

## ABSTRACT

Jamaica has seen the rise of two native religions, Revivalism and Rastafarianism. The former is known for its syncretism of authentic African religious tradition and Christianity, the latter for its back to Africa millenarianism. Yet when viewed from the point of view of their historical development both are significant in the struggles of the black peoples of Jamaica against socio-economic oppression. They form a continuity, in fact, inasmuch as one picked up, as it were, where the other left off.

It is important, then, to view the relationship of history to sociology, an area which has been consistently neglected by functionalists not only the major theoreticians and lights in the discipline but also by those who have studied Jamaican religions. Neglect of history has prevented these latter from noticing the tradition of struggle and from exploring meaningfully the differences and similarities between the two cults.

Revivalism developed out of the late eighteenth century Native Baptist Movement, the symbolism of the post emancipation era, and the great revival of the early 1860's. Both in this development and in the life and works of its greatest prophet, Alexander Bedward, the cult served the social and political interests of the people. After Bedward failed in 1908 it began a steady decline but its political tradition has been carried on by the Rastafarian movement, one of whose singular prophets has been Claudius Henry, whose religious organisation and political work merit much consideration.

Henry may be called a charismatic figure, in the original meaning of the term, but, from a sociological point of view it is more useful to focus upon the situation which saw his emergence, and which, because it can be defined as one of oppression has guaranteed the continued resistance of the blacks from slavery to the present.