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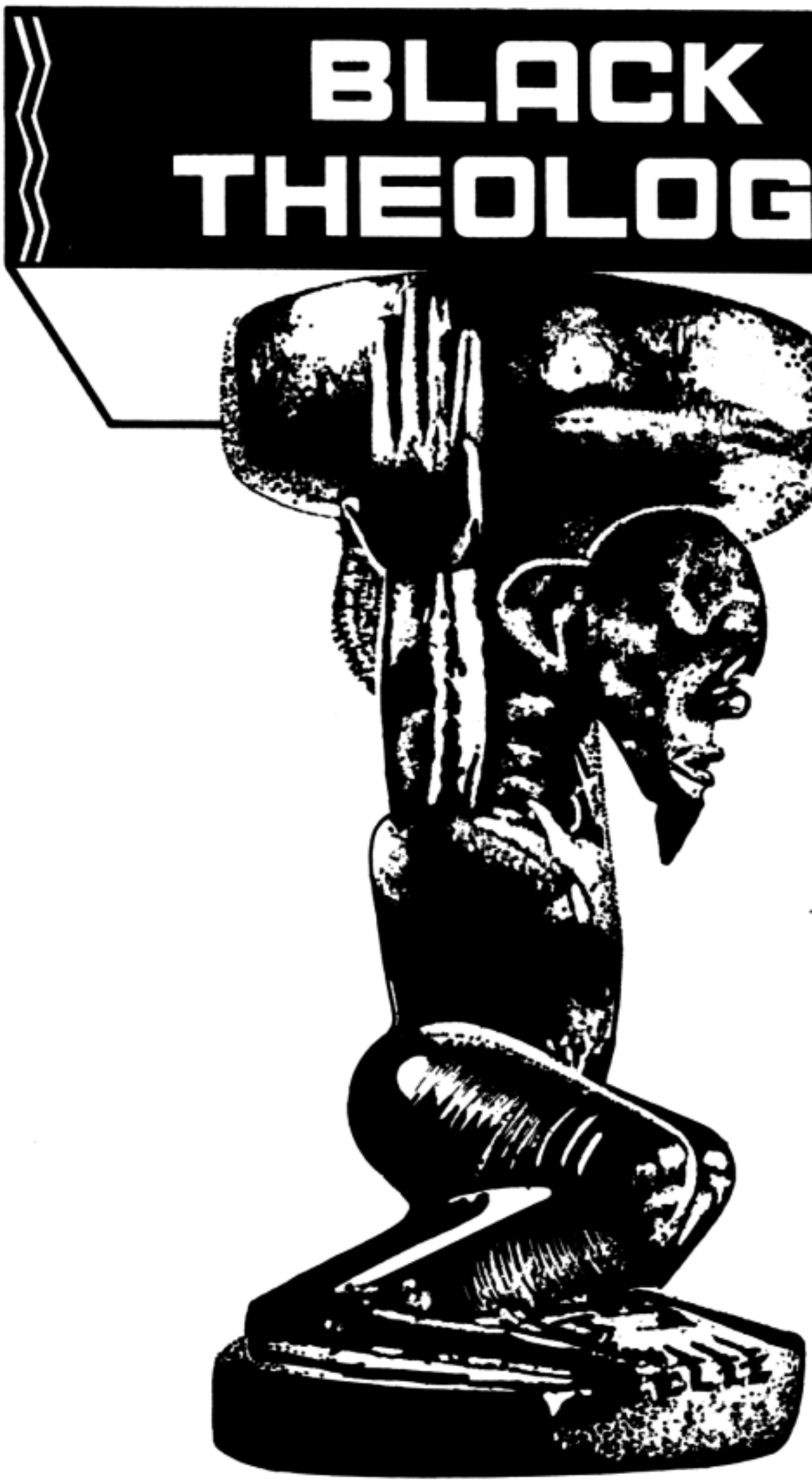

SPECIAL ISSUE: DEDICATED TO THE REVEREND DR. SIMON T. GQUBULE, LONG TIME THEOLOGICAL TEACHER, OCCASION OF HIS 60TH BIRTHDAY. DR. GQUBULE IS CURRENTLY UNDER GOVERNMENT BANNING RESTRICTIONS.

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JOURNAL OF BLACK THEOLOGY IN SOUTH AFRICA

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EDITORIAL

The Church in South Africa is by definition a Black and oppressed Church. This is so because in the churches comprising both the African Independent Churches and the South African Council of Churches, Blacks constitute the majority of their membership. For even in the so-called English-speaking churches, such as the Anglicans, Methodists, Roman Catholics, etc, Blacks make up 80% of the membership.

Regrettably, however, the Church in its theological reflection has never fully appropriated the fact that it is the church of the oppressed and dominated masses. Hence theological reflection has been and continues to be done by middle-class theologians and priests in the abstract and without due regard to the concrete experiences of the suffering by the Black masses who make up the Church. Not surprisingly, the theology of the Church – done by the powerful and comfortably situated theologians and "church leaders", as the Kairos Document rightly pointed out – is a theology which wittingly or unwittingly serves the political interests of the status quo of oppression. It is a "colonial theology" which has successfully distorted and married the gospel of Jesus Christ to the socio-political and economic interests of the White colonizers who, for more than three hundred years, continue to lord it over the Black Christians.

Cognisant of the fact that the Church and its colonial theology will never serve the interests of the oppressed because religion is misused as a pacifying opium for the Black masses who bear the brunt of racial injustice and oppression, the Black Theology Project sponsored a conference on the theme: "The Black Church", at the Wilgerspruit Fellowship Centre, on September 25-27, 1987. The objective was to provide a forum where Black Christians would dialogue and share ideas with one another as they together wrestled with the questions such as: What is the Black Church and who constitute it? What are the characteristics of the Black Church? What theology ought it to promote, if the Church is to be an effective instrument in the struggle for liberation?

It is, therefore, with deep satisfaction that we publish in this volume the fruits of that conference. We invite our readers, especially in South Africa, to reflect deeply on the issues that the authors of the articles raise. It is important for us to have a sense of where we come from and what kind of theology we operated with, if we are to appreciate the dilemmas that face the Black Church, which have thrown Black Christians into a state of near paralysis. Also, it is necessary for us to take stock of what options and theological alternatives we have if we are to help the Church and Christians to be on the cutting-edge of social transformation. We have started a process of self-criticism and evaluation and we invite you to be part of it.

Finally, the editorial board has felt that a fitting token of appreciation should be given to the Reverend Dr Simon Gqubule on the occasion of his turning 60 years old. Dr Gqubule has been for more than twenty years a theological educator at Wesley Theological Seminary (a constituent member of the Federal Theological

Seminary). His teaching and ministry have touched and moulded many young ministers of religion. We, as the Black Church, shall be eternally grateful for his contribution. It is with a sense of deep appreciation and admiration that we dedicate this volume to this great son of Africa.

It is even more fitting that this tribute should be made at this time because as we go to press, news has just reached us that the South African government has imposed a banning order on Dr Gqubule which restricts his activities. This of course is the context in which Dr Gqubule and other pioneers of black theology have done their theology over many years – that is, a situation of serious repression and of struggle against it.

Towards a Black Church: A Historical Investigation of the African Independent Churches as a Model

Rev. J M Lamola*

INTRODUCTION:

A desire to have an African Church independent of the white man and expressing African cultural genius, dignity and self-reliance is as old as the period of the conversion of first Africans to christianity. We live in a period when this desire has been realised in the form of a mass movement of African Independent Churches (AIC's) which is sweeping the entire African continent, and is most expressive and visible in South Africa.

The emergence and existence of AIC's represent an attempt, and the only one thus far in South African Church history, at the establishment of a Black Church. The AIC movement is a symbol of African religious boldness and novel theological creativity, a step towards the construction of an authentic Black religion for Africa of the twentieth century.

Challenges Facing AIC's

The academic misrepresentation of the AIC's by Western Missionary researchers and some theologians from the Black community has distracted Black Theology from taking these Churches seriously as a possible model of a Black People's Church. On the other hand the latent AIC's themselves are undergoing a crucial identity crisis. Many of them are operating in direct contradiction to the very reasons and conceptual modalities their pioneers had founded them on. This paper will introduce some of this conceptual modalities, and further demonstrate how the AIC's are a victim of the developments in Black history.

The African Independent Church movement is faced with the daunting challenge of reaffirming itself in the face of the hostile and negative characterization by the unsympathetic bourgeois white theology, on the one hand, and on the other, it is faced with the challenge of rediscovering its role as the sole Church which is being built among, and by the oppressed themselves.

Analysis of the AIC's Socio-theological image

AIC's are, as a historical movement, Churches that have emerged as a protest phenomenon. In the process of their emergence they have swum on the current of a renaissance or a radical affirmation of African humanity and Black self-hood. Even up to this

juncture, whenever an African Independent Congregation is established, a symbolical enactment of liberation happens. A leap, a bold one indeed, is being taken away from the experience of religious manipulation, deculturalization and racial subjugation, to the promised land of freedom. An assertion is here registered that the founding of AIC's is a step of liberation, and a part of the broad and long term process of national politico-economic emancipation.

However, our submission is that our AIC's have not yet completed the leap they have set out to take. A vast majority of the African Independent Churches are still somewhere in the air. They have taken a leap of liberation but they have not (and some are consciously afraid to) put a foot across into the promised land.

AIC's have revolted against traditional European theology, but they have not yet arrived at constructing their own contextual theology. (or are we imposing our western-education inspired expectations on them?) Many have broken away from mainline mission churches in protest against discrimination and oppressive ecclesiastical structures but up to now have not developed liberatory leadership and administrative structures. In their rejection of racism some of them were being deliberately built on tribalism. In church practice much confusion and indecision on the fusion of African cultural rituals and beliefs with the Gospel teachings is observable. Also, AIC's in South Africa are summarily accused of failing to take an explicit missiological position on the national liberation struggle. AIC's are wandering in the desert between the Red Sea and the river Jordan. They have left the house of slavery but they have not yet arrived in the land of the Lord's rest. Or is it because as a church which is an institution which is embedded in society, it cannot reach this freedom independent of the general transformation of societal structures?

A Contribution towards AIC's History

A history of the AIC's, which this paper hopes to introduce, is a demonstration of the very first attempts to establish a Black national Church. This history is a religious heritage of Black people. The activities of the pioneers of the AIC's at the turn of the nineteenth century represent the very first articulations of what we later came to systematise and label as Black Theology. The AIC's are obligated with the mission of guiding the Black nation through to this liberating heritage of Black Christian religion in colonial South Africa.

When reflecting on the history of Black Theology in the USA, in one of his latest writings, James Cone observes that "When Black Theology first came into being it was the radical, prophetic voice in Black Churches, calling them back to their liberating nineteeth-century heritage, by attacking racism and affirming black identity extending back to Africa" (1986: 111). This statement poses for Black theologians in South Africa a question as to whether we have ever taken seriously the task of reflecting on the liberating heritage of our religious history as a people.

The purpose of this paper is to distil those aspects of the history of Black Christianity which are self-evidently bountiful with liberatory and revolutionary undercurrents. Through this paper we shall attempt to investigate the AIC's from a historical perspective. As we do this it will be interesting to note the fundamental historical role a

Black Church in South Africa can play in the people's struggle.

