Introduction

Caribbean Crossroads: Historical and Theoretical Considerations

The successful transatlantic crossing of Columbus and his crew in 1492 brought the Caribbean and the rest of the Americas into the mainstream of world history, initiating a process through which the area became an important arena in which European powers competed for political and economic dominance. This colonial experiment spawned the diversity of peoples, languages, and cultures that is the present reality of the Caribbean. An important part of this cultural mix is its variety of religious traditions. As these traditions encountered one another and their new environment, a process of accommodation, adaptation, and transformation began that has resulted in the character and diversity of religious beliefs and practices in the Caribbean today. This book traces the historical trajectory of the major (and some minor) religious traditions of the Caribbean against the broader background of Caribbean social history, paying particular attention to the historical events and processes that have shaped the religious experiences of the Caribbean people. To study the history of the Caribbean without serious consideration of the function and role of religion, we argue, is to miss a fundamental dimension of Caribbean cultures. The Caribbean is a microcosm of the world, where populations from around the globe have come together, with their cultures, traditions, and religions.

A Brief Profile of the Caribbean

In profiling the Caribbean, it seems apt to begin with geography, but we are immediately faced with the problem of delineating the area to be included under the designation “Caribbean.” One way of posing the problem is to ask whether our definition of the Caribbean is going to be restrictive or expansive. The restrictive definition reserves the term for the islands in the
Caribbean Sea. These include the Greater Antilles, the large islands in the northwest Caribbean; the Lesser Antilles, the string of smaller islands in the eastern Caribbean stretching from the Virgin Islands in the north to the Grenada in south; and the southern islands of Trinidad, Aruba, Bonaire, and Curacao, all off the coast of South America. In addition to the islands in the Caribbean Sea, the more expansive definition includes the Bahamas, which lie north of the Greater Antilles but are technically in the Atlantic, and such territories as Belize, Guyana, Surinam, and French Guiana, in Central and South America. The inclusion of these territories is usually based on historical and cultural ties that link these countries more strongly to the Caribbean than to the Latino history and culture of Central and South America. An even more expansive definition would include all the northern coast of Central and South America that is washed by the Caribbean Sea. In this book, we are following the more restrictive view of the Caribbean, not because we want to deny Caribbean identity to those traditionally linked to the history and culture of the islands in the more expansive definition but because it is a more manageable unit. We will make occasional references to places found outside this restrictive definition, but they will not be the focus of sustained discussion.

The Caribbean islands are home to close to forty million people of diverse ethnicities whose ancestors and cultural heritages originated in the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Europe. Probably an equal number of people living abroad, especially in North America and Europe, identify themselves as Caribbean. The Amerindians who occupied the islands when the Spanish arrived in 1492 were the Ciboneys, the Tainos, and the Caribs. The Ciboneys were a relatively small group residing mostly on the western tip of Cuba and probably in the southwest of Hispaniola. The Tainos occupied the large islands of Greater Antilles—Cuba, Hispaniola, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico—and the Caribs mostly resided in the islands of the Lesser Antilles. Within the first hundred years after the arrival of Columbus, a combination of European forced labor, massacre, and diseases killed most of the Amerindians. The Caribs who had intermarried with Africans who in turn had escaped from the Spanish resisted French and British encroachment into the late 1700s. The British eventually deported most of them to Roatán Island, off the coast of Central America. From there, they migrated into Belize, Honduras, and Guatemala, where they came to constitute the Garifuna people. Today a few small communities of Caribs have survived in Dominica, St. Vincent, and the Grenadines. Amerindian strains have also survived in various racial mixings, particularly in Puerto Rico and in Dominican Republic. People of
darker hues in Dominican Republic, for example, are likely to refer to themselves as Tainos.

