



The Communications Unit

Cabildo Chambers, 23-27, St Vincent Street, Port of Spain, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Phone: (868) 625-9141 (d), 625-7010 ext 2605; Fax: 625-7889; e-mail: communications@ag.gov.tt

Opening Remarks for the Spiritual/Shouter Baptist Liberation Day Celebrations at the Ministry of the Attorney General. Delivered by the Honourable Senator Anand Ramlogan

Salutations: Minister in the Ministry of National Security,

Permanent Secretary-Ministry of the Attorney General, Solicitor

General, Chief State Solicitor, Chairman of the Law Reform

Commission, Chief Parliamentary Counsel, Heads of Department,

Employees of the Ministry of the Attorney General, Feature Guest

Speaker(Ms. DePesa), other specially invited guests, Ladies and

Gentlemen.

On this momentous occasion of celebrating 60years of the repeal of the Shouter Baptist Ordinance of 1917, it gives me immense pleasure to give due recognition to our brothers and sisters who had been seared for over 400 years in the flames of withering religious persecution and alienation. And so I stand here before you today to echo, endorse and underscore what

American Physicist—Albert Einstein said on the subject of religious equality: “**ALL RELIGIONS, arts and sciences are branches of the same tree. All these aspirations are directed towards ennobling man’s life, lifting it from the sphere of mere physical existence and leading the INDIVIDUAL towards FREEDOM.**”

Moreover my Baptist brothers and sisters beside being on the same footing as any other religious denomination in our beloved country, you have been responsible for being the primary agent of inspiration to many renowned people in various fields like West Indian Literature, anthropology, music and dance. Your religion has been the vehicle used to capture and sustain the creative imagination of several people over the years.

A renowned anthropologist—Melville Herskovits and his spouse returned to Trinidad in 1949 after their initial visit in 1929, to conduct research on a Protestant Negro way of life in an English-Speaking Caribbean. We have the Baptist to be eternally thankful to because they recorded several Baptist hymns and subsequently their endeavours bore fruit in the publication of their ethnography entitled, **Trinidad Village.**

The struggles, hardships and plight of the Baptist and their unrelenting fight to worship freely were clearly depicted in novel, **The Wine of Astonishment**. This West Indian novel that was written by local son of the soil—Earl Lovelace has been classified among the canon of West Indian Literature as a “must read”. For decades this masterpiece, has been on the English-Literature Curriculum of the Caribbean Examinations Council (C.X.C), educating and enlightening our young charges about the adversities that our Shouter Baptist Community had to undergo just to worship.

Hence, when I read it as a teenager, it ignited a blaze within me to propel a longing to champion the cause for the wronged and for those who have been treated unjustly and denied accessibility to basic human rights. **From that day forward, I held Martin Luther King Jr.’s quote as my mantra:**

“This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism..... Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of injustice to the sunlit path of justice.”

The Baptist has been and is still responsible for having an indelible and major impact on our music—soca and calypso. Calypso music tactfully spiced with Baptist hymns/rhythms were evident in the 1950’s with

songs like “Don’t touch me” by illustrious Calypso King of the World—

The Mighty Sparrow.

Andre Tanker’s(Musician and Composer) “Sayamanda” and “ River
Come Down” are calypsoes that are highly seasoned with Baptist chants
and rhythms. Another calypso icon—Ella Andall sang the famous and
unforgettable “Bring down the Power of Love”—a calypso song that
contains all the ingredients of a Baptist spiritual/chant/song.

Tomorrow, we celebrate Spiritual/Shouter Baptist Liberation Day. This occasion is a celebration that is not only for our Baptist brothers and sisters but for all citizens/religious sects of our beloved twin-island republic. It signals to all that we reside in a land where we are free to worship how we so desire, without fear of persecution. This my brothers and sisters should not be taken lightly especially when we live in a world and time where many people in several parts of the globe are killed for dissident religious views. The celebration of this occasion as a national holiday signifies our superb ability to respect every religious affiliation in our plural society.

In conclusion ladies and gentlemen, I ask that you introspect on the following adage that is quite fitting at this juncture: “We must learn to live together as brothers, or perish together as fools.”

Have a great and reflective holiday!

I thank you!

MINISTRY OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL