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St Hope Earl McKenzie, *The Loneliness of a Caribbean Philosopher and Other Essays*. Kingston, Jamaica: Arawak Publications, 2013.

Earl and I have met only once in person, but he has become a provocative companion in pondering the complexities and possibilities for doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with the God who has befriended us both and brought us together in stimulating conversation.

I met Earl through my wife, Jill Alexander. They, in turn, had met at Church's Teachers College in Mandeville, Jamaica, while Earl was teaching there and Jill was married to another of the teachers. Earl then came up to Vancouver, where Jill had moved to open her spa business, to do his doctorate at the University of British Columbia. By the time Jill and I were married, Earl had returned to Jamaica to teach philosophy at the University of West Indies (a department of one) and establish himself as one of Jamaica's leading poets and writers. In 2000, he was awarded the Silver Musgrave Medal for his contributions to Jamaican literature.

It was Earl, especially in this collection of essays, that got me thinking more deeply about the idea of hybridity. For an urban pastor in Canada's most secular urban region, that concept is crucial to understanding how one witnesses to the Gospel in the complex mix of cultures, convictions, and complacencies that are shaping post-Christian Vancouver.

Philosophy, for McKenzie, involves asking deep questions that get to the bottom of things. The key questions, sown throughout his wide and wonderful considerations in these essays, are the ethics of character, the spiritualities of labour and suffering, and the virtues that contribute to social harmony.

In the Caribbean, this depth of thinking seldom happens through the consideration of traditional Western philosophers. Rather, it happened in more indigenous cultural expressions, like writing, painting, sculpting, musicking, politicking, and religioning. He was intensely aware that he was "a creolized West Indian," shaped by a confluence of the cultures of Europe, Africa, India, China, and the aboriginal peoples of the region. McKenzie does not agree with those who want to exclude the voices of the colonizing West in their search for a creolized culture. Rather, he wants everyone in the dialogue. He wants the creolized West Indians to assimilate the wisdom of these diverse voices rather than be assimilated by one or the other of them.

The voices he listens to in this collection are an intriguing mix that speak powerfully to the riches of hybridity and the virtues it can generate. They include Marcus Garvey, the Jamaican visionary and leader of black nationalism and pan-Africanism; Edouard Glissant, the Martinican novelist, poet, and thinker; Frantz Fanon, also from Martinique, was a psychiatrist and radical thinker who wrote *The Wretched of the Earth*, one of the most influential books of the twentieth century on radical politics; CLR James was born in Trinidad and was a renowned sports writer who saw in cricket as a true art form that captured the drama and delight of life; Lorna Goodison and Earl Lovelace provide McKenzie with windows onto the spirituality of the Caribbean, as does the Rastafarian movement; and Edna Manley's sculptures, especially her 'Negro Aroused,' captured the strength of the Caribbean peoples and their

aspirations yet to be achieved. One of my favourite essays deals with the folk philosophy McKenzie finds in Jamaican proverbs. God's care for the disadvantaged is affirmed by "*Wen cow tail cut off, God-a-mighty brush fly.*" Hope is expressed in "*God-a-mighty mek yu se star, no matter which way wind blow.*" My favourite is "*De bes passion is compassion.*"

But what, in the end, are McKenzie's own aspirations in spending so much time in this lonely pursuit of the sense and significance found in these creolized ethics, spiritualities, and virtues? First, I think, it is to break the loneliness by entering into companionship with a rich range of artists and activists who resist the forces that have dehumanized the people of the Caribbean. Second, it is to assert with resilient confidence, the dignity and worth of a culture that developed from the 'canepiece,' that world of enslaved indigenous peoples and Africans and indentured Indians and Chinese in which the Caribbean consciousness has been forged.

There are important lessons here for the church in urban North America. First, listen with curiosity and respect to the multiple voices in your city. Second, follow Jeremiah's advice to seek its welfare (Jeremiah 29:7) by learning the hybridity of influences that is forming its culture and drawing out the compassion that is in all of those passions. Third, remember that the Holy Trinity (Creator, Redeemer, and Reformer) is already there, inviting you to join them as agents of their reconciling love as they build character through justice, generate significance in labour and suffering, and cultivate an inclusive social harmony.