Today’s Caribbean population is a result of repeated waves of immigrants since the late 1400s. These include Europeans, from northern and southern Europe, who migrated to the area in search of fortune or simply to better their lives. Though a numerical minority in most places, they exercised political, economic, and cultural dominance during the colonial era. Many European Jews also migrated to the Caribbean, fleeing persecution in Europe and/or pursuing business opportunities. Today, descendants of Europeans are a small minority in most places in the Caribbean. Official censuses in Puerto Rico and Cuba place whites/Europeans squarely in the majority, though scholars contest the validity of these censuses, arguing that Puerto Rico is a mestizo (mixed-race) society and that Cuba should be considered predominantly mixed race as well. People of African descent and people of mixed African and European ancestry are the dominant ethnic groups in most of the Caribbean. However, significant numbers of Asians were brought to the Caribbean from the mid-1800s to the early 1900s. The most significant group was Indians—or South Asians (from India and Pakistan)—who were imported as indentured workers by the British after 1838. Between 1845 and 1917, more than 400,000 Indian indentures were transported to the Caribbean with the largest concentration setting in Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana. Today the number of their descendants is equivalent to the population of African descendants in Trinidad and Tobago, as well as in Guyana, and they form a substantial minority in Jamaica. Chinese also came to the Caribbean as indentured workers or as traders. They are a small minority in the Caribbean, mostly associated with commercial enterprises. Portuguese, Arabs, Syrians, and people of other ethnicities and backgrounds all add to the Caribbean mix, and miscegenation has produced a host of racial and ethnic mixings.

With the diversity of people comes a variety of languages. The major European languages—English, French, Spanish, and Dutch—are spoken. Various creole languages and dialects have also emerged in the Caribbean. Most Haitians speak Kreyol; Papimiento is the popular language in the Dutch Antilles; forms of French creole are spoken in the French Antilles and in Dominica and St. Lucia; and an English-based patois (patwa) is spoken in most former British colonies.

Modern Caribbean history may be divided into three periods based on European activities in the area. The first period stretches from exploration to emancipation (1492–1838) and covers most of the slave era. Though
emancipation came at different times for different islands—Haiti in 1804 and Cuba in the 1890s, for example—the emancipation of the slaves in the British colonies in 1838 set the stage for the abolition of slavery throughout the Caribbean. The second period extends from emancipation to independence, 1838 through the 1960s. Again, independence did not come at once for all Caribbean islands. For example, for Cuba and Haiti emancipation and independence came together, while most of the larger islands that were former British colonies attained independence only after 1960. Other islands have maintained some form of dependent relationship with the European nations or the United States. The third period is from independence to the present.

Another way to characterize Caribbean history is to see it as composed of cycles in which the area alternates between taking center stage in world events and being peripheral to international interests and events. The Caribbean first burst onto the center stage of history between 1492 and the 1520s as it became the arena of Spanish exploration and colonization. Yet, it quickly became a kind of neglected backwater of the Spanish empire as the Spanish shifted their interest to Mexico and South America, where the precious metals of gold and silver were found in abundance. For most of the 1500s, the Caribbean became a mere staging area or filling station for Spanish ships on their way to and from what was seen as the Spanish mainland. As other European nations, especially France and England, challenged the Spanish monopoly in the Americas in the 1600s, the Caribbean became a main stage for the playing out of European conflicts. With the development of a plantation economy based on the growing of sugar cane, the Caribbean also became a main source of wealth for European powers. Successively, Jamaica, Haiti, and Cuba became the most economically prosperous colonies in the world from the early 1700s to the mid-1800s. With the waning of the sugar industry in the post-emancipation era, the Caribbean again became peripheral to metropolitan interests. During the Cold War that followed the Second World War, the Caribbean became an arena for U.S. and the Soviet Union geopolitics. Socialist revolutions in Cuba, Grenada, and Guyana and Jamaica’s experiment with Democratic Socialism all fueled and were fueled by Cold War geopolitics in the area. With the fall of the Soviet Union and the rise of the global economy, the Caribbean lost much of its political and economic significance, remaining important mostly as a tourist playground. With the spreading of Chinese economic power in the Americas and with Russia seeking to reassert its influence, there are signs that the Caribbean may again be swept up in international power play in the early part of the twenty-first century.
With the evolving history of the Caribbean, political realities in the region have also undergone changes. Plantation societies during the slave era were dominated by Europeans, either through the agency of colonial administrators appointed directly from Europe or by local legislatures and assemblies of Europeans elected by and from the planter class. While the European interests and the planter class of European extract continued to dominate during the period bookended by emancipation and independence, the emerging local middle class, consisting predominantly of mixed-race people, and the working, mostly black, population, agitated for self-rule and eventually for independence. Emancipation and independence for Haiti resulted from the same struggle, the Haitian Revolution—which transpired between 1791 and 1804. Similarly, emancipation and independence in Cuba came out of a great effort that lasted from the 1860s to the 1890s. Independence in the Dominican Republic is somewhat complicated. That nation first became independent in 1821 as part of the general movement toward the independence of Spanish colonies in Latin America. Annexed by Haiti shortly thereafter, it regained its independence in 1884 but has experienced periods of foreign domination by Spain and the United States (1916–1924 and 1965–1966, respectively). Most of the larger English colonies became independent nations in the 1960s and 1970s. Other Caribbean islands maintain a variety of relationships with European nations and the United States.

