BLACK THEOLOGY VERSUS THE SOCIAL MORALITY OF SETTLER COLONIALISM: HERMENEUTICAL REFLECTIONS ON LUKE 1 AND 2

REV. ITUMELENG MOSALA

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to address again the question of Luke's audience as it is reflected in the infancy narratives. In order to do so with some measure of intellectual honesty it is necessary to make clear the questions which I wish to use to interrogate these narratives. These are: What social class assumptions underlie Luke 1 and 2? What is the social class market that these narratives are intended for? What social class reasons or solutions frame the discursive practice that Luke undertakes in these texts? In the context of an Apartheid political economy where black people are fashioning for themselves a black theological weapon of struggle for their liberation, what is the social, political, ideological, and spiritual effects of the Luke 1 and 2 discourse?

These questions are influenced by a materialist approach to exegesis and hermeneutics. They emerge out of a perspective that pre-supposes a methodological priority of material conditions over ideological conditions. That perspective is often articulated in the following terse, albeit frequently misleading way: "The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life process in general. It is not people's consciousness that determines their being, but their social being that determines their consciousness" (Ross Gandy, 1979: 119). Our starting point, therefore in addressing the questions we posed above, is the material conditions of production of the Luke 1 and 2 discourse.

2. THE MATERIAL CONDITIONS OF LUKE 1 AND 2

The social-historial context of Luke 1 and 2 is no doubt the colonial occupation of Palestine by Rome which is characterized by the articulation of two tributary modes of production. The Palestinean tributary mode of production of the first century A.D. was overdetermined by the imperial tributary mode of production of the Roman colonial power. It is necessary to reconstruct however briefly these two tributary social formations and their relationship to each other in order to see how the social history of that world at that time is constituted ideologically through the discursive practice of the Luke 1

and 2 discourse.

2.1. THE MODE OF PRODUCTION

By the mode of production we mean an articulated combination of the forces and relations of production. Forces of production refer to the means of production, e.g., land, cattle, trees, rivers, tools, machines, etc., plus human labour, the latter taking different forms and kinds of organization in different historical epochs and geographical areas. As Ross Gandy puts it:

> "The productive forces of an epoch are the raw materials, tools, techniques, work relations and co-operation people use to produce the things they need. In primitive epochs we find the hoe, the spear, the bone needle, the grinding stone, the hunting party, common tillage, and co-operative labor; in feudal times, the mill, the plow, the loom, the axe, the craft tool, the workshop, the strip field, and home industry; under capitalism, the steam mill, the power loom, the locomotive, cross breeding, assembly lines, and factory organization" (Gandy, 1979: 125).

The relations of production refer to the places occupied by people in the process of production. These relations are structured by the nature of social divisions of labour in the society. Whether or not these are classes in a society depends on the form and level of development of this division of labour. The specialization that evolves out of the division of labour and the semi-permanent assignment of people to certain relationships to the means of production and their mobilization in productive activities is a key condition of class configurations in society.

The combination of these relations with the forces of production constitutes the mode of production which is the material basis of social formations. Modes of production are differentiated from one another by the means by which surplus social products are appropriated from direct producers in the society.

2.1.1 The Forces of Production of First Century Palestine

The fundamental means of production in Palestine had been, since antiquity and was during the first century A.D. the **land** and especially the **arable land**. de Ste. Croix makes the point succinctly that "Wealth in the Greek world, in the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic periods, as in the Roman Empire throughout its history, was always essentially wealth in land, upon which conducted the cultivation of cereals . . . and of other agricultural products, especially those of the olive and vine and also the pasturing of cattle, sheep and horses" (1981: 120).

Next to the land the other key means of production in the Palestine of the first century A.D. seems to have been the lakes and seas and probably rivers of that country. With respect to the lakes, Joseph Klausner writes:

> "The sea of Galilee contained all manner of fish, including certain very choice varieties . . . So plentiful were the fish that they were salted and sold in Palestine and abroad; this accounts for the fact that a town on the lakeshore which apparently bore the Hebrew name Migdal . . . was the Greek called by the name 'Tarichaea' from the word Taplxos salted fish. The newly built Tiberias became the fishing centre and fish market of Galilee" (1925: 176).

