needful. Through examination of gun crime and gang violence he puts forward a prophetic action approach for social engagement.

Whilst essentially concurring with Beckford that the response of the British Black Church to the social needs of society is wholly inadequate, I nonetheless highlight, through my investigation into a nationalised, Black-majority Church (BMC), their contribution to society.¹⁰ I argue that although the church responds through social and voluntary action programs their motivation is prophetic for "where there is no vision the people perish" (Proverbs 29: 18). In this, they differ to Beckford's project-work response. These practical and visionary programs aim to combat social and religious exclusion for greater Christian and civil engagement. However, unlike the direct combat idea which Beckford promotes in his prophetic action paradigm, not all social provision operate at this level. Some are more passive and function through either the churches' social systems themselves,¹¹ their associated community centres and/or faith-based organisations (FBOs) or FBOs that are owned by black church members but are affiliated to the Black Church. My inquiry found that

although black churches do not necessarily engage in matters of racial politics and social injustice beyond that of church connections, they are, nonetheless, attempting to involve themselves with the wider society. The underlying motive is not about the avoidance of response to direct social problems, as the project-work response suggests, but about heeding the Holy Spirit's call to 'serve tables' similar to that found in Acts 7. Recent British government policies, specifically geared towards black and minority ethnic groups, are trying to encourage further development and establishment of black services for the wider community. Despite the government's attractive incentives, I give a word of caution to black churches, to remain guided by the prophetic voice and not to allow finance alone, through necessary and important, to determine the nature and level of their social provision.

The literature is virtually silent where specific relations to British Black Church involvement in the provision of secular education of black youth, is concerned. The few exceptions are found in my book on *Black Success*¹² and other selective papers. Reference to the influence of the Black Church as a community organisation, black Christians and some black supplementary schools in the successful education and career trajectory of black children, is made. Courtesy of Anthony Reddie, the British context now has documentary evidence on the importance of black theology in the Christian education of black youth.¹³ However in the secular education of black children, it is the secular community and voluntary sector which are the main providers.

Secular Educational Providers and Black Youth

Specifically relating to school exclusions, recent research shows that it is a combination of mainstream and black community initiatives that specialize in school exclusions to help African Caribbean children and their families. Statutory organizations are found to be less supportive.¹⁴ These community initiatives provide practical help through the exclusion process such as, alternative sites where black excludees can learn, advocacy and the representation for school excludees and their families. These organizations are also utilized to assist excluded children with career advice and emotional problems and the reintegration back into mainstream education.

Other studies on secular educational provision more generally, show that it is black community initiatives and organisations that are agents of help, support and information for black children, their families and the local, black community. These community-led and self-help initiatives respond to a mainstream educational system that is seen by the black community as misrepresenting black youth as underachievers and anti-education. These organisations reflect black social and cultural capital in the form of empowerment, civil engagement, collaboration and community. They are characterised by black-dominated environments in which African-centric culture and values are promoted alongside, high expectations for successful career trajectories of young people and images of positive black self-identities. These community initiatives are designed to enhance black young peoples' self-respect, promote self-discipline and thus enable young people to successfully achieve in education and employment.¹⁵ In her study of community-based projects designed to support

black pupils and parents, Lorna Cork highlights five distinct types of social action provision. The first is designed to improve the direct relationship between school and home through a Local Education Authority (LEA) liaison role - Linkaid. The second provision – Actionaid – is a community-based Black parents’ group. The third type is an organization that serves in a mediation role between home and school – Mediaid. The fourth is child-centred in which parents advocate through Black parents’ organisations for their children – Advocaid. Finally, Culturaid is about raising Black historical and cultural awareness through a school-based, parents group.

Black supplementary schools and community mentoring programmes are examples of these community initiatives. Only a small amount of black supplementary schools are religious. Most are secular. Supplementary schools are out-of-school, part-time providers of mainly after-school or Saturday school education in which the curricula and activities foster a positive black space for learning.¹⁶ Black community-run programmes are set-up by and for the black community and are designed to guide young people through their education to adulthood employment and/or further education. Examples of these black mentoring schemes are 100 Black men in Birmingham, and Windsor Fellowship in London, England.¹⁷ As the secular, black community is actively engaged in serving the educational requirements of black children, as limited as this may be, the question is therefore begged as to the need for Black Church ministerial involvement. To this question I now focus my attention.