Franklin W. Knight and Colin A. Palmer, both noted historians of the Caribbean, identify three types of political status in which most Caribbean island fall. First, most of the islands, with between 80 and 90 percent of the Caribbean population, are independent states: Antigua, the Bahamas, Barbados, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago. Second, a number of islands occupy the status of associated states of European nations or the United States. These include the French Overseas Departments of French Guiana, Guadeloupe, and Martinique and the Netherlands’ self-governing territories of Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, Sint Maarten (island shared with the French territory St. Martin), and Sint Eustatius. Puerto Rico is a commonwealth, or dependency, of the United States, and the U.S. Virgin Islands of St. Croix, St. John, and St. Thomas are U.S. territories. Finally, a number of islands may still be considered colonies. These include the British colonies of the Cayman Islands, Montserrat, the Turks and Caicos Islands, and the British Virgin Islands of Tortola, Virgin Gorda, Anegada, and Jost Van Dyke. St. Barthélemy and St. Martin occupy a similar status under the French flag.2
For most of the region's modern history, the economy of the Caribbean has reflected the dominance of metropolitan interests, first of the European overlords and then, increasingly, of the United States. The initial Spanish thrust into the area was stimulated by the search for gold and other precious metals, followed by an attempt to develop a plantation economy when these metals were not found in sufficient quantities. In the first half of the 1500s, most of the Spanish settlers headed to Mexico and South America, where gold and silver were found in substantial quantities, leaving those who remained in the islands to develop ranching and subsistence agriculture as the main economic activities. With the arrival of northern Europeans, mainly from France and Great Britain, tropical products for European markets came to dominate the economy in the Caribbean. The major crops included indigo, tobacco, sugar cane, cacao, and, later, bananas. Sugar was by far the most important product, dominating the economy of the Caribbean from the late 1600s into the 1900s. The contemporary Caribbean has a somewhat mixed economy. Sugar and bananas continue to be significant but are of diminishing importance in many islands. Manufacturing output has increased significantly since the mid-1950s. Much of the manufacturing is actually off-shore operations of multinational corporations, including the assembling of clothes, electronics, and baseballs. Exploration for bauxite (the raw material from which alumina is extracted), petroleum, and pitch add to the economic activities in the area. Increasingly, tourism has become the highest foreign exchange earner in the area. The Bahamas, Aruba, and Jamaica, for example, have long been recognized as world-class vacation spots. More recently, Barbados, Dominican Republic, Antigua, Puerto Rico, and even Trinidad and Tobago have developed robust tourism industries. Some smaller islands, famously the Cayman Islands, have become prosperous as off-shore banking centers and tax havens. In most rural areas, subsistence farming and the rearing of cash crops remain the economic life line for many. Economists now credit drug trafficking and remittances from Caribbean people living abroad as substantial contributors to Caribbean economies.