Minerals such as sat, bitumen, phosphorus and tar were sometimes found in such places as the Dead Sea (Klausner 1925: 176; Cf. Michel Clevenot, 1985: 43). However, first century Palestine seems not to have witnessed any significant development of the forces of production. Technological progress is not evident during this time. The setting of motion of the forces of production through the tilling of arable land seems to have followed ancient ways of labour organization. Peasant family labour appears, as in the olden times in the absence of slave labour, to have constituted the basic economic production unit in agriculture and in the fishing industry.

2.1.2 The Relation of Production of First Century Palestine

The specific mode of articulation of the means of production (e.g., land, lakes with fish, possible crafts industries) with the available human labour and the forms that the latter may take is a function of the existing social division of labour and its consequent ownership and productive relations. In Palestine in the first century A.D. there existed the principal contradictions between the Roman colonial state and the dependent colonized Palestinean social formation. By virtue of its colonial domination Rome extracted a surplus from the population of Palestine through a comprador Palestinean royalty, nobility and priesthood. This contradiction between Rome and Palestine, however, was overdetermined by an internal social division of labour out of which issued a tributary class formation. The social relations of this tributary mode of production resolve themselves into a political and ideologically powerful class of landowners (made up of contending fractions of Sedducees, Pharisees, priests and scribes) which was responsible to the Roman procurator based in the province, on the one hand. This class was, on the other hand, in contradiction with an ideologically powerless peasant class made up of various strata of people from artisans, apprentices, small property holders, tenant farmers to casual labourers, permanently unemployed people, bandits, petty criminals, prostitutes and beggars.

The surplus which was extracted from the peasants in agriculture

and other industries through land taxes, animal taxes, tithes, etc., functioned to finance the resident alien armies, the local ruling classes, and the Roman colonial state. There seems no indication that the surplus was ever invested in productive activities that could help raise the capital needed for developing the forces of production and consequently increasing productivity for the purpose of meeting the overall human needs. The Roman colonial tributary social formation was a dead end.

External trade tended to focus on luxury items such as oil and wine. Internal trade assumed the form of internal regional barter:

> "The Palestinean towns exchanged their agricultural produce. Sharon in Judea sold its wines and bought bread. Jericho and the Jordan Valley sold their famous fruits for bread and wine. The Judean Shefela had a superabundance of bread and oil, and Galilee of corn and vegetables. Palestine also exported its surplus of oil, wine, wheat and fruit, while it imported a considerable number of commodities" (Klausner 1925: 186; See also, F. Belo 1981: 62ff; J. Jeremias 1969 31ff).

First Century Palestine was a complex colonial social formation with a complex class structure. This does not mean that the class forces of this social structure cannot be delineated with reasonable precision. It simply means that the forms of surplus extraction that existed in this society were not confined to the relations represented by the principal contradiction. There were, for instance, historically accrued traditional Palestinean ideological mechanisms of surplus extractions which the Romans did not tamper with but certainly benefited from their use on the peasants of Palestine. Michel Clevenot provides a terse characterization of the relations of production of the social formation which formed the material conditions of production of the Gospel of Luke. He writes:

> "In short, First Century Palestine was a class-structured society at every level. At the economic level the masses were fiercely exploited by the privileged. In politics the priestly class, supported by the great landowners, held the mechanism of the state in their hands. Ideologically the ruling class imposed its ideology (essentially the system of purity), which was passed on in diverse ways by the groups, sects, and parties" (1985: 50).

3. IDEOLOGICAL CONDITIONS OF LUKE 1 AND 2

What then is the nature of the movement from history as we have described it above to a reconstitution of that history in a gospel discourse? In examining Luke's ideological production of the historical situation of First Century Palestine we shall avoid the empiricist problematic that plagues most biblical historical critics (see

for instance Richard Cassidy, 1978: 9ff). We shall rather take the view that "the notion of a direct, spontaneous relation between text and history ... belongs to a naive empiricism which is to be discarded" (T. Eagleton, 1976: 70). Equally, the idea of a possible neat division between the ideological, which is hard to trap with scientific tools, and the historical, which is accessible through formal quasi-scientific methods, is regarded here as epistemologically doubtful. Following Eagleton we shall assume that:

> "History, ... certainly, 'enters' the text, not least the 'historical' text; but it enters it precisely **as ideology**, as a presence determined and distorted by its measurable absences. This is not to say that real history is present in the text but in disguised form so that the task of the critic is then to wrench the mask off its face. It is rather that history is present in the text in the form of a double-absence. The text takes as its object, not the real, but certain significations by which the real lives itself – significations which are themselves the product of its partial abolition;" However, "History ... is the ultimate signifier of literature, as it is the ultimate signified. For what else in the end could be the source and object of signifying practices but the real social formation which provides its material context?" (T. Eagleton, 1976: 72).

Luke's gospel has been described variously as universalist, concerned about the poor and outcasts, and as a social gospel. The reason for such descriptions lies in the subject matter of this gospel which covers these areas of social life more extensively than the other gospels. To my knowledge, however, no attempt has been made to determine more precisely what the social class perspective from which Luke addresses these issues is and how it determines the nature of the historical in Luke. Such a process of inquiry would lead not only to the class position of Luke but also to the class and ideological interests that frame Luke's discursive practice.

A recent major study on Luke's social and political description of Jesus argues that the picture of Jesus that Luke draws is one of someone who was dangerous to the Roman Empire (R. Cassidy, 1978: 77ff). This study argues that Luke's Jesus "espouses a concern for persons and groups from all social levels and backgrounds, but especially for the poor and the sick, for women and Gentiles" (*Ibid.*). What this study does not do is to scrutinize the class character of a position that portrays Jesus in this way. The study illustrates Luke's description of Jesus as being concerned for groups and persons of all levels by drawing attention especially to his attitude "to the use of material possessions" (*Ibid.*). According to Cassidy "Luke indicates that Jesus adopted an extremely strong position against surplus possessions. Jesus himself lived simply and sparingly and he

praised others like Zaccheus when they took steps to do likewise" (*Ibid.*, .78). It is difficult not to sense in Cassidy's argument hermeneutical assumptions that derive from contemporary liberal humanist ideology. We will argue later that a different set of hermeneutical assumptions that derive from not only a different ideology but also a different cultural and political agenda detects a vastly different ideological manoeuvre on the part of Luke.

Robert J. Karris, by contrast to Cassidy, states more categorically that the "poor and rich" constitutes what he calls "**the lukan Sitz im Leben**". According to Karris "Luke's community clearly had both rich and poor members. Luke is primarily taken up with the rich members, their concerns, and the problems which they pose for the community. Their concerns . . . revolve around the question: Do our possessions prevent us from being genuine Christians?" (in Talbert, (ed.), 1978: 124). Karris is undoubtedly correct in his focus on the rich as Luke's primary preoccupation. What Karris does not do is to draw the hermeneutical implications of Luke's discursive employment of the story of Jesus to address a problem that fundamentally arises out of and concerns a community of rich and powerful people. What happens to Jesus when he is ideologically co-opted into the examine the nature of its 'problems' in the light of its 'solutions' (T. Eagleton, 1976: 88), in order to be able to transcend the ideological limitations of the text. By employing the ideological concerns and aspirations of the oppressed and exploited black people of South Africa as a hermeneutical structuring pole we hope to cause the text of Luke 1 and 2 to yield greater secrets than it has so far done as a result of its encounter with white western ideologies that do not differ markedly from the text's own ideology. For as Eagleton so cogently argues:

> "It is not, in other words, simply by virtue of ideology being forced up against the wall of history by the literary text that it is terrorized into handing over its secrets. Its contradictions may be forced from it by its historically determined encounter with another ideology, or ideological sub-ensemble; indeed it is in such historical conjunctures that the moment of genesis of much literature is to be found" (1976: 96).

For Wolgang Stegemann "the gospel of Luke is a sustained call for repetence - and it is addressed to Christians of wealth and repute" (In Willy Schottroff and Wolgang Stegemann, 1984: 165). It is absolutely clear to Stegemann that Luke tries to turn into a virtue for the rich and powerful what is a necessity for the poor and powerless majority of the Palestinean people, namely their poverty and homelessness. The experience of starvation, sickness, imprisonment, homelessness, separation from family and friends and persecution from authorities and indeed of being **a single mother** was an inescapable necessity

for the majority of people in first century Palestine. Luke in his gospel turns it into an ethical choice with which the rich and powerful men who make up his audience are faced. The ideological effects of this find of discursive practice which Luke is engaged in are hinted at by Wolgang Stegemann when he writes:

> "What would it mean for us theologically if the historical Jesus movement had, in fact, drawn its recruits from among the lowly? What if the followers of Jesus, like their master, were from the poor and hungry, not as the result of renunciation of possessions but because in fact they possessed nothing? What if the desired goal of their criticism of the rich was that in the kingdom of God present relationships would be reversed... What this kind of radicality, which has nothing to lose but much to gain, still win our sympathy?" (1985: 166).

Luke's ideological production of the story of Jesus within the historical context of First Century Palestine has made available a gospel that is acceptable to the rich and poor of Luke's community but in which the struggles and contradictions of the lives of the poor and exploited are present by their absence. By turning the experiences of the poor into the moral virtues of the rich, Luke has effectively eliminated the poor from his gospel.

White western bourgeois male exegesis, however, seems incapable of penetrating the ideological practices of Luke in order to reach to the radical story of Jesus and his followers which Luke produces in such a way that it is "handleable" by the rich and the powerful.

In a frenzied attempt to defend the ruling class interests of Luke as revolutionary – of course "responsibly revolutionary" – recent studies of political issues in Luke have colluded with the ideological interests of the texts at the expense of the oppressed and exploited people of First Century Palestine as well as their contemporary world descendants (see for instance R. Cassidy and D. Scharper (eds.) *Political Issues*, 1983: passim; J.M. Ford, *My Enemy*, 1984). The issue, therefore, is not that these scholars misunderstand Luke. They do not. Rather they collude with Luke. In social class terms this is perfectly understandable even though critically indefensible (see Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 1981).

Black theology attempts to transcend the ideological limits that Luke imposes, through his particular production of the Jesus story, by making the history, culture and struggle of the black people a hermeneutical starting point. One of the reasons why black theology takes this position is that it holds that:

> "The idea that there are 'non-political' forms of criticism is simply a myth which furthers certain political uses of literature all more

effectively. The difference between a 'political' and 'non-political' criticism is just the difference between the prime minister and the monarch: the latter furthers certain political ends by pretending not to, while the former makes no bones about it" (Eagleton, 1983: 209).

Even more importantly, black theology's ideological suspicion in its approach to texts stems from the conviction that:

> "Discourses, sign-symptoms and signifying practices of all kinds, from film and television to fiction and the languages of natural science, produce effects, shape forms of consciousness and unconsciousness, which are closely related to the maintenance or transformations of our existing systems of power. They are thus closely related to what it means to be a person. Indeed 'ideology' can be taken to indicate no more than this connection – the link or nexus befween discourses and power" (Eagleton, 1983: 210).

Thus in order to situate properly within the wider nexus of power relations what Luke, through the stories of chapter 1 and 2 of the gospel, defines as the meaning of "being a person" black theology must retreat hermeneutically to what black history, black culture and the black struggle defines as the meaning of "being a person".

Prior to the advent of white "civilization" in South Africa a person was a person in relation to other persons. An egalitarian social system in which the means of life production and reproduction were communally owned defined the nature of the dominant morality.

This system of egalitarian social equality was destroyed and replaced by a capitalist civilization whose defining characteristic is private property ownership and the commodification of all aspects of life. The modern form of this civilization is aptly described by Eagleton when he writes:

> "Whereas capitalism originally pulled material production away from the spheres in which meanings are produced – the condition of the classical public sphere – it has now returned to reorganize the very production of meanings according to the logic of the commodity" (1984: 121).

In order to enable this process of commodification to take place black culture and history were beseiged not only by the subjection of black people to exploitation as cheap labour-power, as providers of raw materials and easy markets, but also by the ruthless uprooting of their languages and customs.

Black theology's starting point, therefore, is an economically,

politically, culturally and morally dispossessed people. It carries with it the morality and social assumptions of a people who have suffered the hypocrisy of a supposedly superior civilization. Black people's liberation as the starting point, the content of the goal of black theology is to be struggled for from the totalizing hold of modern capitalism. With Marlene Dixon, black theology begins from an awareness that:

> "Capital leaves not the tiniest corner of society free of its domination. A simple juridical review of marriage, divorce, custody, bastardy, and welfare laws, and of the laws related to sexuality, prostitution, and moral life in general, amply demonstrates capital's direct concern with marriage, the family, children, sexuality, and so-called 'moral'. The supervision by the state of the moral life of the working class is directly related to the role of that class in commodity production, including the production of labor power itself, without which the entire capitalist society would cease to exist" (1983: 15).