Black Christian Involvement in the Secular Education of Black Children?

The answer to why Black Church ministries and Black Christians should be involved in the secular education of black children is partly summarised in James 1: 27; 2: 14-26. First, ‘pure religion’ is intrinsically connected to social responsibility for the marginalized, disadvantaged and vulnerable - made possible through loving God firstly, and then secondly, loving humanity (Matthew 22: 36-40; John 12: 30-1). This love includes the welfare and concerns of Black youth. ‘Pure religion’ can therefore never be truly effective and meaningful through dutiful actions that are exempt of love. In the New Testament the fatherless and husbandless – ‘orphans and widows’, are frequently cited as the poor whom, through unfortunate social circumstances, are left without the primary economic provider in their households – the male breadwinner. The importance of education in the transition to adulthood for children means that the absence of it can lead to social exclusion, a point which I shall develop further below, and thus the likelihood of becoming a statistic of society’s poor.

Second, Black Christian establishments and Black Christians provide a uniquely redemptive message of liberation, transformation and hope for oppressed people through Jesus Christ.¹⁸ This redemptive message is unparalleled in the mission and action of any other organization and religious group in society. The Black Church and its social welfare programs, offers to black people a culturally sensitive salvation.¹⁹ The Black Church, in particular, is God’s representative of Black Christianity in the world that speaks with a prophetic voice. When the Black Church and black Christians fail to proclaim ‘thus says the Lord’ on issues of concern to Black and oppressed peoples, their quietness enables ‘secular’ organisations to

speak on their behalf from values that often misrepresent Christian, Black peoples' spiritual and cultural matters. For these reasons, the Black Church must play an integral role in society. Black Christians are thus called to be 'salt' and 'light' in the world (see St. Matthew 5: 13-16) and can also be the agency of educational provision and social justice for black youths.

Having established a need for the involvement of The Black and black Christianity in the secular education of black children, I shall now address the issue of school exclusions and black males in order to later development my practical model.

School Exclusions in Britain

In Britain the subject of school exclusions has become an issue of considerable attention for academics, practitioners, the public and the government.²⁰ Studies on school exclusion have focused on explaining increasing trends and have pointed to educational policy and the process of schooling,²¹ as feasible explanations. On the consequences of school exclusion, other studies points to poor educational achievement; poor employment prospects; induced alienation, disaffection and social exclusion; links with criminal and other socially corrosive activities and family disruption.²² Whilst for 18 years, the British government has sought ways to reduce school exclusions and has invested nearly £470 million to improve behaviour and attendance,²³ and have set performance targets so that by 2004 school truancies would have reduced by 10% compared with 2002, issues of school exclusions still remain as a paramount topic of attention in 2007.

The 1993 Education Act in England defines the current law on permanent and temporary exclusions. These are the official terms used in England and Wales for being expelled or suspended from school. Fixed-term exclusion (or temporary exclusion) refers to a specific number of school days, not exceeding fifteen school days in one term, in which a student is suspended and is allowed to return to the same school. Permanent exclusion results in removal of a student from a school's enrolment. Official statistical evidence on school exclusion is problematic in that some fixed or permanent exclusions are unrecorded. Similarly, they do not always stipulate between the two types of exclusions. Furthermore, whilst the 1993 Education Act clearly defines types of exclusions, it fails to point out the criteria on which offences would result in exclusions.²⁴

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES),²⁵ the Government's administrative department that is responsible for education in Britain, only states that exclusions should be used sparingly, in response to serious breaches of school policy where all the facts of a case, including pupils' age, previous record, health and other relevant issues, are taken into account. Permanent exclusion must only be taken as a last resort. The decision to exclude is thus left with head teachers, school governors and senior school management of individual schools to make decisions and form judgements on specific cases. School decision makers are given the power to set their own policies concerning behaviour and exclusion in which all parents are allowed copies of school behaviour and exclusion policies.²⁶

However, schools must ensure they do not infringe the 1976 Race Relations Act and the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act. It is this power granted to schools to set their own policy

agendas that poses problems for Black boys who are the most susceptible group to school exclusions.

