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Another Caribbean Atheist Steps Up

From Mythology to Reality: Moving Beyond Rastafari, by Seon M. Lewis (Raleigh, North Carolina, Lulu Enterprises, Inc., 2012, ISBN-978-1-300-43068-1) 372 pp. Paper \$16.00 (Cloth \$22.00)

A Review

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

Non-theists are coming out of the woodwork, and this is always a most welcome development, especially among people of African descent. Seon M. Lewis of Grenada has done so with his book *From Mythology to Reality*. This well-researched book expertly demolishes the ridiculous notion among Rastafarians that Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia is God. Moreover, Lewis offers many excellent critiques of theism, the Bible, Rastafarianism, Afrocentric thought and religion in general.

Readers must be forewarned that the book would have benefited greatly from a good editor or proofreader. The book abounds with errors in spelling, punctuation, syntax, word usage, etc. However, the information is spot on, there is an index, and the book has much else to highly recommend it.

Like most non-theists, Lewis has a problem with Black humanist scholar Anthony Pinn's contention that humanism is a religion. According to some definitions, humanism can be considered to be a religion. However, most humanists consider that to be unnecessarily confusing. For example, the late, great Paul Kurtz preferred the term "life stance." Such a term does not imply the belief in a Supreme Being, which is implied in the common usage of the term "religion." It is certainly more accurate, less confusing and intellectually honest.

Lewis points out that, ironically, Rastafarianism is derived from Eurocentric Christianity, despite its claims to Afrocentric authenticity. Indeed, Rastafarianism draws upon the teachings of the Bible that was bequeathed to people of African descent by people of European descent. As the author writes on p. 9: "Rastafari is only a theistic movement that is mostly concerned with wishful supernatural thinking and engaged in drug trafficking. As a result, it has abandoned its true purpose of fighting [against] social injustice, racism and socioeconomic inequality."

Rastafarians are well-known for their locks (or dreads or dreadlocks), a hair style that they have popularized among Black people throughout the world. The style goes back to ancient Africa and other parts of the world. However, according to Lewis, Rastafarians were encouraged to adopt the style from the Eurocentric Bible (e.g., Numbers 6:5).

Lewis writes that Rastafarians had numerous acres of land in Grenada that they could have used to feed the people. Instead, they chose to grow marijuana. Meanwhile, people went hungry and their neighborhoods were taken over by thieves. Furthermore, the author points out that if any society were actually run by Rastafarians, based upon what Rastafarians profess to believe, they would

thoroughly oppress non-theists, LGBT people and anyone that questioned their worldview. This should not be surprising, in light of the fact that the Bible condemns atheism, homosexuality and, in many cases, dissent and critical thinking.

One of Rastafarianism's biggest weaknesses is that it condemns rationality and objectivity, which are considered to be Eurocentric conceits. Throughout his book, Lewis refers to the book *Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior*, by Marimba Ani. Ani routinely condemns everything she deems European and romanticizes everything she deems African. Her "thinking" is typical of that found among most Afrocentrists and Rastafarians.

Lewis identifies a great deal of conceptual confusion among Rastafarians. For example, though they identify with the supposed Chosen People of the Bible that were allegedly enslaved by the Egyptians, the Bible says that God is from Egypt (e.g., Hosea 12:9 and 13:4). To serious students of the Bible, comparative religion and Egyptian history, though, this is not surprising. The Hebrews routinely "borrowed" their religious ideas from the Egyptians and other civilizations.

Rastafarians believe that the early 20th century Black nationalist Marcus Garvey prophesied that Haile Selassie would arise as a divine figure. However, Lewis demonstrates that Garvey never believed that Selassie is God. Moreover, the author writes that Garvey did not maintain that God is literally Ethiopian. Rastafarianism, it seems, is founded upon one misunderstanding after another.

It is amazing that anyone would believe that Selassie is God. Lewis shows that Selassie was just another tyrant that brought massive suffering to his people. He was eventually imprisoned and died on August 27, 1975.

Perhaps Rastafarianism's greatest achievement is its music, reggae. However, the author maintains that "Its lyrics are full of misogynist and sexist language." (p. 242). I found this to be especially disturbing. Though I have heard such language in dancehall, reggaeton and other genres of Caribbean music, I had always considered reggae to be the quintessential music of Black liberation. My all-time favorite reggae group, Steel Pulse, as far as I know, has consistently delivered positive, uplifting messages in its music.

Lewis points out that, as is the case in the Nation of Islam and other reactionary Black organizations, women are not allowed to lead Rastafarians. The author writes that there are different Rasta sects, and he discusses in some detail the sexism among the sect known as the Bobo Ashanti.

The author notes that Christianity does not make Caribbean people morally upright. He discusses the numerous instances of arguments, crime, the dehumanization of and violence against women, etc. to be found throughout the Caribbean. Similarly, the late atheist, pro-democracy activist and educator, Tai Solarin of Nigeria, used to point out that though Nigeria is one of the most religious nations in the world, it is also found to be the most corrupt on an annual basis.

Lewis makes an impressive critique of Afrocentric thought throughout the book, and his concluding chapter is the best in the book. *From Mythology to Reality: Moving Beyond Rastafari and Christianity and Black Oppression: Duppy Know Who Fe Frighten*, by Zay Dilette Green of Jamaica are two welcome additions to the literature of Black non-theists. Perhaps even

more Caribbean non-theists will arise to help awaken the potential of non-theism in the Caribbean and beyond.