Historically and currently, the Caribbean region has been marked by internal fragmentation, resulting from the pattern of European involvement in the area. The present division of the region into Anglophone, Francophone, Hispanic, and Dutch Caribbean is a legacy of colonial conflicts and partitions of the islands by Europeans. This has created feelings of kinship based not on proximity but on language and former association with European powers. Jamaicans, for example, tend to feel closer and to have social and cultural exchanges with Barbadians and Trinidadians hundreds of miles away in the
southeastern Caribbean, rather than with the Cubans, Haitians, and Dominicans in their own Greater Antilles neighborhood. Another expression of this fragmentation is that individual Caribbean countries tend to be oriented toward their former colonial powers instead of toward one another. Nowadays, the United States and, to some extent, Canada have replaced Europe as the object of the outward focus of Caribbean people. This shows up in travel and emigration patterns. Some observers have complained that it is easier to get to London, Paris, Toronto, New York, or Miami from any Caribbean country than it is to get from one place to another within the Caribbean.

In terms of public social institutions in the Caribbean, Europe still holds sway. Such institutions as politics, the economy, education, and the legal systems are either of European provenance or are adaptations of European institutions. On the cultural front there is a tension between what the Caribbean public intellectual and cultural scientist Rex Nettleford calls “the melody of Europe and the rhythm of Africa.” We see this tension between the official European languages taught in schools and the vernacular bending of grammar and vocabulary to African speech patterns. We also see this in the tension between the rational-ethical and confessional religious traditions from Europe and the vernacular religious traditions oriented more strongly toward ritual healing and expressive, emotional displays. As we will see, this tension in the religious sphere is finding some resolution at present in the growing, popular Pentecostal and charismatic churches. One of the ways of characterizing contemporary Caribbean culture[s] is to say that, while Europe rules in the official social institutions of politics, economic, education, and law, other ethnic groups, particular Africans, tend to rule in folk and popular culture, including religion, music, dance, and, increasingly, the visual and performing arts.

Social class is another issue that has evolved within the confines of Caribbean history. At first, the great divide was between white planters, traders, and colonial officials on one side and the mass of African slave laborers on the other. In some places, there were poor whites, but they tended to be identified with the white power structure. An intermediate group of mixed-race people emerged in most places through miscegenation between white males and slave women. Usually free, this group came to occupy a middle place between whites and blacks. Jews, Chinese, and Middle Easterners became grafted into the upper white class. When Indians (from India) first arrived, they were considered a special case outside the existing class construct. As they remained in the islands, particularly Trinidad, as poor rural agricultural workers, they were considered on a par with or below the masses of the black
population well into the mid-1900s. Many have climbed the social ladder through educational, business, and professional success. Today, social class and social status in the Caribbean are much more complex. While race, color, and ethnicity remain important, education, economic success, and political power are more essential markers of socioeconomic status.

_Theoretical Perspectives on Religions in the Caribbean_

Theoretical consideration of the evolution and character of religion in the Caribbean falls within the broader discussion of how to account for the cultural traditions that have been forged in the Caribbean. In an attempt to explain the origin and character of Caribbean culture, scholars of the region have put forth three major theories: the plantation society theory, the plural-society theory, and the theory of creolization.

According to the plantation society theory, the legacy of the plantation slavery is the central determinant of life in the Caribbean. The Harvard sociologist Orlando Patterson and George Beckford, a prolific scholar of the Caribbean political economy, are the proponents of this view. According to these scholars, the distinguishing features of plantation societies were coercion and exploitation, leading to a rigid system of domination and class and race stratification. The domination was not just political and economic but also social and cultural. The culture and heritage of the dominated—black slaves—were suppressed and strangled, and the ruling minority—white Europeans—imposed a new identity upon them. Some would even go so far as to agree with the African American sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, who argued that the horrors of Middle Passage (the slaves’ journey from Africa to the Americas) and the brutality of plantation slavery erased the most significant features of African culture, including religion and family traditions, among African Americans and Afro-Caribbean peoples and that what we now identify as black culture is but a bastardized imitation of European culture. A contemporary iteration of that thesis is that espoused by Prem Misir, Pro-Chancellor of the University of Guyana. He asserts that “Africans lost most of their African heritage to take on a creolized variant of European culture. This absorption process really is cultural assimilation at work where a minority group, either through force or voluntarily, surrenders its cultural tradition to become enveloped into a different and invariably dominant culture.” Advocates of this interpretation of Caribbean culture insist that the legacy of plantation society still persists in the economic and cultural dependency of the Caribbean on the metropoles of Europe and North America.
While the plantation society theory correctly highlights the coercion and oppression of plantation slavery and its continuing legacies in the Caribbean, it fails to acknowledge the abundant evidence produced by historians and social scientists of the survival of African cultural elements in Caribbean cultures, especially in musical and religious expressions. This theory also overlooks the cultural agency of the dominated to resist cultural imposition and to fashion cultural expressions to mirror their sense of identity. As we will see, in many cases in which Africans brought to Caribbean or their descendants accepted elements of European culture, they often deployed them in an African manner and employed them for their own purposes. For example, many Afro-Jamaicans accepted Christianity in the slave era but deployed it to resist their enslavement and to pursue liberation. Another example is the relationship of Afro-Cuban religion to the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, the indigenous patron saint of Cuba. Ostensibly a Catholic saint, she is understood by the devotees of the Afro-Cuban religion Santería as a manifestation of one entity in their spiritual pantheon, Oshun. Furthermore, plantation society theorists attribute too much to institutional and macro-level social forces and too little to vernacular cultural beliefs, ideas, and values. As the sociologist O. Nigel Bolland points out, this theory leaves the analysis at the institutional level, not accounting for the “values, beliefs and ideas of the various protagonists with the society.”7 While the plantation society theory gives all of the agency to the dominant class, much of what is distinctively Caribbean popular and folk culture has been fashioned by people on the lowest rung of the social ladder.

Moreover, the plantation society theory can quickly segue into a reductionist Marxian explanation in which culture is seen as the effluence of the underlying economic conditions. In other words, economic relationships are seen as the sole determinant of culture, including religious expressions. This explanation may have been espoused by some Marxist-oriented intellectuals from the 1960s to 1980s, but it has received no serious treatment in the sociological and anthropological literature on the Caribbean.

The plural-society theory of Caribbean culture was championed in the mid-twentieth century by the scholar M. G. Smith, of the University of the West Indies. According to Smith, Caribbean societies are made of “disparate parts” that emanated from elsewhere. These societies have no shared culture and no shared participation in common social institutions that could provide a pre-condition for social stability. With this lack of shared institutions and socialization, force is the only social mechanism that holds these societies together.8 Thus, these societies are characterized by social pluralism in which “each cul-
tural section has its own relatively exclusive way of life, with its own distinctive systems of actions, ideas, values, and social relations. For Smith, these social divisions are based not on class distinctions but on cultural traits, though the history of the Caribbean has produced a correlation between race and culture.

If the plural-society theory has any merits, it is that it draws attention to the complexity of Caribbean culture and to the multiplicity of cultural influences vying for attention in the Caribbean public space. Admittedly, the Caribbean is a multicultural environment where diversity prevails. Though Smith concentrates on differences among the white, brown (mixed race), and black populations, he very well could have added the Indians, Chinese, Syrians, and Jews to the ethnic mix of the Caribbean. Smith also recognizes the fact that the historical relationship between groups has been determined by differential access to power. However, the glaring weakness of Smith's interpretation is that it is too static. Smith would have us believe that over the past five hundred years of Caribbean history, interaction between discrete groups has been minimal and cultural exchange has been nonexistent. Even if Smith is right, his theory is a simple classificatory scheme that does little to explain social and cultural change in Caribbean history.