British Black Males and School Exclusion

Research on school exclusion reveals boys in general²⁷ are prone to school exclusion and permanent exclusion at that. Poor literacy, in some cases, is a causal factor. Most boys, aged between 13 and 15, start secondary school with a reading age behind that of their female peers. High truancy levels augment poor literacy.²⁸ Although exclusion rates have fallen, African Caribbean boys in particular are nonetheless immensely at risk than any other group.²⁹ The office of standards in education (ofsted)³⁰ in Britain has shown that, young, Caribbean British males account for 9% of the school population, yet, according to Tony Sewell, they are four to 15 times more likely to be excluded from school depending on regional variations in Britain, compared with other groups.

Unlike white boys, research on African Caribbean boys and their experience of schooling has showed that their combined masculinity, race and class are attracting vast racism in school³¹ and this attraction, in many cases, is partly responsible for their exclusion from school.³² A parent in my study states this well:

There is more hassle for the black kids because they want to go to school and learn. Whereas white kids, with me being a youth worker I know this for a fact, the white boys don't want to go to the school. They won't have the same difficulties as the black boys, because they are not there to be told off and then to be excluded.

It is suggested that the way in which Black people display their social distress makes them susceptible to being identified by lay people and the police as deviant, whilst within the school setting it is teachers and other educational professionals who have the power to label the phallogentric distress of Caribbean British boys (usually manifested as alienation and disaffection) as problematic.³³ Studies on school exclusion and Black British boys show that whilst they did not exhibit ‘disruptive’ behaviour prior to attending secondary school and are not disaffected with education, they were among the reasons given for their school exclusion at secondary school. Cecile Wright and colleagues, in their study of *School exclusion and transition into adulthood*, also identify the following reasons given for exclusion:

attitude problems; behavioural problems including disruptive behaviour; stealing; graffiti; violent behaviour including fighting, verbal abuse, aggressive behaviour; truancy; bullying; smoking cannabis, forgery³⁴

In addition to some of these, my own study found sexual harassment and damage to public property as other grounds for exclusion.³⁵

Other research has suggested that the recent changes in government education policy, notably the 1998 Education Reform Act (ERA), are indirectly discriminating against African Caribbean children in general³⁶ and African Caribbean boys specifically.³⁷ At primary school, Caribbean British children’s educational attainment is better than other ethnic groups.³⁸ However, whilst in the main, Caribbean girls dramatically excel at secondary school compared with other groups despite the combined discrimination of racism and sexism,³⁹ African Caribbean boys’ Key Stage 4 results (taken at age 16) show a worrying educational decline in

relation to other ethnic groups.⁴⁰ It is argued that the continual assessment process introduced in the 1998 ERA discriminates against African Caribbean boys in education and is also responsible for exclusion of Caribbean British boys.⁴¹ It is because African Caribbean males are disproportionately represented in school and social exclusion rates compared with other ethnic groups that, on this occasion, they warrant special attention and thus they are the focus of my discussion. Notwithstanding, the discrimination of women and girls is globally universal and the consequences often, extremely extensive, especially with regards to issues relating to sex and sexuality. However, in the British context, the impact of school exclusion on boys, their relatives and society is also significant, to which I now concentrate.

The Impact of School Exclusion and Caribbean British Males

Social and economic repercussions

It has been noted that the social implications of school exclusion is far-reaching. School exclusion have a knock-on effect in terms of wider forms of social exclusions such as, a channel into educational underachievement, crime (mainly drug-and theft-related), court sentencing, imprisonment, unemployment, poverty, teenage pregnancies and family disruptions.⁴²

With regards to crime, a 1993 Royal Commission study on the operation of the criminal justice system demonstrated greater proportions of African-Caribbean youth, mainly males, stopped and arrested by the police. Once arrested these youth, like Black adults, are less likely to be cautioned; expected to be remanded in custody; prone to plead not guilty; apt

to be tried at Crown Court but, nonetheless, more likely to be acquitted. The fact that the acquittal rate for crime is proportionately higher for Black males than other groups, clearly demonstrates to me that many of their cases should never have gone so far through the criminal justice system in the first place. African-Caribbean males are unnecessarily going through the ordeal of the British criminal system. However, when Black males are found guilty they are more likely to receive longer custodial sentences than their white counterparts.

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This social exclusion rate of Black males is not distinct to Britain. In his paper, “Poor Brother, Rich Brother,” Dwight Hopkins paints a similar picture of social exclusion among African America males in the USA,⁴⁴ which emphasises an international problem. I would further argue that black males in both the UK and USA are generally located in one of three settings: (1) castrated within the criminal justice system, (2) sectioned in psychiatric institutions, an area I shall discuss below or (3) the Church. To extend and labour this point even further, as a Christian, black, heterosexual, professional female, I am also concerned about the impact on this two thirds of black male exclusion on black women in terms of enforced institutionalisation and the struggles that this poses for sustainable and long-term partnerships; as well as for mothers as absent fatherhood is eminent and increases. To add, the remaining one third of black male churchgoers, are prone to be more reluctant to reverse patriarchal discrimination, especially in terms of leadership, if for them, the Church provides the only legitimate public space of hegemony. Nonetheless, as pointed out in my book *Unsung Sheroes*,⁴⁵ gender egalitarianism is an essential requirement in a theocracy constituted by

social justice. Thus, the fact that society has socially-excluded our Black boys and men is no justification for them to discriminate against Black women in the Church generally and Black Church specifically.

Since my observations locate two thirds of black males in the UK and USA in social exclusion and the effects of both inclusion and exclusion for Black women is noted, this is a matter that clearly requires attention and positive response no less from Black Church and Christian thought and practice.

The economic cost to society from social exclusion can also be extensive. Carl Parsons estimates the total in England in 1996/7 as £81 million.⁴⁶ This includes costs to health services, social services and the criminal justice system. Average educational costs to exclude a child were £4,300, and costs to other services in 1994/5 were nearly £1,200. To maintain a child in school who would otherwise be at risk of exclusion is calculated at £2,800. These costs do not include those more difficult to calculate such as, costs to communities and policing.⁴⁷

Whilst documentary evidence reveals the social and economic impact of school exclusion, very little is known about the psychological effects of school exclusion on African Caribbean boys. However, what little evidence is available can be draw on to assess how best black church ministries can respond to the secular education of Black youth.

Psychosocial effects of school exclusion on African Caribbean males

It is worth noting from the outset “studies of race and mental health are [often] gender blind, while studies, which include gender analysis, tend to be race blind.”⁴⁸ Similarly, issues relating to mental health and racial cultural is still misunderstood and problematic for the medical and other associated professions of mental health. As a 32 year old woman, diagnosed with schizophrenia puts it: “Be aware that what may be considered ‘mad’ behaviour in one culture may not be in another.”⁴⁹

With this cautionary preface, it can now be said that recent studies reveal disproportionate representation of African Caribbean people in general, and males, in particular, in admissions to psychiatric institutions⁵⁰ and their links with psychological disorder.⁵¹ Recent data by MIND⁵² entitled *African Caribbean community and mental health in Britain*⁵³ shows racism and its ensuing influence as a major contributory factor. The Mental Health Task Force Project reported a disproportionate representation of African Caribbean males amongst those formally detained in acute in-patient units. They were also more likely to be ‘taken to a place of safety’ under section 136 of the 1983 Mental Health Act. It was found that they are up to three times more likely to be sectioned than their white counterparts.⁵⁴ Similarly, black men were more likely than white people to receive a diagnosis of schizophrenia or drug-induced psychosis⁵⁵ and are 4.3 times more likely to receive ‘first time admissions’ for the diagnosis of schizophrenia.⁵⁶ In addition to racism being a causal factor in mental illness, I believe that the stressful ordeal of having to go through the process of the

criminal justice system is also likely to have psychological repercussions on the psyche of black men.