Thus armed with this kind of experience of oppression and of stuggle against it, and like the Caribbeans Rastas whose appropriation of the Bible is necessarily selective and partisan, black people of South Africa are "mindful of the long and bitter struggles master and slave fought across its (Bible) pages" (Paul Gilroy, in *CCCS* 1982: 295). The question, therefore, of whose side in the political and moral struggle inscribed in the pages of Luke 1 and 2 Luke the writer takes, is of pivotal importance to Black Theology.

For Black Theology the juxtaposition of the story of the birth of John the Baptist with the birth of Jesus is of far-reaching ideological implication. This arrangement is an ideological solution to a fundamental politico-moral problematic that faced Luke's ideological section of the comprador Jewish ruling class. We have seen in our analysis of the social structure of colonized Palestine that the Roman Empire ruled Palestine by proxy of an indigenous comprador class consisting among others of the priestly sector. It is for this reason that Luke, in his attempt to depict Jesus as not being fundamentally in antithetical relation to the ruling class, produces a discursive practice whose function is to produce the ideological legitimation by the priestly class of the birth and subsequent mission of Jesus. This is not to imply that there were no members of the priestly sector who were ideologically and politically opposed to both the Roman and Palestinean tributary oppression of the nation. It is significant, however, that this class plays no part in the rest of Luke's work outside the birth narratives. Our opinion, therefore, is that the story of Mary's visitation to Zachariah and Elizabeth is intended to deal with the embarrassing social class origins and position of Mary. Luke's attempt to sell the story of Jesus to the Jewish priestly groups must

have floundered on the rocks of Jesus' family background which was not socially acceptable. Raymond E. Brown hits the nail on the head even though he does now draw the implications of this when he writes:

> "The marriage situation envisaged in Matthew and (seemingly) in Luke where Mary has conceived or will conceive before living with Joseph implies that Jesus was born at a **noticeably** early period after his parents came to live together. This could have been 'a historical factor known to Jesus' followers and opponents... The Jewish opponents of Christianity eventually accused Jesus of being illegitimate ... but Christians rejected any implication of sin in Jesus' origins ..." (1978: 134).

As the custodians and administrators of what Fernando Belo has called the "symbolic order" – comprising the pollution and debt systems the priestly class would have questioned the messiahship of Jesus on specifically "priestly-morality-class grounds". It is part of the brilliance of Luke as a signifying practician to address this aspect of the opposition to Jesus in his writing. Only he must necessarily do it from the perspective of what **he** regards, in class terms, as significant.

We are not, therefore, imputing any conspiratorial motives on the part of Luke. Rather we are recognizing that "Like private property, the literary test ... appears as a 'Natural' object, typically denying the determinants of its productive process. The function of criticism is to refuse the spontaneous presence of work – to deny that 'naturalness' in order to make its real determinants appear." (T. Eagleton, 1976: 101).

Mary, probably a single mother from the ghettos of colonized Galilee needs the moral approval of the priestly sector of the ruling class which is the audience of Luke's gospel. How can the saviour of the world emanate from the ghettos of Cross Road and KTC in Cape Town rather than the royal white suburbia of Johannesburg? How can the messiah emerge out of urban human dumping ground of Oakland rather than from the serenity of Marin Country? He could not sell that kind of messiah to his ruling class audience. Luke's ruling class perspectives inscribe themselves even in his choice of places. As Zann Redalie so perceptively observed:

> "But to pay attention to locality, land, squares, places is to be faithful to the way Luke writes his story. For him the writing of the Gospel occurs within a geography that goes 'towards Jerusalem' in his Gospel and 'from Jerusalem to Rome' in Acts. The story he tells takes shape within a definite route in the heart of the Greco-Roman world" (1975: 103).

In the Gospel, where he is dealing more directly with the Jewish colonial comprador ruling class, Judea and especially Jerusalem is the place from which legitimation is to be drawn from by Luke. The test of the gospel of Luke moves dialectically from talking about the oppressed and exploited to addressing the concerns of the local ruling class and how they might receive the message and ministry of Jesus without totally contradicting their class position. What is required of them is that they should use their possessions to support the movement. The movement of Mary from Galilee to Judea functions within the same discursive framework.