THE BLACK CHURCH IN BLACK HISTORY

The Black Church Shapes Black History

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the mode of Black protest against racist and capitalist colonialism, which had begun in the 1650's, took a dramatic new character. The age of tribally organised armed resistance against the settler advancement was to close with the Bhambatha Uprising of 1906. A new strategy of non-military intellectual confrontation of the oppressor began to emerge. Instead of the hitherto tribally organised resistance, now supra-tribal and nationally based structures of protest were being founded. This strategy was a result of a new wave of self-consciousness which was beginning to gain ground within the African community.

The motor of this new development was one of the results of the missionary endeavours. Through the missionary church institutions, Africans were being educationally equipped and exposed to what they later came to discover in full for themselves as the liberating potential of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Much against the missionaries expectations and intentions, this educated class of Africans gradually became conscientised with the obligation presented by the Gospel, that dehumanising structures in the Black community had to be attacked and dismantled. This period (1890 – 1912) saw the first founding of African political organizations. The most notable being *Imbuba ya maAfrica, the Funamelungelo* Society (seek your rights), Natal Natives Congress and the culmination of this movement in the founding of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC), two years after "Azania" had been named a South Africa in which the African majority was excluded from political power. It was not accidental that the SANNC was to have a Rev. John Dube, a product of missionary tutelage who had even had the rare privilege of studying overseas, as its first president.

The church in the Black community played a crucial role and is still up to this day dispensing this role. What is questionable is the kind of historical results that the church deposits into a people's history. In a passing brief, we note from the foregoing development that the conduct of the struggle for emancipation changed hands away from the grassroots to the African petit bourgeious class during the 1900's through the influence of the Church.

The Black Church, Mid-wife of Black Nationalism

When they began to learn to read and interpret the Bible for themselves, late nineteenth-century African Christians became aware of a contradiction between what the missionary church was teaching them and what the Spirit was revealing from the scriptures. God was discovered as dynamic being who was concerned about the upliftment of all nations. A contradiction was found between the ecclesiastic model which was emerging in the Biblical writings, where the church emerges as an institution of the mission of human liberation, and the missionary presentation of the church as a transplantation from Europe to Africa. A tense contradiction was also discovered between their attraction to the Christian message of human fellowship and their experience of racial discrimination both in society and the church.

With admirable boldness in defiance of the Western Church's sacred theological tradition that outside of itself *"Salus Nullus"* (No Salvation), that those who are not part of it or break away from it are Kaffirs (Heathens) and anathema, one African church leader after the other began to express rejection of missionary Christianity, and instituted their own African Churches, independent of all foreign influence.

From Nehemia Tile to Mangena Mokone

In 1882 Rev. Nehemia Tile of the Wesleyan Church, a gifted and well-known preacher in Thembuland (Sundkler: 1961: 38) colluded with the local paramount chief, Ngangelizwe, and led a breakaway of the Thembuland area Methodist Church, to establish the Thembu National Church.

The founding of the Thembu National Church is significant in at least two respects besides the fact that it was the first AIC in South Africa. Firstly, by calling his church a Thembu *National* Church, Tile had caught up to the theological fact that the Church is not a supra-social institution. The founding, structuring and mission of the Church is much affected by the ideological and class interests of those involved. For Tile the Church could be *national*, that is, it could be organised by the interest and aspiration of the nation. As if to ridicule the English history of the Wesleyan Church, Tile ordained Chief Ngangelizwe as the head of the Thembu National Church, just as the Queen in England was the head of the Church of England.

Secondly, this Church became famous for its pioneering work of assimilating African cultural practices which were then vehemently castigated by missionaries as being heathen, barbaric and uncivilized with Christian doctrine, and ethics. Cultural self-affirmation, a rejection of religious sub-servience to non-liberating foreigners, and a commitment to the nationalistic ideal blended together into a theology of the Thembu National Church.

The fact that Tile's church was tribally based is usually used to diminish the nationalist significance of his contribution to the Black history of emancipation. We however, have to note that Tile was the product of his times (and the best product indeed). To the African of the 1880's (the pre-industrial period) the tribe represented the nation, Africa ended where his tribe end, and the battles of his tribe were the battles of Africa.

Nehemiah Tile's expression of nationalist sentiment through the Church was to be further developed and extended in the following epoch of Black history, the post-discovery-of-gold era.

During the years 1892-96 Rev. Mangena Mokone in Pretoria together with his colleagues, Rev. James Dwane and Simon Brander, formed a new church after a dramatic resignation from the Methodist Church. What was significant about this new church, besides the background of the historical dynamics which resulted into its founding, was the name adopted. It was called the Ethiopian Church. Its mission was to enlist all Africans into Ethiopian consciousness, believing that the Psalm 68: 31 "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God", was finally being fulfilled.

The historical significance of the Ethiopian Church was that whereas the hitherto pattern of the founding of AIC's was tribally conditioned, this Church was to become consciously non-tribalistic. The concept of

Ethiopianism, representing a philosophy of African self-consciousness and unity, and which at the time was mobilising all Africans even across the Atlantic ocean into a liberatory front, was for the first time introduced into colonial South Africa's protest. The advent of Ethiopianism was to change the shape of Black political protest. "Unlike those who believed in evolutionary change through constitutional means, the separatist [Ethiopian] Churches were impatient with white control and pessimistic about the protest for evolutionary change" (Ondendaal: 1984: 23).

Ethiopianism

Ethiopianism was an assertion of the absolute right of Africans to rule Africa. It was a rejection of the accommodative ideology of John Tengo Jabavu's newspaper, "Invo Zabantsundu" (founded 1884). It called for Africans to struggle for goals beyond mere representation in the Cape Colony or any other legislative assembly. Its formulative battle cry became "Africa for Africans, Africans for humanity!" It emphasised African self-pride, self-reliance and service to humanity.

The Ethiopians questioned the one-way missionary traffic from the West to Africa. They maintained that the church in Africa should also be allowed to develop to a point where it will also be able to send missionaries to Europe and other lands. Also, Africans should be armed with education and economic power so that they could rise from a position of social subjugation by the settlers and be prepared to serve other nations. (This message of the Ethiopian movement was to encourage the emergence of an African petit-bourgeoisie which was referred to earlier). A reading of the history of Ethiopianism is a record of attempts, both unsuccessful and successful, at establishing Black-sponsored educational institutions. In 1903, Rev. Brander's application to the colonial Transvaal republic government for the establishment of the Ethiopian School was rejected (Karis and Carter : 1973: 37 Vol. 1).

"By the end of the nineteenth century the Ethiopian movement had gained thousands of adherents and spread throughout South Africa" (Ondendaal: 1984:29). This emergence and phenomenal spread of the challenges of Ethiopianism was not without crisis. It created a crisis for both the colonial regime and the missionary agencies, as well as for sections of the liberal-bourgeois Black community.

In his African Yearly Register of 1929, T.D. Mweli Skota reports that the missionary agencies and the colonial Transvaal (Z.A.R.) Legislative Assembly instigated President Paul Kruger to suppress the Ethiopian Church. Paul Kruger is said to have given in a carefree manner the monumental reply to this, saying: "Let the Kaffirs preach to the Kaffirs, why interfere with them". For Kruger the institution of separate Black Churches was wrongly confused with a manifestation of racist social regimentation.

Summaring up deliberations on Ethiopianism among the missionaries at the first General Missionary Conference held in Johannesburg in July 1904, Alexander Roberts of the Lovedale Mission characterised the missionary view of Ethiopianism: "First, it is a race movement; second, it is political; third, it is Church" (quoted in: Kuzwayo: 17).

Reception of Ethiopianism within the Black Community

Within the Black community, particu-

larly in the 1920's, the Ethiopian creed of "Africa for the Africans" was to create conflict with the programme of those Africans who were sympathetic to Cecil John Rhodes' League, which was established to mobilise British intervention against the Boers in the politics of South Africa. Many middle-class Africans supported it as they wished Britain, thought to be more liberal than the Boers, to assume responsibility over "native affairs" throughout Southern Africa (Ibid: 1984: 11). The Black disciples of Cecil John Rhodes preached their slogan of "equal rights for every civilised man South of the Zambesi" against the Ethiopian demand of absolute African rule of Africa. Karis and Carter also observe that "the Ethiopians, through the medium of the Church, rejected the liberal assumptions of a common non-racial society. Instead they supported separate but African-controlled organisations" (Ibid: xi).

The Ethiopian assertions were most unacceptable to the Black intellectuals in Natal and Cape Colony where Blacks had a vote in the colonies parliaments, and were at the time struggling to get more constitutional rights. In Natal there was a campaign for an expansion of African representation in that colony's Parliament. A few Blacks who could fulfill the stipulated property-ownership requirements had the vote (the "exempted"). These few educated and "rich" Africans, together with *amakholwa* (Black Christians outside of the Ethiopian movement) formed an organisation called *Funamalungelo* – "seek your rights" – (Exempted Native Society), through which they could press for more rights within the colonial structures. In 1900 the *Funamalungelo* was widened to include non-exempted Africans and became the Natal Native Congress, (*New Nation*: June 11, 1987:9). The most famous and eloquent opponent of Ethiopianism in Natal became Rev. John L. Dube, the editor of the second African-owned newspaper in Natal, the *Ilanga lase Natal* which he founded in 1903. The *Ilanga* started circulating as a sister newspaper to the *Indian Opinion.* The first African-owned newspaper in Natal was *Ipepa Lo Hlanga,* which was started in 1900 by Chief Mkhize Majozi. It "met with white hostility from the start. It was regarded generally as a seditious propaganda organ for the Ethiopian movement ...." (Ibid: 1984: 61). *Ipepa* was suppressed by the Natal colonial authorities within twelve months, and the *Ilanga* emerged as its substitute.

The leading opponent of Ethiopianism in the Cape colony was politician and journalist John Tengo Jabavu. Jabavu entered politics with a serious faith in the colonial structures and a hope of reform that would enable the Cape Africans to have full participation in the political running of the colony (Odendaal: 1984: 11 -16). He distinguished himself as being the pioneer of the Black independent press. However, his newspaper which he used to present his views and attacks against the African exclusivism of Ethiopianism, the *Imvo Zabantsundu* (Native Opinion) was set up with the finance and guidance of the family of a white friend, Rose-Innes, whom Jabavu had helped to win a seat in Parliament (Ibid: 1984:12).

The aim of the *Imvo,* according to Jabavu was "to help bring about closer bonds between blacks and between blacks and whites" (Ibid). Jabavu devoted his life in the mid-1880's to getting Africans to participate in the Cape Parliament. He developed open friendship with liberal Cape Parliamentarians such as W. Sauer and

J.X. Merriman. This set him in sharp conflict with the adherents of the Ethiopian philosophy. The *Casus belli* for Jabavu came in 1898 when in the Cape elections he declared his support for the leader of the Afrikaner Bond, J.H. Hofmeyer. "This action alienated him from large sections of evolving african opinion" (Ibid: 13). Jabavu and his supporters were called by the Cape Ethiopians, "*amagqoboka*" ("People having a hole"). *Amagqoboka* were said to have opened a hole in the Xhosa nation which had allowed the white man to gain a foothold.

