

The Role Swaziland Churches Should Play in the Liberation of South Africa

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INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to discuss the role that Swaziland Churches should play in the liberation of South Africa. In order for the reader to have a clear understanding of the salient issues to be analyzed, it is important that the author explains in brief the meaning of "Swaziland Churches".

This expression refers to member churches of three existing Christian Church organizations, namely, the League of Swazi Churches, the Swaziland Conference of Churches, and the Council of Swaziland Churches. The League, which was founded in 1937, comprises African "Independent" Churches – also known as New Religious Movements – which have emerged from the so-called mainline or older churches as a result of such factors as spiritual hunger, sociopolitical inequality, and economic exploitation.

The Swaziland Conference of Churches, which was created in 1929 is mainly composed of conservative evangelical churches. Typical examples are the African Evangelical Church – formerly known as the South African General Mission (S.A.G.M.) –

the Church of the Nazarene, and the Swedish Alliance Church. The third body, namely, the Council of Swaziland Churches, comprises the so-called liberal churches such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, and the Lutheran Church. The Council was established in 1976.

It must be understood that these Swaziland Churches, which meet from time to time to affirm a growing spirit of ecumenism, have a lot in common. They are bound together since they share "the same faith, the same confession, the same baptism, and the same belief in God the Father of Jesus Christ".¹

SWAZILAND CHURCHES AND THE LIBERATION OF SOUTH AFRICA

This section of the paper will focus attention on the heavy responsibility of the Swaziland Churches in regard to the liberation of South Africa. It must be mentioned, however, that the salient issues to be discussed will be presented in a condensed form, and consequently the analysis will by no means be exhaustive.

1. Allan Boesak, "Liberation Theology in South Africa," in *African Theology En Route*, ed. Kofi Appiah – Kubi and Sergio Torres (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1979), p. 174.

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Promotion of Ethnic and National Unity

In regard to national harmony, it can be said that Swaziland is fortunate in that it is a country with one ethnic group. It goes without saying, therefore, that despite the existence of the three church organizations, there is, as already stated, some form of unity that molds Swazi Christians together. On the other hand, South Africa comprises a number of ethnic and racial groups – a situation that hampers national harmony.

It is the responsibility of the Swaziland Churches to contribute towards the liberation of South Africa by promoting ethnic and national unity, which continues to exist marginally within the Christian community. Swazi Christians can, for instance, encourage their fellow brothers and sisters in South Africa to drift away from ethnocentricity by learning to communicate in other vernaculars so that they can preach in various congregations. Moreover, another contribution towards unity could be demonstrated by genuine openness, encouragement, and desire to see more and more intermarriages among the ethnic groups. In this way, the dynamics of the liberation of South Africa, which has already started, could be facilitated.

Assertion of Personhood and Humanity

It must be realized that the explosive situation of racism in South Africa has adverse psychological effects on the lives of both the oppressors and the oppressed.

On one hand, the oppressors, whose White and superior status is sustained by institutionalized racial segregation (apartheid), enjoy so many benefits and generally pursue such an affluent life that they find it extremely difficult to accept the equality of all races. On the other hand, the Blacks have gone through so much oppression that they tend to suffer from an inferiority complex. Many do not foresee a time when they will regard themselves as equal to Whites.

Because Swaziland Churches operate in a relatively free and relaxed political atmosphere where there is no institutionalized apartheid system, they have room to contribute to the equality of all races in South Africa. They have a pressing responsibility to instill in their local members and to communicate to South African Christians and church organizations² repeated messages of freedom. The oppressed must be persuaded to affirm their God-given personhood and humanity. It is vital that they develop such a positive attitude that they are able to dispel "the awful sense of self-hatred and self-disgust which are the ghastly consequences of oppression".³

The messages of liberation from the Swaziland Churches should not contain elements of Black racism. At the same time, though, they should emphasize with unmitigated frankness the need for justice for the sake of all, who receive unjust treatment. In this way, the oppressors are bound to see their unChristian acts to the extent that they will realise that God sides with the oppressed.

2. The church bodies mentioned above refer to five categories of Christian denominations as suggested by David Bosch in his typology of churches. Bosch divides them into, first, the Afrikaans Reformed Churches; secondly, the member churches of the South African Council of Churches (S.A.C.C.) – namely, the Anglican, Congregational, Lutheran, Methodist, and Presbyterian Churches; thirdly, the Roman Catholic Church; fourthly, the conservative evangelical churches; and lastly, the African "Independent" Churches. (For further information, refer to Marjorie Hope and James Young, *The South African Churches in a Revolutionary situation* Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1981, p. 45 f.)

3. Desmond Tutu, "The Theology of Liberation in Africa," in *African Theology En Route*, ed. Kofi Appiah – Kubi and Sergio Torres. p. 167.

"The more the church identifies and pleads the case of the defenseless, the more it will be an instrument for the salvation of many. The more the church is on the side of the rich, the powerful, and the oppressors, the more it will itself fall under the judgment of God".⁴

The Place of Corporate Personality in the Struggle for Liberation

In the endeavour to contribute towards the liberation of South Africa, Swaziland Churches must fully realize that they should strongly advocate to their congregations, as well as to the Blacks, who suffer under the apartheid system, Christian freedom from the power of materialism and individualism. It must be pointed out that to attain this goal, the concept of corporate personality in which an individual is related to everyone else ought to be impressed upon the minds of the African people.

As soon as Swazi Christians have grasped the dynamics of this concept, they have the responsibility to teach and preach to their fellow Christians in South Africa its significance for today. The suffering must take note of the lessons that should be learnt from this concept.

To move towards freedom, the oppressed must be aware that they need a sense of oneness. Swaziland Churches must emphasize to all South Africans, particularly the suffering Black silent majority, the renowned admonition given by the Rev. Dr Bonganjalo Goba:

"We have been fooled into believing the saying: 'Man for himself and God for us all'. I would rather say every man for all men and God for us all".⁵

It is important, therefore, that in the

liberation struggle, a spirit of solidarity be maintained, and that a sense of social consciousness should prevail. Swazi Christians have a moral obligation to contribute to the ultimate triumph of freedom.

The Need to Contextualize Christianity

It must be remembered that in the introductory portion of this paper, mention was made of African "Independent" Churches as a component part of Swaziland Churches. It will be well at this stage to briefly assess the contribution these churches should make in the liberation of South Africa.

African "Independent" Churches have a duty to continue to make the mission churches, as well as the Universal church, realize that a relevant theology must look to, speak to, and listen to, the needs of Christians objectively. This means that while, on one hand, the positive aspects of White theology must be retained, on the other hand, Swaziland Churches should strongly encourage churches in South Africa to move in a direction of contextualizing Christianity for the benefit of Africans, who long for "a place to feel at home".⁶

In this way, there will be meaningful co-operation between Black and White Christians. Moreover, even those people, who have already met disappointment in Christian worship in its present forms, are most likely to be attracted back. The churches both in Swaziland and in South Africa will consequently be recognized jointly as authentic and powerful institutions, which can make a positive contribu-

4. David Schroeder, "The Church Representing the Kingdom," in the *Kingdom of God in a Changing World*, ed. Paul N. Kraybill (Lombard, Illinois: Mennonite World Conference, 1978), p. 53.

5. Bonganjalo Goba, "Corporate Personality: Ancient Israel and Africa," in *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa*, ed. Basil Moore (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1974), p. 69.

6. F.B. Welbourn and B.A. Ogot, *A Place to Feel at Home* (Oxford University Press), 1966.

tion towards liberation and development.

Launching Self-help Projects

It must be stated that for the oppressed people to attain freedom, both the Swaziland and South African Churches should pay attention to such matters as giving bread to the hungry, curing the sick, and freeing prisoners. David Schroeder⁷ argues, and rightly so, that in a situation where people are experiencing starvation, it is not advisable to depend on the saying, "The Lord will provide" (JAS.2:14-17).

The Swaziland Churches, which have access to resourceful agricultural facilities, must, in collaboration with their South African counterparts, be involved in the praxis of liberation.

Likewise, Pierre Bigo, S.J., deems it essential to offer the following message:

"To give bread means to defeat hunger in the world, an impossibility without organizing the economic community that includes rich people and poor people – something that implies that everybody must become conscious of and conscientious about the dimensions and urgency of world hunger. To care for the sick means to set up public health organizations and keep working to improve them. To free prisoners from their chains means to reform the penal system and to help the delinquent to regain their place in society."⁸

These need not be large-scale projects. The suggested programme of action merely encourages Swaziland Churches to launch self-help projects that should serve as models for the people of South Africa to emulate.

The need to Challenge the Current Lifestyle of the Clergy

As already mentioned above, one of the conditions for the attainment of liberation in South Africa is the maintenance of a spirit of solidarity. Contrary to this viewpoint, it is paining at heart to constantly observe situations whereby the clergy stand aloof because they regard themselves as belonging to a higher social class, as compared with their congregations that they regard as members of a lower class.

The clergy in Swaziland Churches must re-examine their role in order to evaluate the extent to which they need to change their current life-style. Thereafter they should set a good example to clergy in South Africa, who have turned out to be ivory towers and to live in ecclesiastical cocoons. It is important to realize that in order to be fully committed to the creation of a free society, it is imperative that a genuine spirit of oneness should be maintained.

It is vital too that there be change with regard to ways and means of earning a living. According to Gustavo Gutierrez,⁹ the time has come for the clergy in Latin America to seek new ways to support themselves. He goes so far as to suggest that it would even be well for them to secure secular jobs at least on an experimental basis.

The clergy in Swaziland Churches are increasingly becoming involved in the kingdom's political affairs. Quite a number of them, for instance, have been, and still are, members of the House of Assembly and Senate in Swaziland's parliament. It is the author's observation, therefore, that,

7. David Schroeder, "The Church Representing the Kingdom," in *The Kingdom of God in a Changing World*, ed. Paul N. Kraybill, p. 51.

8. Pierre Bigo, *The Church and Third World Revolution* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1977), p. 131 – 132.

9. Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1973), p. 118.

as in Latin America, the Swazi clergy, while continuing to carry out their ecclesiastical responsibilities – with greater participation of lay people in pastoral decisions – is steadily drifting away from dependence for their salaries on church funds.

The clergy in South Africa should begin to emulate this example by moving in a direction of financial self-support. In this way, finances collected by churches could be invested in programmes aimed at conscientizing the oppressed majority, which is certainly in great need of “education for critical consciousness”.¹⁰

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, the author has presented a discussion on the responsibility Swaziland Churches have in regard to the liberation of South Africa.

A number of vital issues have been analyzed from political, economic, socio-cultural, and religious perspectives. It is hoped that although the main points in the paper have not been discussed extensively, they have nevertheless thrown some light on the complex dynamics of the liberation struggle.

10. Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (Herder and Herder, 1972).

Further References

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2. Becken, Hans – Jurgen, ed. *Relevant Theology for Africa*. Durban : Lutheran Publishing House, 1973.
3. Davies, J.G. *Christians, Politics and Violent Revolution*. London : SCM Press Ltd., 1976.
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6. Segundo, Juan Luis. *Liberation of Theology*. Dublin : Gill and Macmillan, 1977.
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