Luke, however, is not a mere distorter of facts or traditions; he is a shrewd ideologist, who writes for his class in the sense of Antonio Gramsci's "organic intellectuals" (*Prison Notebooks*. 1971: 5ff), but is nevertheless true to his facts. The only difference is that the presence of facts in his text is constituted at the same time by a certain imcompleteness. Luke's fidelity to history is represented in the birth narratives by his inclusion of nationalistic revolutionary hymns which reflect the social revolutionary mood of the period he is describing (Luke 1: 46-56: 1: 67-79). J.M. Ford aptly summarises this situation when she writes:

> "Our examination of the infancy narratives has shown that the war angel, Gabriel, appeared to Zachariah and Mary. John the Baptist was to work in the spirit and power of the zealous prophet Elijah. The names Jesus (Joshua), John, and Simeon are names found among Jewish freedom fighters. The annunciation to Mary and the Magnificat have political and military overtones. The words of Elizabeth and Mary echo the beatitude pronounced over Jael and Judith. The shepherd verses have impirical overtones, and a heavenly army appears to them . . ."

And then in a revealingly approving manner Ford continues:

> "From now on in his Gospel, Luke will take almost every opportunity offered him to show that Jesus, contrary to all expectations as seen in the infancy narratives, is a preacher with an urgent message to his generation and to the generations to come, the powerful message of non-violent resistance and, more strikingly, loving one's enemy in word and deed" (1984: 36).

The way in which the birth narratives have functioned in the churches of western Christianity, including those that are geographically situated in the Third World, is an eloquent witness to the success of Luke in his ideological suppression of the social revolutionary class origins of Mary, the mother of Jesus. She has been appropriated theologically more as the priestly "First Lady" than as a starting point of a revolutionary movement to overthrow the

dominant oppressive structures of church and society. The hope that Mary might have inspired in the hearts of millions of single mothers under conditions of modern monopolcy capitalism was dashed first by Luke in his gospel. That hope only lingers on in Luke's gospel by its effective absence. It remains for the questions of contemporary single mothers, given discursive articulation by a militant black theology of liberation, to reclaim the gospel's histories, cultures and moralities of the oppressed.

It is not only the priestly apology that Luke needed to integrate into the otherwise embarrassing moral background of Jesus, at least from the point of view of the colonial ruling class. He also needed to temper with the class background of Jesus itself. In other words, Luke did not only have to address the problem of the moral circumstances of Jesus' birth, he also had to specifically face the problematic – for his ruling class audience – of Jesus' class origins.

Again we have to get to this problem by reading the text backwards. In this we concur with Eagleton that:

> "It is criticism's task to demonstrate how the text is thus 'hollowed' by its relation to ideology – how, in putting that ideology to work, it is driven up against those gaps and limits which are the products of ideology's relation to history. An ideology exists because there are certain things which must not be spoken of. In so putting ideology to work the text begins to illuminate discourse. And in so doing it helps to 'liberate' us from the ideology of which that discourse is a product" (1976: 90).

In the annunciation of Jesus' birth Luke puts ideology to work in a way that successfully establishes the absences which are the foundation of his discourses. The relevant verses in the text are 1:27 "He had a message for a girl promised in marriage to a man named Joseph, **who was a descendant of King David. The girl's name was Mary**"; 1:32f. "He will be great and will be called the son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him **a king, as his ancestor David was, and he will be the king of descendants of Jacob forever, his kingdom will never end**"; 1:34. "Mary said to the angel, 'I am a virgin. How, then, can this be?'."

The problem underlying this part of Luke's discourse is clearly hinted at in verse 34 where the writer makes Mary protest that she is a virgin and that the angel's story does not make sense. Luke had tried to anticipate this contradiction by beginning the annunciation with an explanation that the "girl was promised in marriage to a man named Jospeh". It is quite clear, however, that Luke knew the problem was not really solved since the bounds of historical credulity could not have been stretched beyond asserting a betrothal between Mary and Joseph. As an ideological creation, Joseph could not be made to

serve the function of a biological father because that would be moving beyond ideology to history. The real function of Joesph in this part of the text is to help invoke a royal connection for Jesus. And since the historical context of his story is the national colonization of the Jews, Luke appropriately invokes the Davidic royal connection.