In terms of school exclusion, research demonstrates the psychosocial effects on African Caribbean boys in terms of their perceptions of self and institutions in general, and the psychological distress experienced.⁵⁷ My study on the psychosocial effect of exclusions on black boys did not show serious psychological and emotional effects which require psychiatric hospitalisation or medication. Nonetheless, it did, along with a recent study,⁵⁸ demonstrate the excluded, Caribbean British boys specifically, and children generally, as experiencing feeling of low-self esteem and worth, trauma, paranoia, fear, anger, frustration and insecurity, especially when they thought they were unfairly treated compared with more favourable treatments received by White students; or if they saw exclusion as an injustice done to them. This is demonstrated in the quotation of a father of an excludee in my study:

The Deputy was shouting ... He was saying, 'Patrick we don't believe you. You are a liar.' Patrick was crying... They were hassling Patrick and forcing him to admit things [accused of sexual harassment]. ... when he went back to school what they did, they took him out his class. They locked him up on his own, no breaks, he wasn't allowed outside. ... he was locked up all day until school finished. We had to take him to the doctors about it and he was off school for months because it was psychologically affecting him. He didn't have a say and he couldn't do nothing, nobody wanted to hear his point. Nobody was listening to Patrick.

Despite their ordeal, many of the excluded boys were optimistic and hopeful for the future and their prospects in terms of successful employment and civil engagement. Much of

this optimism is accredited to the support of two agencies: family and community organizations.⁵⁹

However, there were some indications from parents that without this support their boys' present trauma could have developed into psychological disorder. They felt that continued help, and the absence of further tragedy, is necessary to prevent serious psychological problems and that in more serious cases professional counselling must be an option.⁶⁰

Given parents' concerns in my study, it would not be too deterministic to suggest that some African Caribbean males who experience mental health illnesses which required psychiatric treatment have also encountered a history of poor schooling. In other words, school exclusion was for them the first step to social exclusion. It is to an analysis of parents' involvement in their children's education that I now focus.

Parental Involvement and School Exclusions

There is a growing body of literature on parental support in the successful educational transition of Black children.⁶¹ Mothers, in particular, have been instrumental in equipping their children with strategies to withstand institutional racism.⁶² Furthermore, studies show the importance of family relationships and informal, community and voluntary networks to encourage a positive identity and a sense of community for black children when faced with systems of enduring race and class inequalities⁶³ and school exclusion.⁶⁴

These studies show that parents are interested in their children's education and their eventual outcomes as they progress through the system. These included many parents of children who are also excluded from school; who are, in some cases, of professional status and middle-class and born-again, practising Christians.⁶⁵

The Christian faith of these parents did not safeguard them against exclusion simply because they are black and thus experience the same racism as any other black parents. God "sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5: 45). However, these Christian parents were able to turn to their faith, often mainly only in prayer and hope, in addition to the other support networks of community and church. The Christian faith provided for these parents another option that was not considered by non-believers although it was limited to Beckford's withdrawal response where there was no action by the church in an attempt to remedy the situation. My study showed the need for greater Black Church ministerial involvement as some of these parents expressed a need for increased church support but realised that the church was often ill-equipped to deal with such issues of school exclusions:

We only asked the church to pray for my son. Basically, we can go to church and forget about what happens. The church prays and support.
(Mother)

My wife and I, it [exclusion of son] affected us mentally and physically. It was distressing and devastating. Although we are a very close family, God was in every part of it, the strength of God. Things like this splits up families. Christian faith is a medicine, I say to every situation. We have God to reassure us through the difficult times. Imagine going to bed and

you can't sleep. ... God he takes us through that. We've been involved in the church. (Father an ordained minister)

Research shows that close relatives often get caught-up in the exclusion process and perform a supportive role. These studies show that the psychosocial impact of exclusion on families was as traumatic for them as it was for those excluded. Parents appeared to be most at risk of psychological distress. They suffered stress and insomnia. In my study I found that, in some cases, parents' entire lives were thrown into turmoil as they tried to come to terms with injustice by the statutory services, which they thought would have supported them, their sons and their families:

You can easily give up after a while. It is very stressful. I think a lot of people must have given up. ... It takes everything out of you... Probably the school should recognise that parents are stressed by it... Doubly so, because we thought this school had failed us to be quite honest (mother).

It knocked me off my feet. I was devastated. I just couldn't function at all. You have nasty dreams, the reality. These things were new to us (father)

Parents supported other siblings and struggled to keep the family unit together.