Creolization or creole society theory has appeared in one form or another as an explanation for the social processes or dynamics that have produced various aspects of Caribbean culture. Such terms as syncretism, symbiosis, assemblage, bricolage, hybridity, and mestizaje have also been used to highlight aspects of the creolization process. The English word “creolization” has its roots in the French creole and the Spanish criollo. Quite early in the colonial history of the Caribbean, creole was employed to refer to “something or somebody derived from the Old World but developed in the New.” Thus “locally born persons of non-native origin . . . of either African or European ancestry or both” were known as creoles. In colonial Cuba, strict distinction was made between criollos, people of Spanish ancestry who were born in Cuba, and peninsulares, Spaniards who migrated to Cuba from Spain. On slave plantations, both masters and slaves maintained a distinction between creole slaves born in the Americas and African-born slaves (the African-born were more disposed to the plotting of uprisings). In time, “creole” came to refer not only to persons born in the Americas but also to social and cultural expressions and practices developed indigenously.

The Caribbean poet and historian Edward Braithwaite proposed the creolization theory in his famous study The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770–1820. Focusing on how European- and African-derived cul-
tural elements contributed to the development of a distinct Jamaican culture that was neither European nor African, Braithwaite contended that the process of creolization is “based upon the stimulus/response of individuals to their environment and—of white/black, culturally discrete groups—to each other.” He goes on to point out that creolization in this instance resulted from an unplanned flow of influence emerging from co-presence and interaction in which there are mutual adaptations and imitation. The outcome is the evolution of shared cultural practices. Rex Nettleford, an astute observer of Caribbean culture, joins Braithwaite in viewing creolization as the result of a creative interplay among transplanted cultures to produce a “new and rich phenomenon which is neither African nor European, yet embodying the two in unprecedented and creative modes of relationships.” In rather colorful language, Donald J. Cosentino, Professor of Culture and Performance at UCLA and editor of *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, describes creolization as “the process of furnishing a home with imported objects arranged according to the peculiar tastes and needs of the new owner.” In summary, creolization theory posits that the discrete cultural elements that have been transported to the Caribbean environment have undergone a process of transplantation, adaptation, and transformation to produce distinct cultural forms that reflect both the history and the social and geographic environment of the region.

Unlike the plantation society and the plural-society theories, creolization theory recognizes the dynamism of societies and cultures, highlights the importance of the agency of social actors and begins to articulate an explanation of societal change in Caribbean history. However, Bolland gently chides creolization theorists for not having adequately appreciated and articulated the dialectic relationship between the “mutually constitutive nature of ‘individual,’ ‘society,’ and ‘culture,’ and of human agency and social structure.” Furthermore, creolization theorists do not foreground the conflictual nature of “social systems” and how such conflicts serve as “sources of social change.” Creolization theorists have not paid sufficient attention to the mutual influence of diverse elements of African heritage and have paid scant or no attention to the contributions of ethnic groups other than European and Africans to the dialectic of Caribbean culture. Some scholars, especially those of Indian descent, have expressed strong objection to the creolization model for understanding Caribbean culture and identity. Arguing that creolization is a process that involves the blending of Anglo and African cultures, often involving the subsuming or loss of African heritage, Misir contends that Indians in the Caribbean have maintained their own culture and their
cultural and political bonds with India. He proposes that the concept of a mosaic better represents the multicultural reality of the Caribbean.16

Without directly taking on Misir’s claims in detail, we point out that the choice between perceiving Caribbean culture[s] as preserving its multicultural mosaic or as erasing individuals’ Indian, European, or African culture in the process of creolization is a false one. That there exists in the Caribbean a great variety of traditions reflecting various cultural backgrounds and maintaining a variety of cultural values and practices is undeniable. At the same time, most groups have made varying degrees of adaptations to the Caribbean environment. Even those that claim to preserve the pure African, European, Indian, or other traditions often show evidence of being shaped by the historical and cultural realities of the Caribbean. Thus, these traditions have not been static but have reflected the dynamism of the dialectic between change and continuity. The major theoretical perspective underlying this book is the conviction that religion in the contemporary Caribbean reflects a long history of encounter between various traditions and their adaptation to the presence of one another and to the physical, political, economic, and cultural realities of the Caribbean environment.