"One Nation, one Church"

During the 1920's a campaign was launched for the establishment of a one united church to which all African people would belong. By this point the Ethiopian movement had been the only national political ("religio-political") programme. The practice of the Ethiopian movement and its introduction of a supra-tribalistic nationalism influenced the alliance of a number of regional political organisations and led to their coming together to form the South African Native National Congress in 1912 (which in 1930 was renamed the African National Congress – ANC). By the 1910's however, the vigilance of the Ethiopian movement was dissipated by the rivalries and divisions which had developed within the Ethiopian Church, the prime vehicle of Ethiopianism. Two of the original founders of the Ethiopian Church, S. Brander and James Dwane, had led major splits from it. Dwane ended up leading his group into the white Anglican Church.

By the 1920's Ethiopian splinter groups from mainline missionary churches had mushroomed throughout the country. Some people argued that the black church had to carry out the mission of uniting people and that the existence of so many black churches only worked against this nationalistic ideal and theological imperative. Such a church was to be called the United National Church of Africa (Ibid 1961: 50).

The years 1911 – 1930 saw a new convergence of Black political opinion. Africans had been shocked by the callous settlement of the 1910 Union of South Africa Act which sealed their inferior political position. Those who had fraternised with the British liberals in the hope of being accommodated in the settlement felt betrayed and disappointed, and those who all along preached black exclusivism did not only feel vindicated, they found themselves faced with the challenge of having to strengthen African unity in the face of a now seemingly more determined aggressor.

Within its national executive, the SANNC had an office of the chaplain-general (which of course, was for a minister of religion). It became the task of the SANNC's chaplain-generals to mobilise within the churches and draw black Christians towards the need for a united black witness against the colonists. At the historic 1930 SANNC national conference held at Bloemfontein, where the name of the organisation was changed to African National Congress (ANC), one of the most important resolutions, which was released on Dingaan's day, (16 December), was a call for the establishment of the United National Church of Africa. Bengt Sundkler observes that "This linking of the independent Church movement to the Congress was a new development, but the urge for a nation-wide union of all separatist organisations was at least ten years older" (Ibid:50).

The development towards a united

national black church was to be thwarted by two factors. Firstly, the remnants of the early Ethiopian radicals among the African Independent Churches viewed the manner in which the process was being carried through with some suspicion. They noted that the ANC's chaplain-general of the time, Rev Z.K. Makgatho was thus charged with the supervision of the formation of such a Church who seemed still much unwilling to break away from his Methodist connection. The second factor which created the stumbling block to the mission was that of ideological differences which once more erupted within the Black protest movement immediately after 1935.

In 1936, the All Africa Convention (AAC) was formed as a broad alliance of anti-government organisations which were coming together to oppose the Hertzog Native Bills. The ANC, trade unions (ICU), cultural bodies, student groups, sport groups and Churches formed the AAC under the Presidency of Professor D.D.T. Jabavu, J.T. Jabavu's son.

The AAC developed and adopted a policy of African Nationalism as their mobilising creed, and absolute non-collaboration in all government structures as its political principle. Later on the ANC withdrew from the AAC, and the AAC's adoption of a formal constitution in 1937 meant the existence of two rival political ideologies in the country. The campaign for the formation of the United National Church of Africa as an African nationalist expression, became embroiled and finally aborted in the ideological debates that ensued.

The United National Church of Africa failure, as well as the emergence in the early 1950's of the ANC as the sole African nationally-based political organisation with non emphasis on African personhood and self-rule, marked the fizzling out of the original spirit and vision of the Ethiopian movement. The remnant of the spirit and ideas of the Ethiopian philosophy continued to surface in the beliefs of the Pan African Congress of Azania which was founded in 1959 in frustration at the direction the ANC was thought to be taking. It has also found residence in the current Black Consciousness philosophy.

The work of the Ethiopians produced not only the first challenge in the motivation for the creation of the Black Church. They were also pioneers of African nationalism in colonial South Africa. In conceiving the reason for the founding of the Black Church as being primarily missiological even to the extent of visualing the principle of the ecumenical dimension of Christian mission, they were the formulators of the concept of Pan-Africanism. They preached that the Church in colonial South Africa and the entire African population should be so developed, freed and equipped that it can go out and serve other people – "Africa for Humanity!".

The Zionists

The period of the demise of Ethiopian fervour was also a period that saw the emergence of another major theological tradition of the African Independent Churches, namely the Zionist Churches. Besides the differences noted in the colourful uniforms and expressive spirituality of the Zionists as opposed to the Ethiopians, a fundamental difference between them is historical. Whereas the Ethiopian churches are South African indigenous Churches (pioneered by ideas fed from local challenges) with an overt nationalist undercurrent, the Zionist movement

was introduced into South Africa through the work of Pentecostal white missionaries from North America.

The history of the Zionist movement in South Africa dates from 8th May 1904 when Daniel Bryant from the Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion in the U.S.A. baptised his first twenty-seven converts near the Johannesburg railway station.

The pentecostal, spiritual and apocalyptic theology of this church found ready converts and fertile ground among the degraded, exploited and culturally disoriented Black population which was streaming into the Transvaal gold fields. In accepting the Zionist faith, African converts developed into congregations which could in no way have any relations with white people.

Being away from European interference, the Zionists were free to incorporate into their religiosity elements that were part of the African religious culture. Also, a new indigenous meaning was subconsciously attached to the concepts *Zion* and *Jerusalem*. Many of the churches which were mushrooming all over the country, adopted the two concepts as part of their names.

The Concept "Zion"

Upon closer examination it is discovered that the use of *Zion* and *Jerusalem* were typologically appropriated into some form of an unarticulated social revolution. The eschatological meaning of *Zion* is meditatively transposed into a wish and an affirmation of the eschatological judgement of the status quo. *Zion* alludes to a glorious land and experience which lies beyond the present. It is an echo of the nostalgia of the Israelite captives as they mourned by the rivers of Babylon, remembering the lost glory, both religious and political, of their nation.

(For today's Black South Africans, the concept *Zion* carries an equal psychological and historical import as the concept Azania, a vision of a glorious land untainted with imperialist exploitation.)

After splitting from the main Ethiopian Church in 1903, Rev. Brander called his new Church, the Ethiopian Catholic Church In Zion. Brander used the term "Zion" before Daniel Bryant came to South Africa. The concept "Zion" to Brander was and could be related to his radical nationalistic conceptualisation of Ethiopia.

The use of "Zion", together with "Jerusalem" reveals the devotees' obsession with the vision in the book of Revelation Chapter 21. It is a Johaninine cry, "Lord Jesus, do come", the desperate hunger of a persecuted people for the Lord's intervention.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion we need to reiterate a point made at the beginning that the challenge and option facing both the AIC's and all Black Christians, is a task of revisiting our history, the suppressed history of Black religion which is where the spirit of our forebears, our liberatory *heritage,* lies.

The liberatory undercurrent of our ancestors' experience of God awaits not only to be discovered but also to be reinterpreted, restated and developed into a revolutionary idiom of our time and into projects for the transformation of Black life in oppressive South Africa.

With James Cone we conclude that, "our task as Black Theologians is not to tell others what the Gospel is, as if we know and they do not. Our task is rather to take as the content for Black

Theology the prereflective understanding of the Gospel held by Black Christians, in order to make their voice heard throughout the Church and society."

Furthermore, "We do not create the Gospel, we interpret it as it is celebrated in worship and as it is preached in society. Deeply embedded in Black Church history are sermons, songs and the prayers of our grandparents waiting to be put into theological language ... and we must uncover their words about God and make them the foundation of Black Theology. [The sources of Black Theology] are not to be found in Barth, Tillich or Pannenberg; they are found in the sayings of our people". (Ibid: 1986: 117).

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Theological Dilemmas and Options for the Black Church

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Before outlining my thoughts to you on the topic assigned to me, I want to share with you my experiences at a conference organised by the Ecumenical Association of African Theologians in Cairo (August 14-20, 1987). The theme of the conference was "Africa and the Bible". And among many other things that were said was the central thesis that came very clearly to me: Africans have been turned into beggars in the realm of religion, especially in Christianity which is often understood to be the religion of the White people. Yet this is unnecessary because without Africa the world would not have had Christianity and the Jewish religion both of which have been given birth to through the contributions of the African people. Just to mention but a few examples, the very person who was given the promise of the people of God, Abraham, ran into all sorts of problems in Canaan and would have died of hunger had Egypt not come to his rescue by providing him with food. Not only was he rescued from starvation but also Africa opened its arms to him to such an extent that when he left Egypt he had accumulated property, including donkeys, cattle and sheep. He was even given slaves to help him look after his property. By saving Abraham, Africa in fact literally saved the promises that God had made to the people of Israel. Also, Jacob and his sons were later saved from starvation by Africans in Egypt. Further, Moses whom God used to free the Hebrews from slavery was brought up in an African royal family where he was taught how to read and write. As a result Moses became useful when God later decided to reveal Godself to the people of Israel. Without the African contribution we would not have had Moses or the written Ten Commandments. Later on, of course, when Jesus himself was persecuted during the Roman occupation of Judea, he did not run away from Herod to Greece or Rome or to the most important western countries. Rather he went to his uncles and aunts in Africa. Therefore the whole promise of God to the world in the Christ event rested on what Africans could do to save the life of Jesus. Even on his way to the cross, Africa lent its hand by providing Simon from Cyrene to carry the cross for the oppressed Jesus.

All these facts should remind us that Africa has played a very important role in the development of the Jewish and Christian religions, and even Islam, whose adherents trace their roots to the patriarch, Abraham, as their forebear. We need to reclaim our place and begin to play a crucial role today in the continuing witness of Christian-

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ity. In so doing we will be telling the world that Africans should not be beggars but contributors in the development of Christian theology, like our forebear who were among the leading theologians in the early church.

However, by historical accident, Africans, especially in the sub-Sahara, became Christians via missionary efforts. Because of this unfortunate historical fact, we talk today about the "theological dilemmas" that face the Black church, a church that has been *made* into a beggar. In consequence, the Black church founded both by white missionaries and Africans (the so-called African Independent Churches) in the 19th century has a problem. But before we outline what that problem is, we need to understand what we mean by the Black church. To talk about the Black church, in my view, is to talk about the churches in South Africa made up of both the African Independent Churches and the historical missionary churches which constitute the South African Council of Churches – churches in which Blacks invariably make up the majority of their membership. Indeed, in all the so-called English-speaking churches Blacks constitute 80% of the membership. This is true for Anglicans, Methodists, Roman Catholic. Therefore, the church in South Africa is by definition a Black church except perhaps for the white Dutch Reformed Church.

The problem that the Black church faces arises out of the fact that while its majority membership is Black, the leadership of the Church is largely in white hands. The Black church is thus a colonised and dominated church theologically and culturally because it has inherited all the theological slogans and expressions from our white mentors. Thus western theological vocabulary has become part of us, constituting in our system the air we breathe. And more often than not these inherited theological slogans choke us and cause indigestion. Therefore, if we are to continue living as the Black church we have to find a formula of digesting the foreign elements in our system.

Furthermore, the Black church, consisting of the poor, dominated women and struggling workers is the church of the under-class. Yet our theology is oriented towards the middle values and emphasis, and this constitute a real problem for us as the Black church, a problem we need to reflect about so that we can begin to construct a new theology fit for an oppressed, poor church.

Having said a few things about the Black church, let me now try to outline the problems that face us as I see them. Precisely because the church was founded by white people, and Africans in the Independent Churches also borrowed white theological slogans, it is the white people who have given us definitions of the human problem, namely, what SIN is. And the Black church has unfortunately come to accept that definition of the human problem as the problem of Blacks as well. I want to suggest that as a Black church we should not accept the definitions of what sin for Blacks is because we have a different experience of reality than that of white people, who historically happened to be our colonisers, masters and oppressors. Similarly the western definitions of what constitutes salvation should not be accepted – even if those definitions were given by Luther, Calvin or Barth. I will return to these issues later on, and I mention them here in passing because they constitute a theological problem for the Black church.

According to the biblical witness the human condition is structured in such a way that individuals find themselves living in a multiple network of relationships between God and human beings, between humans themselves, and between humans and the rest of creation. Unfortunately these multiple relationships, necessary as they are for corporate life, mutual support and self-fulfilment, have been shattered and broken by sin. Sin is understood to have transformed these relationships, thus making the human condition into one of radical estrangement, separation from God, from one another, and from the rest of creation. Therefore if we look around at the world in which we live and at ourselves, the present reality of sin is made manifest in the life of individuals such as selfishness, lovelessness, refusal to lend help to their fellows, resulting in a broken world in which humans experience oppression and injustice, poverty and hunger.

The good news, according to the other side of the biblical message, is that God did not admit defeat in the face of sin. Instead, in the vicarious suffering and death of Jesus Christ on the cross, and his glorious resurrection, God procured an effective remedy for sin and its social consequences. Thus the Christ-event constitutes an atonement, that is, a healing or restoration of the broken relationships between God and humans, between humans themselves, and between humans and the rest of creation itself. For this reason St Paul in Romans 8 reminds us that creation is groaning for liberation together with God's people. The mission of the Church should have been one of proclaiming God's victory over sin, a victory that aims at renewing and restoring these multiple networks of relationships not only between God and individual believers but also between humans.

Now, given the centrality which the Bible gives to the multiplicity of human relationships which sin has affected and broken, relationships which are restored when personal (private) sins are forgiven, and interpersonal animosities and hatred, that breed injustice and poverty, are overcome by Christ's atoning work, one would have expected the Church to see the interconnection between the mission of the Church and the problem of the poor and oppressed groups. This is especially so because poverty or oppression of one human by another is not something natural but social in its origin. People oppress one another; we have the Black church to which I have referred to which faces enormous problems because of colonialism and racial domination – all these exist because human beings, in violation of God's will that they should love and serve one another, and wilful opposition to the reconciliation effected in Christ, make others poor by promoting unloving and unjust social relationships which sin has caused. In so doing, sinful humans prevent the gospel from being experienced as a community-creating and life-giving event. In short, people are oppressed because certain people are making the gospel, that is, reconciliation ineffective. They do so in order to protect their socio-economic and political interests.

Regrettably the church has failed to make a very important *link* between its mission to proclaim the gospel of God's gracious forgiveness and reconciliation with God *and* the resultant reconciliation among humans themselves. The Church thus failed to engage itself in actions that promote justice in society so that God's love, peace and reconciliation promised by

the gospel could be made ever more present in human relationships with one another. Many reasons could be advanced to account for why the church failed to make such a crucial connection between faith and ethics. Part of the reason for that failure is the tendency to separate the dramatic stories of Genesis 3 and Genesis 4. As a result, when you read most of Christian theology or listen to sermons in the churches, the sin that is talked about is the sin of the separation between the individual and God. When people talk about being saved and singing halleluja, they sing about the salvation that pertains to them as individuals – thinking that a genuine salvation is possible apart from and in exclusion of the world in which they live. I must, in all frankness admit that Christian theology has made a very serious mistake here, in that part of the multiple relationships that constitute the Second Commandment was given less emphasis than the First Commandment. Yet when Jesus was asked: "What is the great commandment in the law?" he flatly refused to be drawn into some kind of reductionism that restricts the law only to the human condition before God. Rather he reminded his listeners that God's law has a two-fold dimension: The first is that we love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind. The second, as important as the first, is to love our neighbours as ourselves (Mt 22:36-40, Mk 12:28-31). Jesus was merely restating the summary of God's laws as set out in the Torah (Dt 6:5, 10:12, Lv 19:11-18). God's law as summarised by Jesus thus intends to regulate the multiple relationships into which all humans find themselves involved between God and humans, and between humans themselves. In a very important sense, therefore, the summary of the law refers to Genesis 3 and Genesis 4 which should never be separated from one another. The tendency to separate them in the church has thus given people the false impression that it is possible for individuals to be saved and continue to promote oppression among human beings. For the church seems to suggest that it is possible to be saved and remain a racist oppressor while at the same time remaining in good standing in the church. In doing so, the church allowed unchristlike people to constitute the church.

Another equally important reason that led to the failure of the church to make the intrinsic connection between the confession of faith and the confession of justice in society is the fact that there has been a serious break in the healthy relationship between the church and the poor and oppressed people. Beginning with the Constantinian era when the church became an official religion, the church succumbed to its social milieu and began to exercise power, to enjoy certain economic, sociopolitical interests and so on. The church allowed itself to be hijacked and taken over by the ruling classes. In consequence, the church in its theological formulations aimed at no more than the legitimating of the social, political and the economic interests of the dominant sections of society. In the South African terminology, of course, the church's role in society became one of legitimating the sociopolitical and economic interests of whites at the expense of the oppressed Black majority. To make matters worse, even where Whites are a minority in the so-called multiracial churches, it is the white theological formulations and leadership that continue to dominate the Black churches. This white domination of Black

churches poses for us a problem – a theological dilemma which Black Christians must sooner or later confront and overcome.

To return to our point: once the church had aligned its hopes and ambitions with those of the dominant classes in society, the Church began to accept the pessimistic view that equality, social justice and healthy human interrelationships are not possible this side of the grave. In other words, the church began consciously or unconsciously to embrace the view that Jesus' mission of saving the world and its sinful humanity has actually failed especially when it comes to correcting the social evils in society. After accepting the view that the healing of broken human relationships is beyond the power of the cross, death and resurrection of Jesus to bring about, the church began to preach a diminished, distorted gospel, namely, that it is possible for individuals to be saved in an unsaved world; that believers could close the door on the world, pray, and make things right with God. But this salvation is not enough to radically affect the way humans live with one another, thus enabling them to live happily in brotherly or sisterly relationships. The church's acceptance of this reductionist view of the gospel was very convenient for the ruling classes because they could continue both to be members of good standing in the church and to oppress the poor and the downtrodden without qualms of conscience. For this reason it was possible for the whites in the missionary dominated church to claim to be the brothers and sisters of the African people in this country while at the same time excluding Blacks from the positions of leadership – leading to the 19th-century breakaways and the formation of the African Independent Churches.

What was involved here, as I have already indicated, was the reductionism which limited the application, the relevance and significance of the gospel to the so-called individual or spiritual sphere, where it was claimed that individuals could be saved in the midst of broken human relationships; that it was possible for individuals to be saved in the midst of broken sociopolitical injustices in which our fellow humans waste away under the crushing burden of poverty and oppression. Indeed, once the Church had been alienated from the poor and the dominated sections of society, the Church even began to glorify poverty itself. Poverty was thus made an ideal. To be poor and dominated were seen as something useful for spiritual growth; equality between humans was seen as possible only in the Spirit before the Lord and perhaps in the life hereafter. Religion was thus transformed into a powerful tranquilliser, an opium that enabled the poor and oppressed to endure misery with dignity and patience because they were to be rewarded in the next life. As an astute politician, Napoleon, long before Karl Marx, thus understood the sociopolitical and economic function of religion as an opium for the masses when he stated:

> As far as I am concerned, I do not see in religion the mystery of the incarnation but the mystery of the social order: it links the idea of equality to heaven which prevents the rich person from being murdered by the poor ... . How can there be order in the state without religion? Society cannot exist without inequality of fortunes and the inequality of fortunes could not subsist without religion. Whenever a half-starved person is near another who is glutted, it is impossible to reconcile the difference if there is not an authority to say to him: "God wills it so, it is necessary that there be rich and poor in the world; but afterwards in

eternity there will be a different distribution". (Cited by Lindberg 1984:37).

The theological justification of such a glaring inequality between humans is possible only when the Church, under the domination of the ruling class, has successfully disconnected the intrinsic link between individual salvation and restoration of broken human relationships. This makes it possible even for Christians to ignore the injustice and oppression perpetrated by their sinful social relationships. And the Church did nothing to correct this theological distortion, which allowed certain people in society to monopolise all the bread and to rationalise the exploitation of their fellow humans as blessings from God. The Church was implicated in this exploitation of one human by another because, as a co-opted institution to serve the interests of the dominant class, its theological formulations function to give ideological justification for social inequities and injustice.

Matters were made worse by the fact that the people who were in leadership positions, those who became the subjects of theological formulations and establishment of new churches and mission agencies, were drawn largely from the middleclass who were very much more impressed by the spiritual sins or vices to which the poor and dominated majority of human kind had succumbed, rather than by the social evils under which the poor were being dehumanised. That is why the great teachers of the Church, beginning with Augustine, Luther, Calvin and all the way down to the present, had been drawn largely from middleclass people, who had serious anxieties about their life hereafter. For this reason, the most important question for them was: How do I find the merciful God who could save me from my personal sins and thus guarantee my life hereafter? This question was formulated in order to explain how individuals *qua* individuals could be relieved from their personal sins and guilt before God. In this perspective religion and the problem of sin were understood largely in terms of the inner person. Sin became a matter of looking inward, an introspective, navel-gazing exercise in which individuals try to find out how many divine laws they have broken, how unclean they are, and how despicable they are before God. In consequence theology from this perspective:

> often emphasises individualistic sins of the human heart, the rottenness of human life on this side of the grave; it emphasises human weakness and helplessness in the face of sin and evil, and that humans are not able to bring about real fundamental changes in this fallen world; it warns people against worldly desires for comfort, money possessions and other non-eternal values (Maimela 1987:46).

Similarly salvation is understood largely as a matter of preparing people for the life to come, by making them acknowledge and confess their private sins and seek forgiveness from God. Put somewhat differently, salvation was viewed largely

> ... as means of rescuing individuals from their spiritual torments; it becomes a gracious act of lifting individuals out of this miserable world of injustice, poverty, hatred and oppression ... God in this religious education seems to be capable of putting only bandages on the casualties of oppression, because this God cannot really and believably bring about a fundamental transformation of this world so that God's people might be accorded dignity and social justice (Ibid).

The Church never stopped to ask whether any salvation which "allows

sinful and violent and fallen structures to remain substantially unchanged" (Driver 1986:30) can really be the good news of Jesus Christ for the people who, by virtue of their social position in society suffer from all kinds of material deprivation, racial humiliation and sociopolitical domination. The Church's preoccupation with the spiritualised gospel meant that it was not responding adequately to the questions and issues that the poor and oppressed were raising, namely: How do I find meaningful and fulfilling life in a society in which I have no economic and sociopolitical power role to play?

As fate would have it, it was only a matter of time before the poor and oppressed people in the Church would stand up and begin to challenge the religious and social systems which had promoted and abeted the situation of domination and misery, the situation which gives everything to the rich and dominant sections in society while it denies the poor and the oppressed Black people their right to be the subjects of their history both in the church and society. Therefore, by reflecting critically on what it means to be oppressed and dominated in society, the oppressed people began to seriously question the theological formulations of the Church, formulations which try to legitimate broken human relationships in the name of God. This questioning is what Black theology is continuing to do in order to liberate theology from the hands of the oppressors.