It was a very difficult time for us, the whole family. Brian [another son] was going through his exams... (father)

With Tim (another son) when he sees his brother at home he wants to be at home as well. He started playing up. ... Trying to be off school. (mother)

We had applied at that time for our daughter to go to this school. Then this happened [son's exclusion]. I mean, at the time we were just waiting for the acceptance letter or whatever. This occurred and it was so difficult, it affected the whole family. ... We had to bear with them [siblings] as well because the other child needs supporting. (Mother)

Oftentimes, parents concealed the exclusion from extended family members and friends due to feelings of embarrassment thus they endured isolation. Ironically, it was at these crisis times that these parents needed support from family and friends yet their concealment prohibited that support.

We didn't want to tell people what was happening. I don't know if that was a good thing or not. But I said to Patrick, if anybody comes, 'go upstairs or don't answer the phone'. If someone came for two hours in the day he'd be upstairs for two hours. That was horrible. That did get to me. (Mother)

In other situations, parents experienced feelings of guilt:

It is an embarrassing situation. ... You feel that you are on trial, or you have done something wrong, or you have failed... You really could give up. (Father)

It is quite a close-knit area. I even see people and I'm not quite sure whether to say 'hello'. ... I don't know what to say. (Mother)

Parents ‘took time off work’ (father) to attend meetings and support for their excluded son. Racism was given as the reason for the unfairness they and their sons received which impacted the entire family and disrupted their lives.

Having discussed the involvement of parents and the psychosocial impact of school exclusion on them, it remains for me to address the issue of greater involvement of Black Church ministries in the secular education of black children.

Towards Greater Black Church Ministries in the Secular Education of Caribbean British Children

The discussion, so far, has identified insufficient provision to address the educational requirements of black children. The need for greater black church ministries in the secular education of black children has also been revealed. However, it has not addressed the scale of existing Black Christian provision or how best to increase the involvement of the Black Church.

In the British context, whilst limited, some Black Church ministerial services already partly exist. The National Black Boys Can Association, a Christian, black mentoring scheme, is one such example. It was established in 1999 in Birmingham, England to counter black boys’ failings in British education. It focuses exclusively on “raising the academic and social aspirations of black boys” from ages 9-16. However, this scheme does not serve the needs of black girls. It is important that whilst the present educational good fortune of achievement in

black girls continues, they are not overlooked in attempts to raise standards for boys. This is because neglect can lead to a reverse or decline in black girls' educational standards.

Whilst not focusing exclusively on education, the work of the Council of Black-led Churches (CBLC), serves a meditative and facilitative role in the secular education of black children. As a Christian, black ecumenical organisation which “seek to organize and mobilise the leaders and members of the Black Christian community” CBLC acts as a mediator between existing professional, secular and Christian services, such as schools, black churches, local education authorities, black teachers, education community groups and parents. It responds to the cultural and spiritual, educational needs of black children in schools. CBLC facilitates the collaborative effort of all sectors concerned in black children's education through seminars, conferences, information dissemination and meetings. CBLC is not the provider of services. Other participating parties do this. It is the facilitative organisation between and for the other organisations and groups. All other secular organisations do not have a spirituality agenda but the religious input is provided by CBLC. The facilitator acts as an enabler which follows-up and monitors progress.

These typologies are by no means exhaustive lists of Christian service providers. Black Parent Support Groups and Black supplementary schools also exist and provide some kind of Black Church, secular, educational ministry for black children. However, in order to actively and practically engage in the secular education of black children, existing provision require some adaptation to go beyond their partial services and for application in a spiritual and/or educational framework.

Taking into account the knowledge of school exclusions mentioned above and the experiences of those directly affected by it, it is important that any, black Christian and Black Church provision is an integrated service; one which incorporates spirituality, education, intercultural pastoral care/counselling and welfare information. It must be culturally-sensitive, liberating, interventionist, transforming and holistic that serves the spiritual, education, cultural welfare, social and psychological needs of black children and supports parents and families concerned. Furthermore, the provision needs to be effective and efficient to combat social exclusion and its adverse impact on society and black women and black children. My prescription includes services that can be replicated nationally and where possible, internationally, to serve local, national and international needs. My concern is not with providing isolated, almost unknown and invisible services that are virtually ineffective. I am concerned with services that, in addition to community and church or church-agency funding, are likely to also attract public and government funding where necessary and appropriate.