A particularly instructive inflection of the creolization theory is the notion of “nation dance” articulated by Patrick D. Taylor, a scholar and professor of Caribbean culture and religions. Inspired by Braithwaite’s use of “nation language” to refer to the creole languages of the Caribbean, Taylor uses the imagery of dance to indicate the interplay among religious influences in the Caribbean social environment. Describing the Caribbean as a site of “difference, plurality, and transformation,” he asserts that “the dispersed nations dance their separate dance in the same yard. They borrow from and influence each other, but the dancing of the different nations does not stop.”17 Informing Taylor’s notion of Nation Dance and our approach to Caribbean religious history in this book are three concepts that capture the reality of cultural and religious creativity in the Caribbean: diaspora, crossroads, and liminality.

The Caribbean is a quintessential diasporic space traversed by a multiplicity of immigrants coming and going. From the first inhabitants encountered by Columbus to later African, European, Indian, and other populations, whether responding to the promise of the Caribbean or taken there under the duress of the slave trade or indentureship, repeated waves of diverse peoples have found their ways to its shores and transplanted themselves there. The present population of the Caribbean is composed of diasporic peoples who have moved into the region over the past five hundred years.
Implicit in the characterization of the Caribbean as a diaspora space is the idea of the crossroads. In Afro-Caribbean religions, the spiritual entity Papa Legba, or Elegguá, rules over the crossroads—the symbolic juncture between the human and the realm of the spirits, the pathway between present realities and the African past, the point that separates the present and the future, the place of ritual transformation and empowerment, and the site of decision and opportunity. In a historical and sociological sense, the Caribbean is a site where the meeting of diverse peoples and diverse cultures has opened up new opportunities for interaction, cultural innovations, and transformations. The meeting and cross-fertilization of various religious traditions have both given old traditions new inflections and created new, indigenous traditions.

Closely related to the idea of the crossroads is the notion of liminality. The renowned anthropologist Victor Turner describes liminality as the condition of being “betwixt and between.” He specifically uses this term to describe the status of people going through rites of passage. Having left their old status and standing, they go through a period in which the old no longer applies but the new has not yet arrived. Hence, one of the keys to liminality is indeterminacy. It is a dynamic situation that produces change and transformation. In the liminal spaces of the Caribbean crossroads, diasporic peoples have alighted, and, drawing on their cultural heritage and their historical, geographic, and social realities, they have fashioned cultural expressions and religious traditions that express their sense of self in the world.

This book investigates the diverse religious expressions that reflect the historical evolution of the Caribbean, the heritage of its diverse diasporic peoples, and the transformations, transmutations, and innovations in the dance of diverse religious influences in the same social space. Chapter 2 discusses Taino religions and the nature and results of the contact between their practitioners and the early Spanish settlers. Chapter 3 surveys the role of the Catholic Church in the Caribbean during the colonial era. Chapter 4 focuses on Protestantism in the Caribbean from the beginning of the northern European challenge to the Spanish monopoly in the region. Chapter 5 discusses creole African traditions, which have maintained many of their African elements even while being fused with elements encountered in the Caribbean. Chapter 6 investigates Afro-Christian traditions that have fused African and Christian elements to create new religious traditions, including the emergence and evolution of such groups as Revival Zion and Spiritual Baptists. In chapter 7 the focus falls on the role of the churches in the post-emancipa-
tion era and the emergence of the distinction between “mainline” churches (European-derived, with high status) and “clap-hand” churches (Evangelical and Pentecostal groups that originated mainly in the United States and are associated with lower classes). Chapter 8 surveys the growth of religious diversity in the Caribbean with the introduction of Islam, Hinduism, and the religious movement of Rastafari that emerged in Jamaica in the 1930s. The concluding chapter 9 offers a look at contemporary issues facing religion in the Caribbean today.