Given this theological dilemma of the Church's co-option and misuse of theology as an instrument of oppression to the point where the Church itself becomes implicated in human oppression of their fellows, Black theology needs to address a number of important issues if theology is once again to become the instrument of liberation. Among others, the most important issue that we need to address as the Black Church is to relate out theological formulations to our sociopolitical, economic and cultural context. Now, let me briefly remind us, you and myself, as Blacks living in this part of Africa, that Africans are known to be people who are interested first and foremost in human interrelationships. People, according to the African anthropology, are reminded that individuals cannot make a fulfilling life possible in isolation from our fellows. For life is possible only in communal relationships in which individuals try to strike a balance in the way they live in a network of relationships with their fellows who must also be provided with space to breathe and live a meaningful life. Therefore individuals in Africa were socialised and taught ways of pursuing life in such a way that their actions would contribute toward the creation and nurturing of the network of multiple relationships to which I referred to between oneself and one's fellows, and ultimately between oneself and the spiritual world of ancestors and God. To maintain such a network of multiple relationships, it was important to teach people to avoid bad relationships and to refrain from activities that are injurious to those relationships, actions that threaten to undermine the social stability. Accordingly, individuals were expected to engage themselves in those social and personal activities that would enhance communal relationships, thus making life more humane and fulfilling.

In the light of this anthropology, sin and evil in the African context are thought to consist in the human attempt to destroy, to diminish and to

threaten the life of one's fellows. Therefore any activity which aims at destroying or injuring our fellows is regarded as a serious evil or sin, because any such unloving act towards our fellow human being is directed ultimately against God, the Creator, who has created the life of our fellows. Put somewhat differently, sin and evil in the African anthropology are measured in terms of the life of individuals who suffer injustice, oppression and destruction at the hands of their fellows. Sin is thus understood more in terms of the breach of loving fellowship with our human fellows. Sin thus manifests itself in the lack of love in interpersonal relationships, through the state of absence of brotherhood and sisterhood. Furthermore, sin is understood more in terms of the evil that people do to one another than in terms of the human transgression of the divine law. In other words, Africans do not think of sin in terms of the legalistic structure through which humans relate to the Deity outside and beyond the social life in which individuals live as social selves.

This African perspective on anthropology, which looks at life holistically in terms of the multiple relationships in which life is lived, the perspective that lays greater stress on the social wrongs and evils which humans commit against their fellows, is one which Black theologians should lift up and offer as African contribution to theological reflection on the great questions of sin and salvation. The African perspective will remind the Church that sin is not only an evil activity that is directed against God but also has to do with all the evil deeds that are directed against our neighbours in society. Sin is thus both a vertical and horizontal reality, for in the final analysis it is not the Almighty, self-sufficient God who suffers at the hands of those who exploit, and promote injustice. Rather it is the human beings who suffer evil and oppression. Because humans suffer, God who is the Creator of all people is also offended by the deeds of those who perpetrate evil. In the African anthropology, sin was thus correctly understood when it was seen to be committed and perpetrated through human activities that undermine all of life in the society such as witchcraft, evil spirit, hatred, evil-speaking against your fellows and lovelessness. For these threaten to destroy what makes life possible in society for all concerned. In order to overcome evil and sin in society, Africans spent enormous time and energy trying to ward off those evils. Even some among those who have converted to Christianity continue practices that are aimed at warding off evil. Hence, before a pastor baptises a child, something has already been done to fortify the life of the child against the evil forces that threaten it. Similarly before a pastor buries a deceased member of the Church, something is already done to that person. They spent so much time finding out ways to protect individuals against evil both in this life and the next, because the focus is on the individual and his/her well being in communal relationships.

This African perspective on life is the heritage that Black Christians should bring to the Church. In doing so we would be reminding the Church that the stories of Genesis 3 and Genesis 4 should never be separated if one is to have a balanced, holistic theological understanding of sin. Indeed, Black Christians should insist that Genesis 4 which talks about the sin of individuals against others is equally important as Genesis 3 for in

Christ God aimed at restoring both vertical and horizontal relationships marred by sin.

Having outlined the theological dilemma that confronts the Black Church and also having given suggestions of how that dilemma could be overcome by utilising biblical and African anthropoligical insights, I want to bring to your attention a few things for further theological reflection. Among others, as Black theologians we should insist that the way the Church understands sin or what the human problem consists of must change. In the past it was the legal model that influenced the way s:.. was understood. God was portrayed as it were a harsh monarch who gave laws in terms of which we must relate to the divine self. To sin was to disobey those laws, thus revolting against the divine overlordship on one's life. Transgressions of God's laws were regarded as mortal sins, because it resulted in a deserved punishment and even death of the sinner. The unforgiven sinner had no hope for the future but to suffer perpetually in hell. The centre of focus for the Church was to redeem people out of sin and therefore out of hell and eternal damnation.

Against this traditional view of sin, Black theology needs to remind the Church that what stands at the centre of the Scripture and its message is not so much the fact that people are related to God through the law. Rather God in both the Old and New Testament is portrayed as a God who creates covenants of fellowship with God's people. At the centre of the covenant is not law and its demand but a life giving relationships between God and human beings, relationships which makes life possible. Adam and Eve sinned not because they broke a lifeless law but because they undermined and eventually broke the life-giving relationships on which their life depended. And once this relationship was broken life could not continue as normal. Rather they had to suffer the consequence of the broken fellowship with their Creator: their friendship and cordial communication with God in the cool of the evening was abruptly ended. Adam and Eve began to blame one another and became alienated from one another. The story of Cain and Able is but a continuation of the broken and alienated relationship between God and humans, and between humans themselves. Because sin involves a breach of fellowship, Black theology should help the Church to make a shift in its theological focus from the legal structure to the network of multiple relationships in which human life is lived. And should any human act begin to disturb, threaten and undermine those relationships, the Church should seriously begin to talk about sin on the horizontal level, a sin which ultimately is directed against God who created and cntinues to uphold those relationships.

This shift of emphasis in our understanding of sin leads to an important theological consequence: Black theologians should no longer merely borrow theological formulations that are unintelligible to the African perspective on human life. Formulations such as "Justification by faith alone" propounded by Luther and others were intended to give individuals assurance both about the forgiveness of sins and the life hereafter. This theological insight, however important it might be, should not be accepted by the Black Church without heavy qualifications. For the anxiety about the life hereafter, an anxiety based on the legal structure that dominated western thinking, is not an African problem.

For in the African anthropology individuals were assured of their future life because at death individuals were taken up and gathered to their ancestors. Any punishment for wrongdoing was something that was meted against sinners on this side of the grave so that at death the sinner has already made things right with his/her fellow human beings, the ancestors and God. In the light of this, individuals did not face death with fear and trembling, agonising as to whether they would be saved or condemned to hell. This brooding over the future and hell is not an African problem and Black theologians should discourage the Church from making it the central concern and focus of Church ministry among Black Christians.

Furthermore, because for us the focus is on the network of human interrelations we should insist that the Church should pay greater attention to what in the past were regarded as venial as opposed to mortal sins. The focus thus should be on our continuing sinfulness between ourselves and our neighbours. Christians should focus on the wrongs that they do to their fellows in society instead of focusing their gaze on the clouds in the sky and wondering about their future security in heaven. As we focus on those sinful activities which are hurtful to our neighbours, it will become possible for us to think of the ways and means by which we could overcome our sinful relationships. For the sphere of human interrelationships is left entirely in human hands to create death-dealing or life-giving structures. Here humans cannot plead that they are incapable of relating to their fellows in just and humane ways because it is within their power and ability to correct the destructive social structures that threaten to destroy and undermine their corporate life. By focusing on the area of human interrelationships, the Black Church will be bringing its theological contribution to the Church at large by reminding the Church that the central focus of the biblical message is the healthy relationships which should exist between us and our fellows, and ultimately between us and our Creator.

The focus on the centrality of these relationships enables Black theologians to make necessary links between right believing and right doing, between faith and ethics – none of which can stand on its own without the other. In the past the Church was concerned that people should have the right belief, a correct dogma, regardless of whether what Christians do in life matches up to their verbal declarations. Against this view, we should insist that the right belief (orthodoxy) and the right doing (orthopraxis) belong together; both are equally important tests of the authenticity and integrity of the gospel. The emphasis on both aspects can be made only when Christians take seriously what they do to and with one another in society as the measure of their faith in the saving God. Put somewhat differently, the emphasis on the right belief and right doing (action) enables the Church to link once again our relationships between God and our fellows. As it makes this crucial link between the vertical and horizontal relationships, the Church will be calling people to account for what they do as people who try to live according to God's holy and loving will. If people claim that they believe in God, it becomes necessary for them to demonstrate the authenticity of their faith through the way they live with their fellows in society.

The testing of genuine faith by right

actions has become necessary in South Africa which prides itself on being a Christian country. And if all the people who claim that they are Christians were to live according to what they profess on Sunday, we would neither have the so-called racial problem nor all the injustices and oppressions which characterise our society. I believe it is the calling and challenge that face the Black Church to begin to call the Churches and Christians in this land to account for what they do in their relationships with their racially different neighbours in the light of what they teach and profess every Sunday. In so doing, I believe, we would be helping the Church of Jesus the Saviour to become a life-giving and community creating instrument of reconciliation between God and humanity and between humans themselves. For the promotion of justice, peace and reconciliation in society are important dimensions of the gospel. Indeed, Christians have been called to begin to make the Kingdom of God more visible and present in what they do in relation to their fellows, and through the social structures they create. And as they do this, I believe, the love, peace and fellowship proclaimed and promised in the gospel will become realised and made more present in our world, as Christians struggle to transform their world and interpersonal relationships in preparation of the Kingdom that is to come. For the Kingdom of God is not going to drop some day from the sky but will emerge out of the dynamic creativity that aims at creating a more humane society and out of the small victories which Christians win against sin and its social consequences on this side of the eschaton.

1. Carter Lindberg "Through a Glass Darkly: A History of the Church's vision of the Poor and Poverty" in *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 33, 1981, pp. 37.
2. Simon S Maimela "What do the Churches want and expect from Religious Education in Schools?" in the *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa*, Vol. 1, 1987, p. 46.
3. Ibid.,
4. John Driver, *Understanding the Atonement*, (Scottdale, Pen.: Herald Press, 1986), p. 30.

Ethical Problems, Options and Strategies Facing the Black Church today

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INTRODUCTION

The church and all Christians in South Africa are faced with a serious and worsening situation of conflict. The church in general, and the Black church in particular ought to make an unambiguous response in this time of confusion, stress and crisis. The crisis has not lessened and with the imposing of the State of Emergency has even deepened. There are noticeable divisions in the Church as a whole, the South African public and the Apartheid regime relative to a number of ethical and moral questions that keep on arising from this volatile situation. Questions about the notions of violence-nonviolence, justice-injustice, liberation, repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation keep on emerging again and again and again.

Perhaps the harshly real question facing the Black Church in the South African context is that which has been raised to J.G. Davies by students and theologians in the "Third World" namely:

> We are Christians living in countries where poverty, exploitation and suffering abound. There seems no other way to alter the situation except by joining in violent revolution. But is it ever possible to do this and remain a Christian?[2]

To this question, the Black Church must give a carefully reasoned theological response. Moral guidelines must be sought for action and participation by the Black Church in the volatile situation found in South Africa. In order to do this, an analogy will have to be drawn between a just war and a just revolution. Such an approach might enable us to see whether or not there is any theoretical objection to Christian participation in violent revolation.