I shall provide two religious, educational typologies. Other types can be formulated for employment. Whilst not necessarily constructed in a religious context, Lorna Corks' models, which have been tried and tested and proven to work in practice in improving the home-school relationships of black children, can be modified as a basis for possible Black Church provision.

Christian Black Supplementary Club and Mentoring Scheme

The traditional black supplementary school movement seeks to provide a 'black' education service for only black children in which qualified, black schoolteachers provide curricula.⁶⁶ It does not seek to cater for parents or other relatives neither is it integrated. My study of Marcus Garvey Nursery, revealed an educational and caring service that was not only for black children but also gave parents and the community a black social space.⁶⁷ The nursery preached an African-centric message which was reflected in all of its provision, and since some of its leaders are Christians, Christian social values of community, social justice and care were implied although not necessarily and explicitly stated in policy and practise. The nursery emphasized the significance of promoting a positive self-image of blackness for children, parents and the black community and had high expectations of educational and/or vocational career progression for all its children and parents.

Black theological values of liberation, social justice and hope for oppressed people, made possible through the atonement of Jesus Christ,⁶⁸ and linked to prophetic action by the Holy Spirit⁶⁹ underpins the provision of my proposed black supplementary club and mentoring scheme. Whilst written for the Christian Education of black youth, relevant sections of Anthony Reddie's curricula, "Growing in Hope,"⁷⁰ can be adopted for use in this secular educational environment from a Christian perspective. Thus Christian, African and Caribbean songs of liberation, transformation and victory and books on black church heroes and heroines in which the bible is also viewed from a black perspective, are relevant components of such a provision. The history of black people and their relations to faith, are other components of this

service where issues concerning ‘no respect of persons’ is preached. Respect is inclusive of listening to students speak about their spiritual as well as secular experiences and aspirations. It includes using friendly gestures not aggressive ones, using students’ preferred names, asking questions rather than making accusation, dealing with problem behaviour in private and avoiding negative comments on cultural style.

The provision is intended to focus on early and longitudinal intervention for prevention in the sense that ‘prevention is better than cure.’ The aim is to provide a service from pre-school that continues to track children’s progress through schooling, with the help of schools and parents, to avoid underachievement and school exclusions. In my study of school exclusion of Caribbean boys, I found that most exclusions occurred in year nine (ages 13-14) when children were about to select their courses for examination in their final year of schooling. This longitudinal interventionist approach is designed to prevent exclusion at the most critical stage in a child’s education. Similarly this service includes good role models of black success of both genders in the Church and society to counter black underachievement and failure. Furthermore, the service focuses the development of life skills relating to social interaction and communication, citizenship and social behaviour, Christian and social responsibility, stewardship, cultural awareness and the like.

Even if exclusion or underachievement does not occur for an individual child, black children are likely to experience some form of racism in their schooling which could lead to some distress or trauma. For this reason, a service that includes some type of intercultural

pastoral care and counselling should be offered to which I shall now discuss in the next proposed typology.

Secular Prophetic Pastors/Minister

Whilst I am concentrating on educational services, secular prophetic pastors/ministers can operate in many secular settings. Given the innovation of the proposal in the British context, the implementation of this typology is likely to be long-term rather than a quick-fix response to the educational needs of black children.

In October 2005 a Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) conference⁷¹ noted concerns about the low take-up of black, ordained ministries for ecclesial leadership among those less than 40 years. On closer examination, I discovered that some young people were interested and felt a call into ministerial leadership but did not necessarily see this as church-based. In the USA, there are already recognised workplace pastors and some seminaries and religious-based colleges that train ministers for secular ministries other than only for prison chaplaincy. Similarly, secular pastors are also needed given the general decline in church attendance in England⁷² although Black Church membership is growing compared with mainstream Churches. If people are failing to attend church, for whatever reasons, the church needs to go to the people. It is with this context in mind that I propose educational pastors for involvement in the secular education of black children. It is also hoped that this proposal will encourage the under 40s in Britain to consider alternative pastoral ministries in addition to

traditional ecclesial ones, and for British seminaries to prepare to train ministers for the 21st Century where black churches will either employ or be a cover-church for them.