Raymond E. Brown in a perceptive article draws attention to the fact that this angelic pronouncement in Luke "clearly echoes the promises of Nathan to David (2 Sam. 7: 8-16), the promise that came to serve as the foundation of messianic expectation" (1978: 132). The Davidic connection, therefore, plays a double role in this story. On the one hand, given the national oppression by the Romans, the return of the Davidic kingship through the birth of Jesus could be intended to herald the national liberation which the David that Robert Coote calls "the early David" brought for ancient Israel. Coote writes, in relation to a similar use of David in the C-stage, or third edition of the book of Amos, that:

> "The reference is to the early David, the folk hero, the protector of the disenfranchised, the David of the byways and caves of the Judean hill country, sprung from the country town of Bethlehem, the ruler who knew his subordination to Yahweh, and who delayed the building of the temple that would serve in folk memory as the functional symbl of despotic royal power" (1981: 124).

On the other hand, there is the David who was an accomplice in the political murders of the nearly monarchy, who used his royal power against Uriah in an act of adultery with Uriah's wife, who deprived a poor man of his small possession in order to feed his royal visitors, who rationalized his economy by attempting to impose a census – that instrument of political and economic exploitation (See 2 Samuel: 1. J. Mosala, 1980: Chapters 4-6).

Even more importantly for our present purposes there is the David who reinterpreted, through his royal ideologists, the Yahwist faith into a political ideology that served as a glue for keeping the interests of the monarchic ruling class together (2 Sam. 7: 8-16). Walter Brueggemann, in an article that seeks to appreciate the covenant traditions of the Bible sociologically has demonstrated beyond doubt that the Davidic covenant traditions have their **sitz im leben** "among the established and secure" members of society (1983: 308).

Given the fact, therefore, that Luke's audience is undoubtedly the dominant groups of first century Palestine – even though the subject matter is the conditions and struggles of the poor – there seems no doubt that Luke's invocation of the Davidic royal connection was meant to suppress the unacceptable low class origins of Jesus.

From the point of the oppressed and exploited people of the world today, Luke's ideological co-optation of Jesus in the interests of the ruling class is an act of political war against the liberation struggle. Black people, and other oppressed groups, recognise in Luke's discursive practice a social class struggle in which Luke has taken a definite side. In their appropriation of the Lukan discourse black people raise their own class sights beyond what Luke wants to permit them, and they made, through their own struggle, a hermeneutical connection with the struggles of the poor that Luke compromise so much for his own purposes.

The limitations of space in this paper does not allow us to explore the racial hermeneutical significance of the part of the text which states: "he will be the king of the descendants of Jacob forever" (1: 33). Suffice it to adapt Norman Gottwald's conclusion of a study of Jewish statehood and social order in the second century B.C.E. for our purpose here: "though we strive not to distort the record of the past, how we assess (the social, political, economic and ideological dynamics and practices of first century Palestine) will be greatly influenced by our own class interests and religious affiliations, as will our views of international politics today, including the claims and policies of Israeli Zionism and Palestinean and Arab nationalism" (1985: 456).

As for black theology and its biblical hermeneutics of liberation it remains for us, after our study of Luke's birth narratives, to confirm the conclusions that Anthony Mansueto draws in his proposal of a new exegesis. He writes:

> "Together the results of a materialist history and of historical criticism allow us to read scripture in the light of the real struggles of those who forged the tradition: to reappropriate the real, objective significance of these books which have weighed so heavily in our cultural heritage). The results of such a reading which has only begun to take shape (Chaney: oral presentation, Gottwald, 1979) suggest that those who have found an affinity between our present struggles for national liberation and an end to exploitation, domination, and mystification of all kinds, and the struggles which gave birth to the Jewish and Christian traditions have not erred. We speak with justice when we say that the same God who delivered Israel from Pharoh, and struck Midian at the rock of Oreb, has even now stretched out his right hand over the battlefields of the revolution from Kronstadt to Yenan, and from Mozambique to Morazon" (1983: 40).

Or as the present writer likes to say, black oppressed and exploited people must liberate the gospel so that the gospel may liberate them. An enslaved gospel enslaves, a liberated gospel liberates.

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