The purpose of this paper, is to analyse the available options to the Black Church; to reflect on the situation and to determine what response by the Church and all Christians in South Africa would be most appropriate. The crisis situation in the country is a challenge to the Church, especially to the Black Church and Christians are called upon to respond. Unless Christians are challenged they often stick to the stands and percep-

1. Davies, J.G. *Christians, Politics ad Violent Revolution*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1976, pl
2. Swomley Jr., *J.M. Liberation Ethics: A Political Scientist Examines the Role of Violence in Revolutionary Change*, Macmillan, New York, 1972, pl

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tions they have had over the years and do not if these are relevant or moving them closer to the justice and freedom and righteousness to which God calls them. As my starting point or point of departure I will take the view that liberation ethics is a response both to human need and to the biblical emphasis on redemption.

Point of Departure:

J.M. Swomley Jr. has correctly pointed out that liberation ethics begins with the fact of desperate human need to be free from whatever it is that threatens or enslaves. Accordig to J.M. Swomley Jr., liberation ethics holds that the goal of history is the liberation of humankind. Yet liberation is an impossible goal so long as people seek freedom for their own group at the expense of others.[2]

On the other hand, however, the threats to freedom originate in divisiveness, drives for power, and low estimate of the lives of others that are obvious in racism, poverty and other forms of oppression. Swomley Jr. is correct when he contends that liberation ethics also begins with these specific problems, because those most obviously oppressed and those who identify with them are always the key to social change.[3] Indeed, the drama of freedom is always connected with a specific people such as the Israelite slaves in Egypt, Black Americans, Vietnamese peasants, Bolivian miners or black working class – peasants and/or suffering masses in South Africa.

Hence Swomley Jr says that:

> Liberation ethics is a response both to human need and to the biblical emphasis on redemption. In fact, liberation is simply a currently more acceptable or modern term for redemption. Both words mean setting (people) free from whatever it is that enslaves them.[4]

It is common knowledge that many people think of liberation "as a secular term with chiefly political overtones and redemption as a distinctively religious or theological word."[5] However, *redemption* was at one time a word with no more religious significance than the term *liberation* implies today. "A slave who was redeemed was set free; he was no longer the property of his owner. He was set free because someone paid a price to redeem him."[6]

Today, however, few people are enslaved by another human being. People are robbed of a rightful freedom by massive systems or structures of society. Some of these systems, such as war and racism, have been in existence for centuries.[7] Everyone is born into one or more of them, as black children and white children in South Africa are born into separate social structures. In fact, some social structures are so much a part of the way of life of a particular society that people accept them without thinking about them. "People then tend to fit into the system and to accept the myths which support or rationalize it."[8]

Thus we live in a world where systems such as the military or war system are seen as necessary even by those who suffer the most from them. "These people, therefore, have tended to think of individuals or groups who *administer* the system as their oppressors rather than the system itself."[9]

3. Ibid, p. 2
4. Ibid
5. Ibid
6. Ibid
7. Ibid
8. Ibid
9. Ibid, p. 3

History shows that people have sought more humane existence at an enormous human cost and yet their efforts at revolutionary social change have not achieved significant freedom for them or their children. Hence liberation ethics is to be viewed as follows:

> Liberation ethics is primarily social ethics because it holds the elimination or the conversion of oppressors as individuals does not deal with the structures of oppression embodied in long accepted and interrelated social systems.[10]

Thus the struggle for liberation is not a clandestine operation designed to destroy a few oppressors; it begins with an analysis of society different from one which sees some people as "good guys" who are to be liberated and others as "bad guys" who are to be subjugated or destroyed.[11] Hence the polemic or divisive Christian debate on concepts such as: violence-counter-violence; justice-injustice; liberation-reconciliation, etc, are guided by such an analysis. Because of such polemics the Church in South Africa and in the world is divided into two relative to analysis and perception. We have the Black church and the white church. The experience of the one church is completely foreign to the other. Hence K.M. Rasmeni argues that given this situation, two paths appear to be open to the Church: to break up, let the black church go it alone and allow the white church to remain passive. The other option is to find a way of action together as a Church of Christ.[12]

I do not intend adding anything on the endless debate about violence and non-violence etc. Rather I intend exploring the Black Church's increasing awareness of its summons to act in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. I hope that such an exploration will lead to a call for clearer thinking about the kinds of actions which are appropriate to Christian participation in social conflict and, especially about the potentialities and problems of violence and nonviolence. Along the same line of thought, the Notting Hill Consultation on Racism of May 1969 urged the World Council of Churches to adopt the position "that all else failing, the Church and churches support resistance movements, including revolutions, which are aimed at the elimination of political or economic tyranny which makes racism possible."[13]

According to J.G. Davies the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) raised the question of violence and revolution precisely because it led to the recognition of two types of situation and of their interconnection. "The first type is one in which the masses are oppressed in terms of economic and political power. The second is one in which the masses are oppressed in terms of a particular racist policy."[14] Their relationship is affirmed in the following statement:

> It is no longer sufficient to deal with the race problem at the level of person-to-person relationships. It is *institutional racism* as reflected in the economic and political power structures which must be challenged. Combating racism must entail a *redistribution* of social, economic, political and cultural *power* from the powerful to the powerless.[15]

Such an effort entails the importance of further investigating the con-

10. Ibid
11. Ibid
12. South African Council of Churchs, *Ecunews*, Vol. 13,
13. No 3, August 1987, p. 3
14. Quoted in Davies, J.G., op cit, p. 2
15. Central Committee of the World Council of Churches meeting in Canterbury, August 1969.

cept of a just revolution. But such an investigation must be done against the backdrop of another approach to liberation, namely, the approach of revolutionaries to their adversaries.

Two Approaches to Liberation

(a) Approach of Revolutionaries:

Revolutionaries such as Robespierre, Lenin, Mao Tse-tung, Castro and counter-revolutionaries such as Napoleon, Franco and Stalin, while prepared to run personal risks, thought to making their adversaries pay the greatest price.[16] According to Swomley, the assumption that we shall make others pay is a product of three obsolete ideas. He says that:

> The first is that those who have oppressed us should in some way receive a dose of their own medicine or experience the pain they have inflicted on us. This is revenge. The second is that it is possible for one group to be liberated by a process that enslaves or degrades others ... .
> The third obsolete idea is that those in power determine by their resistance to change whether and how much violence there will be.[17]

Swomley argues that the first two ideas depend on a false analysis of the root of the unfreedom. He goes on to say that such false analysis is based on the assumption that oppression is caused by evil individuals or groups; that if they can be defeated or eliminated or forced to change places with the oppressed, liberation will have taken place. Swomley also contends that the third obsolete idea falsely holds that violence must always be met with violence or that the dispossessed fight better when they choose the methods or weapons of the oppressor. "When put simplistically," says Swomley, "it is said that one must fight fire with fire. But sometimes it is better to smother a fire by depriving it of oxygen or to pour water on it or to isolate it."[18] In other words there are a number of ways by which change takes place in such a way that the oppressor does not determine the methods of liberation.

There are nonviolent methods of resistance such as economic boycott or strikes. These methods depend on numbers of people rather than the "firepower of weapons".

According to Hannah Arendt, there is a distinction between power and violence. She asserts that "power always stands in need of numbers, whereas violence up to a point can manage without them because it relies on implements."[19] This means that the larger the number demanding change, the less is their need to rely on violence. "But it also implies that minority reliance on violence can be nullified by superior technology. It is a mistake for the oppressed to let their oppressors choose the weapons they can use more effectively."[20]

(b) Just Revolution:

Another approach to liberation is that of the just revolution patterned after the medieval Christian concept of a just war. According to Swomley, a just, violent revolution is waged only when

1. there is gross injustice on the part of the ruling class;
2. all nonviolent means to eliminate injustice have failed;

16. Ibid
17. Swomley Jr., J.M. op cit, p. 9
18. Ibid, p. 10
19. Ibid
20. Arendt, H. On *Violence*, Harcourt, Brace & World Inc., New York, 1969, pp. 41, 42.

3. there is moral certainty that the side of justice will win, and;
4. there is a clear intention to bring into being a just order rather than a mere shift of the reins of power.

He also contends that a just revolution must also be

1. rightly conducted: restrained within the limits of justice and love;
2. fought so that guilt and punishment must be proportionate. Punishment exceeding the measure of guilt is unjust and therefore prohibited, and;
3. careful to avoid unnecessary destruction of lives and property not immediately endangering the revolution..[21]

I agree with Swomley when he says that it would be difficult for anyone who believes in radical social change to indict those who engage in violent revolution if there is great injustice and if repeated efforts to eliminate it by organised nonviolent direct action have failed.[22] Indeed, nonviolent struggle such as strikes, boycotts and sit-ins, can be said to be "successful if they accomplish a limited purpose and if that achievement results in some transfer of power or in partial democratization so that new demands can be made from a position of greater strength. They can be said to have failed if there is a revolutinary situation but aggressive nonviolent struggle is again and again defeated."[23] One speaks of a revolutionary situation because neither nonviolence nor violence can succeed if there is no social basis to support revolution. Thus the question whether violent revolution can be won depends upon the context. It is in the light of such a motion that one can say that liberation ethics is concerned not only with the goal of freedom but with the process of setting people free.

Hence Swomley contends that the function of liberation ethics is to provide guidelines for action that will "humanize rather than brutalize persons, that will help solve problems rather than proliferate them, and that will be useful in evaluating the methods and consequences of social change. There are always moral as well as pragmatic dilemmas in choosing a course of action that may lead to loss of lives, or to failure, or to immediate success but ultimate failure."[24]

The Reformist Strategy

As I have already pointed out, the reformist strategy seeks to change the system from within. But if change is sought from without, real success will depend on sympathies from inside. The analysis of the Apartheid regime shows that there are no sympathies for the black majority inside the ruling racial oligarchy. Even the PRP pushes for qualified franchise. For blacks such reforms are meaningless. Blacks want full political rights granted to all South Africans in a united country. They also want Apartheid structures dismantled. In short, they demand majority rule in a unitary state and, are opposed to federalism, confederalism and partition.

There are three reasons that make the use of a reformist strategy very difficult. First, there is the absence of strong external pressure. Given the unwillingness of the NP to negotiate with authentic black leaders, there is no hope for a negotiated settlement in

21. Swomley Jr., op cit, p. 11
22. Ibid
23. Ibid
24. Ibid, pp. 11, 12

South Africa. The only thing that could force the NP leadership to a negotiating table is external pressure, that is, political and economic pressure.

Second, the ruling party (NP) and opposition parties of both the right and the left are all committed to either partition or qualified franchise. They do not want one person, one vote, in a unitary state which is what constitute black political demands. Thus the black demands have no sympathisers inside Parliament.

Third, the regime is determined to suppress all extra-parliamentary forms of dissent. From 1912 to 1960, black South Africans sought peaceful means to achieve change in South Africa. They pursued reformist objectives and their methods were nonviolent. But the government responded by sending police or the army to shoot unarmed blacks and also to arrest black leaders. Thus the government's use of violence to crush opposition to its policies led blacks to answer violence with violence. This leads us to the question: To what extent can revolutionary strategy bring about social change in South Africa?