In his book, *In Living Colour*, Emmanuel Lartey provides appropriate affirmations of pastoral care for the Black Church that can be applied here. He claims that first, intercultural

pastoral care requires collective ‘seeing, judging and acting’ ... Pastoral caregivers need the visions of many cultures on the issues they seek to respond to. The collective approach is required also in the art of ‘judging.’ It is where many examine their evaluations that wisdom is to be found. To act reflectively together ... is to open the way for more transformative activity.⁷³

In education, the collective means for pastoral counsellors to work in partnership with black children and parents through their difficulties, and where voluntary and statutory organisations provide education with pastoral cultural support. Larty secondly adds, that pastoral carers “need the humility and trust of the divine presence ... that respects difference and seeks to give itself way in loving service.”⁷⁴ Unlike secular, social workers/pastoral carers, these Christian education pastors are to exert selfless, committed, evangelical characteristics and speak with a prophetic voice to affect change in a problematic world that oppresses people of colour and in an education system thwart with racism.

Thirdly, Lartey sees pastoral care as incarnational theology where God operates in the world. Education pastors are to be concerned with care and counselling of black children. In addition, in order to be relevant and purposeful, they also need to know the environment in which they are serving, that is, the education system, policies and practices generally, and in relation to black children specifically. This may mean training as a teacher and acquainting themselves with secular, black educational provisions already working effectively and

efficiently as outlined by Lorna Cork in her book, *Supporting Black Parents and Pupils*.⁷⁵ This training may be in addition to or alongside training for ordained pastoral ministry. Fourthly, Larley suggests that pastoral care must be contextual. He states that:

It is imperative that caregivers have an understanding of where people are ‘coming from’. ... The texture of the terrain is gauged in historical, social, cultural, gender, economic, spiritual and political terms. Pastoral analysis cannot be undertaken adequately in the absence of these features of the lives of ordinary, living persons.⁷⁶

Although “like all others” in the sense that, like white children, black children share the experience of compulsory schooling, they are “like some others” in that they are black and therefore, unlike their white counterparts, face racism in the British education system but in reality, they are “like no other.”⁷⁷ Each black child is unique, deliberately created by God to be distinct and it is this distinctiveness that the Christian, black educational pastor must never lose sight of when engaging in the secular education of black children and their families.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the need for greater involvement of Black Church ministries in the secular education of black children through examining the school exclusion of Caribbean British boys – a highly vulnerable group to school exclusion in Britain. The paper showed the alarming, social impact of school exclusion on society and its worrying, psychosocial effect on excluded black boys and their families. These impacts suggest a need for alternative education other than the mainstream system that is, itself, excluding black boys. Whilst there is some

evidence of black Christian engagement in education, it is minimal. Given the importance of education in the life course of children and that black children face discrimination in the British education system, compulsory education that is provided by the State needs to be supplemented by some form of black, cultural provision. Black Church ministries can play a crucial element in this as part of its Christian social responsibility to black children and society at large. The chapter thus calls for its greater response to the need for Christian, black, secular education by providing some paradigms/models that can be utilised by black churches and black-faith organisations and community projects.

Endnotes

1 This paper was previously presented at the 2006 conference of the International Association of Black Religions and Spiritualities in Cape Town, South Africa, January 8-18th. I again presented it in the same year as a visiting professor to American Baptist College, Nashville, Tennessee, USA, September 5-9th.

2 Whilst African Caribbean is more frequently used in the British context, I have decided to use the term Caribbean British synonymously with African Caribbean to signify the specific ethnic Black British group referred to in this chapter. I think the use of Caribbean British (a term which I previously used in McCalla, "The Academic and the Community Meet: Two black, female voices," *Discourse: the cultural politics of education*, 2002) will help to distinguish between other Black Caribbeans in a global context namely British Caribbeans in other parts of the world, and thus eliminate any confusion.

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4 Due to limited space I cannot draw extensively on the empirical data of a small-scale, ethnographical research I undertook in 2000.

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