The Revolutionary Strategy

After the Sharpeville massacre on March 21, 1960, the black liberation movement adopted a revolutionary posture. Today, the radical young people are also close to doing so. But at the same time, the liberation movement made it clear that behind its revolutionary strategy lies the African National Congress (ANC) tradition of nonviolence and negotiation as a means of solving political disputes. Indeed, black leaders would agree to sit around a table and talk to white rulers, to discuss ways and means and timetables for the dismantling of Apartheid, but no one has asked them yet.

Given this background, the liberation movement in South Africa did not commit itself to open revolution. Rather, it outlined four forms of revolutionary strategy, namely, sabotage, guerilla warfare, terrorism and open revolution. Consistent with its political tradition, the liberation movement adopted the first method. Sabotage does not involve loss of civilian lives and, the liberation movement felt that it offered the best hope for future race relations. Proponents of such revolutionary strategy argue that it will keep bitterness to a minimum and if the strategy succeeds, a democratic government could become a reality. Although property which people will need after social change has taken place gets destroyed, the moral content of sabotage rests on the fact that civilian lives are saved.

Moreover, this strategy (sabotage) is based on the political and economic situation of South Africa, that is to say, the fact that South Africa is dependent, to a large extent, on foreign capital and foreign trade. The liberation movement thought that the destruction of power plants and telephone communications would scare away. capital from the country; make it difficult for goods from industrial areas to reach the seaports on schedule; and in the long run cause a heavy drain on the economic life of the country. This strategy, in turn, would compel the white voters to reconsider their position. The attacks on the industrial installations of the country were linked with sabotage of government buildings and symbols of Apartheid. It was hoped that such attacks would serve as an inspiration to the victims of Apartheid. The plan aimed at organizing mass action which would raise sympathy for the cause of black South

Africans from other countries. The hope was that other countries would put great pressure on the South African government.

It is of vital importance to note that sabotage was adopted as a properly controlled revolutionary strategy only after a 50-year-old policy of non-violence. Against the backdrop of the ANC heritage of nonviolence and its desire for racial harmony, the liberation movement tried to avoid guerilla warfare, terrorism and open revolution on moral grounds. Guerilla warfare was avoided because guerillas tend to hide among civilians, thus compelling the military to injure civilians in search of its targets. Terrorism tends to have no political objectives. Thus terrorists kill for the sake of killing. Open revolution tends to shed a lot of blood. When outright revolution takes the form of a civil war, it leaves scars that take a long time to disappear.

Thus, the liberation movement in South Africa reflected on the results of war within South Africa's own history and realized that the scars of wars fought between white racial groups (Dutch and British) were deep, but those of wars between black groups and white groups (e.g. Battle of Blood River) went even deeper. Hence, a civil war in which blacks and whites would fight each other was to be avoided. The wounds of the Anglo-Boer war took more than 50 years before they could heal. Thus the crucial question that the liberation movement keeps on raising in South Africa is: How much longer would it take to eradicate the scars of interracial civil war, which cannot be fought without a great loss of life on both sides?

The avoidance of civil war has dominated the thinking of revolutionary strategists in South Africa. However, there is a realization that one day South Africans, black and white might have to face the prospect of a civil war. At the same time, sabotage as a strategy has not achieved its objectives except for isolated spectacular acts of sabotage in the 1980's. These include the bombing of SASOL II which is a coal gasification plant at Sasolburg on the borders of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal; the bombing of the Voortrekkerhoogte military base near Pretoria; and the bombing of a nuclear reactor at Koeberg about 45 kilometres from Cape Town. Moreover, the regime has done all in its power to circumvent acts of sabotage.

Because black South Africans do not see white South Africans as their enemies, but their oppressors, it is almost inconceivable that a revolutionary strategy can work in South Africa. Unlike the objectives of those engaged in a revolutionary strategy which are ideological, black South Africans' strategy and objectives are purely political. In other words, the former seeks to overthrow the state on ideological grounds. But the latter is committed to reordering the state in order to establish a just society. Indeed, black South Africans do not see white South Africans as enemies to be eliminated, but as fellow citizens who need a change of heart. Moreover, black South Africans want a non-racial society and, do not believe that the state is a product of social conflict and violence. Given all this, I think that J. de St. Jorre is correct when he says that revolution is not yet round the corner in South Africa but a revolutionary situation is developing. However, it is clear in terms of general principles that black South Africans want full political participation in a non-racial democracy. But I contend that the only way to achieve such objectives is through dialogue.

But dialogue will only be feasible in South Africa when the power equation is more evenly balanced which means a net loss of white power and a net gain of black power.[25] Hence, pressure from the West will play a great role in making that balance of power possible. In other words, there ought to be an interplay between the external pressure and internal resistance to Apartheid. Such a multipronged strategy will open up channels of communication and dialogue which do not exist in any adequate fashion today. This means that there ought to come a time when the U.S. government and its allies must do something more than simply issue harsh and condemnatory language with regard to what every right thinking person sees as an evil, unjust and immoral political system in South Africa. These countries should look, I think, at the interplay between the long-term and short-term considerations. The question to be raised is: Is it really in their self-interest to continue supporting the Apartheid regime which is beginning to die?

It is inevitable that the black majority will ultimately come to power in South Africa. The internal resistance has taken a new phase. In recent months there has been coordination among the opposition groups in the black community throughout South Africa. I refer here to the students' movement, grassroots-based political organizations, workers' unions, churches, and the freedom fighters' acts of sabotage. This internal resistance can generate support from abroad which ultimately could lead to a national convention of genuine black leaders, the government and other parties.

25. Ibid, p. 13
26. Turner, R. *The Eye of the Needle*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1972, pp. 117, 118

Black Christians, the Bible and Liberation

Dr Takatso Mofokeng*

1. Introduction

No statement in the history of political science as well as that of Christian missions expresses the dilemma that confronts black South Africans in their relationships with the Bible with greater precision and has whipped up more emotions than the following: "When the white man came to our country he had the Bible and we had the land. The white man said to us 'let us pray'. After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the bible". With this statement which is known by young and old in South Africa, black people of South Africa point to three dialectically related realities. They show the the central position which the Bible occupies in the ongoing process of colonization, national oppression and exploitation. They also confess the incomprehensible paradox of being colonized by a Christian people and yet being converted to their religion and accepting the Bible, their ideological instrument of colonization, oppression and exploitation. Thirdly, they express a historic commitment that is accepted solemnly by one generation and passed on to another – a commitment to terminate disinheritance and eradicate exploitation of humans by other humans.

The statement we referred to talks about the connection between *black Christians, the Bible and the struggle for liberation*. This is the issue that will occupy us today.

The historical dilemma – The Bible as an instrument of social control and social struggle.

It is a generally accepted fact which will undoubtedly come up again and again in this conference that the Bible first reached the shores of our part of the African continent through the sometimes uncomfortable but nonetheless successful partnership between colonialism and the Christian missionary enterprise. Many critical African writers, both secular and religious, have written extensively about this partnership and its benefits to each of the partners involved. Some have argued that the missionary enterprise used colonialism as an effective and readily available vehicle to reach the religious heart of the so-called 'dark continent' and win it for Jesus Christ. They add that in the missionary use of this vehicle they succeeded in two things. Firstly, they reached their destination with the Bible, which is the religious heart of Africa, emptied it of all the 'evil' contents that led to vio-

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lent African social structures, corrupt political institutions and a weak economic system. Consequent to their activities the African people have accepted a new religion and the Bible as a guide in their lives. They have been introduced to new European cultural values, norms and attitudes and that their entire society has been changed. For this work, the defenders of the missionaries argue, they deserve eternal gratitude from Africans. Bishop Desmond Tutu agrees with this line of thought but adds a critical note with which we agree, saying: "But it remains true to say that they sought to Europeanize us before they could Christianize us. They have consequently jeopardized the entire Christian enterprise since Christianity has failed to be rooted sufficiently deeply in the African soil, since they have tended to make us feel somewhat uneasy and guilty about what we could not alter even if we had tried until doomsday – our Africanness."

In addition to the change of the African personality and society that have been achieved through the use of the Bible, another achievement is always added. It is contended that these men did a lot to blunt the sharp edges of the sword of the colonizers with their moral influence on the latter. Had it not been for their numerous interventions, it is said, Africans would have been ruthlessly butchered. While this may be true, it should not, however, be forgotten that more often than not, the missionaries invoked the same violence of the colonial powers whenever they wished to mete out punishment on the so-called stubborn and intransigent African kings.

Other African writers have also argued very persuasively that it was colonialism that used the missionary enterprise to soften the hearts and minds of our African forebears. As Gwinyai Muzorewa aptly puts it: "What is indisputable is the fact that the colonists tended to use the missionaries to make their task easier". He follows up this assertion by addressing the congruence of their goals and says: "... consequently, there is a thin line between the missionary intention and the intent of the colonizer[1] ..."[2] B.M. Magubane is even more emphatic when addressing this issue. He argues very forcefully that "the initial act of conquest was buttressed and institutionalized by ideological activities" that resulted in the African people themselves loudly admitting the cutural hegemony of their conquerors.[3] Magubane further argues that it was necessary for Africans to be incorporated into the mental and cultural universe of their white conquerors through an ideological onslaught. Hence the presence of Christian missionaries who were armed with the Bible on the colonial ox wagon when its wheels rolled violently through the breadth and length of our continent. In the Bible they had the most potent canon in the entire ideological armoury targeted at the fundamental pillars of African social structure, religion and culture.

Magubane's assessment of missions and the use to which the Bible was put has not just been sucked from his own thumb. Many missionaries confirmed the legitimacy of this indictment of the Bible in their reports to the missionary societies as well as in their memoirs. Brownlee, a British missionary for instance, wrote and said: "As the natives came under the influence of the teaching of missionaries, ... in proportion to the spread of missionary influence the desire for articles of European manufacture grew and spread, and I think (it) will well satisfy

this meeting that to the missionary mainly we owe the great revenue now derived from native trade." The same sentiment was expressed by Dr. John Philip of the London Missionary Society in his *Researches in South Africa*. John de Gruchy in his *Church struggle in South Africa* also points out that the initial opposition to missions among Africans in South Africa was defeated by an assurance given by the missionaries that the Bible would, contrary to the colonists' fears, create obedient and loyal hardworking slaves out of the indigenous people.

Stories that come from areas where the slave trade and slave labour was practised also confirm this indictment. In that case too the initial efforts to introduce the Bible to captured Africans were opposed until the slave owners were assured of the benefits of Christian missions. Slaves were severely punished by their masters if found reading the Bible until the assurance referred to above was given and kept. In other words the missionaries were certain that there was enough material in the Bible which would enable them to keep their word of making better slaves out of a colonized people.

However much one may try to plead the innocence of missionaries as the overzealous children of the Victorian age, and many have done this, the presence of the Bible which most of us still accept as the normative document of the Christian faith on the colonial wagon presents us as present victims of colonialism and capitalist exploitation which it ushered in with a contradiction we cannot easily ignore. We have to admit that the Bible which was a great problem as well as a blessing to millions of our ancestors for two or more centuries, still constitutes a problem and a blessing to millions of our contemporary African people, both Christian and non-Christian, religious and non-religious. And this historic paradox cannot remain unresolved to haunt of our coming generations. We have to respond to it with all the zeal and intelligence at our command. But as things stand we can respond best only if we are prepared to learn from the responses of those Black Christians who went before us in order not to repeat their mistakes.

2. Black responses

Looking at the history of Black responses to incursions which the Bible and its message made in an ideological field that had hitherto been the exclusive territory of African religion and its oral traditions we can distinguish three different kinds of Black response to which we shall refer only briefly and in passing. Firstly, we notice the heroic defence of the legitimacy of African traditional religions and their hegemonic field. Inspite of all the energies expended in this effort these religions have lost the struggle for exclusive ideological and spiritual control of the Black community. Secondly, as a consequence of the loss of control to which we referred, the African Independent Churches emerged as churches of compromise, in which elements of the Christian tradition as represented by the Bible and those of traditional religion as conveyed by African oral tradition are synthesized. Thirdly, the historic churches or colonial churches or even white churches which represent a total surrender of the African ideological field and a consequent total assimilation into European Christendom mushroomed as Blacks were converted into them. These three responses constitute the inexhaustible source from which present Black Christians and theologians

in South Africa draw their own different responses to the paradox presented by the Bible in a situation of unabating oppression and disinheritance of the indigenous people of South Africa. I wish now to move on to a discussion of the present state of the paradox we referred to above under the heading:

Contemporary paradox: the Bible as a problem as well as a solution

The paradoxical nature of the Bible is not only inherent. It is also external. It derives from another concrete paradox, i.e. the paradox of racist oppression and the exploitation of black people by white people. It also derives from a religious paradox – that the overwhelming number of people from both races are Christians who swear on the Bible and pledge allegiance to Jesus the Messiah and his teachings. It is internationally recognized that the forebears of the present white Christians used the Bible to justify white superiority and the right of whites to be masters over Blacks. Hence the well- known partnership between the gun and the Bible. Even the present generation of white Christians continue to use the Bible in many of their efforts to resist change. What is worse, they even launch endless Christian revival campaigns to passify Black resistance to oppression. When Black christians see all these conservative ad reactionary efforts and hear the Bible being quoted in support of reactionary causes they realize more and more that the Bible itself is indeed a serious problem to people who want to be free.

Many Black Christians through the ages have tried to locate and solve this problem of the Bible in many different ways. The most commonly held approach has been to accuse oppressor-preachers of *misusing* the Bible for their oppressive purposes and objectives. This misuse is based, it is argued, on misinterpretations of biblical texts to support or promote oppressive intentions.

It is clear that this critique is based on the assumption that the Bible is essentially a book of liberation. This assumption is held in spite of the obvious presence in the Bible of texts, stories and books which can only serve an oppressive cause. This argument, which is generally held by trained theologians who have been brought into the ideological universe of the dominant and oppressive Christian world and accepted it, is not completely based on fact. We will concede that this misinterpretation has indeed been done. But this is the case with some texts and certainly not all. It could easily be done only with texts that already appeared to be written to promote a different cause namely, the cause of liberation. We contend that there are stories and texts which are basically oppressive and whose interpretation (not misinterpretation) only serves the cause of oppression. On the contrary it is (in fact) their interpretation and use for liberation that would constitute misinterpretation and misuse. There are numerous texts which have long disqualified themselves in the eyes of oppressed people. We can refer to the well-known Pauline position on slavery and on the social position and behaviour of women. We think that in the light of this textual reality formally-trained hermeneutists and exegetes of the downtrodden should abandon the ideologically-motivated concept of the unity of the Bible as well as the assumption that it is a book of liberation per se. They should join those grassroot Christians who made the necessary distinctions

long ago and identified their texts and used them to the exclusion of others.

In many cases the problem of the Bible has been transferred to the area of ethics or the practical concretization of biblical teaching. In this attempt to solve the dilemma many downtrodden Christians have accused many preachers and racist whites of not practising what they preach. Again that may well be the case as far as certain texts, that are ambiguous or broad enough to allow for many options at a practical level, are concerned. We want to argue that there are texts, stories and traditions in the Bible which lend themselves to only oppressive interpretations and oppressive uses because of their inherent oppressive nature. And that no amount of textual surgery or hermeneutic juggling and semantic gymnastics can change that. In fact all surgical attempts to transplant the blame or stretch the interpretation to "save" or "co-opt" these oppressive texts for the oppressed only serve the interests of the oppressors who desire to have the oppressed under the same cultural, spiritual and ideological as themselves because they are in control of it. Instead of pursuing these diversionary paths oppressed Christians and theologians have to acknowledge the reality of this problem, assess its gravity, commit themselves to search for its solution and chart a new and independent approach to the biblical text, as well as a more relevant epistemological cause.

On the other hand, when many Black Christians read their history of struggle carefully, they come upon many Black heroes and heroines who were inspired and sustained by some passages and stories of the Bible in their struggle, when they read and interpreted them in the light of their Black experience, history and culture. They could consequently resist dehumanization and the destruction of their faith in God the liberator. It is this noble Black Christian history that helps to bring out the other side of the Bible, namely, the nature of the Bible as a book of hope for the downtrodden.

A careful reading of the experiences and witness of the early church confirms the correctness of the experiences of our people concerning the usefulness of the Bible as a book with a message of survival, resistance and hope. As we all know, the weakest, neglected, poor and marginalized people in Palestine at the time of Jesus felt attracted to Jesus' practices and message about his God and human life. What Jesus taught and did benefitted them materially and spiritually and gave them a reason for hoping for a different future and believing in their right to a decent human existence. It is no accident that after Jesus' departure this first Christian community structured and organised their communal and material life in the manner in which Acts 4 relates. This was a thoroughly practised structure of material survival and basis for hope for the weak and poor in that threatened community at that historical period and those imperial economic circumstances. At a spiritual and ideological level Jesus had given them a new way of reading the Old Testament and understanding their God. With this new way they could counteract the official reading of the Old Testament as well as the dominant view of God as the God of the law who demands total and blind obedience or else .... Against this view they witnessed to a God who delights in the salvation of people, the removal of their burdens and not in their destruction. They could hold onto a gracious God who is merciful to

the weak and the blind who fall continuously or lose their way in the socio-economic and political jungle. Jesus also brought them to a God who champions the cause of the victims of people's inhumanity to the point of suffering and the cross.

It is abundantly evident that this basic social and theological position was modified during the period of missions into Europe and other areas of the Mediterranean basin or of the Roman Empire. In this expansion of the church the interpretation of the basic text – the praxis of Jesus and its translation into concrete social structures, relations and attitudes also changed. For example, the original communism of the first community gave way to tolerance of economic disparities, with the proviso that the poor should not suffer from their lack of material possessions. In spite of these modifications which continued to be made up to the point of Constantinian compromise, the position of the earliest Christian community remained as the reference point in understanding the praxis of Jesus. Every Christian generation could go back to it in search of a liberative approach to the biblical text.

This new insight becomes a source of encouragement to contemporary Blacks to assert their claim on the Bible as a weapon of ideological and spiritual struggle for liberation. As they assert this claim a new kind of struggle ensues, namely, the struggle for the Bible or, to be more precise, the struggle for control of the Bible.

This new struggle is accepted not as a substitute or alternative to the physical one but in addition to it. It is realized that the physical struggle for control of the material means of subsistence has to be complemented by a struggle for control of the Bible that contains the means for ideological and spiritual subsistence. But since the Bible is an ecumenical document part of which is even shared with adherents of the Jewish religion, it will be futile to expend a lot of energy and time in an effort to control it. This has been realized by Black theologians. What is within reach as a viable option is to insist on finding and controlling the tools of opening and interpreting the Bible as well as participating in the process of interpretation itself. The dawning of this consciousness thrust Black theologians into the centre of what Harvey Cox calls the "age-old hermeneutical class struggle" which is a struggle to resist and contest the interpretation of scripture by theologians who represent Christians of the dominant race and political order. This is how our version of Black Theology emerged as a broad theological framework within which the new hermeneutic operates. But here again the epitemological break with dominant European theological language and methods was very difficult to effect due to the many centuries of enslavement to the hermeneutical yoke of our oppressors. Many Black theologians continue to slip back to the use of the dominant liberal hermeneutics, thus confirming the assertion made by Anthony Mansueto that "existential or religious commitment to social revolution will not substitute for scientific analysis of the valence of a tradition in the class struggle."[3] This process of one step forward and two steps backwards in the hermeneutical area is a clarion call for hermeneutical vigilance on the part of the entire community of black theologians lest the gains which have been made in this area be lost because as Archie Mafeje says "clear identification of issues (including theological issues) is as impor-

tant as fighting in the streets or in the mountains".[4]

Some people will undoubtedly argue that this hermeneutical option is not the only one, nor even the best one. They'll suggest that the best among the available options is to disavow the Christian faith and consequently be rid of the obnoxious Bible. And indeed many Black people especially the youth have gone further than Steve Biko who asked rhetorically whether the decolonization process should not be accompanied by a process of the dechristianization of Africa – a process which if successfully accomplished, would remove the Bible from Africa. Young blacks have categorically identified the Bible as an oppressive document by its very nature and to its very core. Hence the refusal of all oppressors in South Africa and elsewhere to part with it. They have zealously campaigned for its expulsion from the oppressed Black community but with little success. And this is largely due to the fact that no easily accessible ideological silo or storeroom is being offered to the social classes of our people that are desperately in need of liberation. African traditional religions are too far behind most blacks while Marxism, is to my mind, far ahead of many blacks,[5] especially adult people. In the absence of a better storeroom of ideological and spiritual food, the Christian religion and the Bible will continue for an undeterminable period of time to be the haven of the Black masses par excellence.

In this situation of very limited ideological options, Black theologians who are committed to the struggle for liberation and are organically connected to the struggling Christian people, have chosen to honestly do their best to shape the Bible into a formidable weapon in the hands of the oppressed instead of just leaving it to confuse, frustrate or even destroy our people.

A hermeneutic for the liberation of the Bible

It is an open secret that Black people have, ever since the Bible was brought to them, asserted their right to appropriate and interpret it according to their socio-economic, cultural and religious needs. And this they have done in spite of concerted opposition from those who brought it. Guided by these interests they have appropriated the Bible selectively and critically. Only portions, texts and stories of the bible which were regarded, in the light of these interests, to be supportive of the immediate and long term goals of the majority of that religious community were appropriated. Those portions, texts and stories of the Bible which were seen to be clearly opposed to their communal concern for individual and communal survival were ignored or rejected outrightly. These Black Cristians did this informal hermeneutical work without any feelings of guilt for allegedly dismembering the canon of scripture. Neither did they feel that their faith would be weakened by this exercise. Instead they felt that that was the most responsible way of being authentically African and truly Christian at the same time – without dishonouring their creator and saviour.

In this hermeneutical work the social context is brought into a dynamic and fruitful interaction with the Bible by these untrained Black hermeneutists. The progressive elements of the Black life experience, history and culture interact with the progressive life experience, histories and cultures of some biblical communities. Other life experiences, histories and cultures of

other biblical personalities, and communities are frowned upon and rejected on the grounds of either being unproductive or counter-productive. Intuitively most pious Black Christians at the present stage of the struggle for freedom will, for example, identify with Moses and the Hebrew slaves as they engage in the long and bitter struggle to undermine the ancient Egyptian economy and weaken the Pharaonic political grip on them. In the light of the internal and external difficulties encountered by Black Christians on our national "exodus" Black exegetes are attracted to the stories about the difficulties of the desert journey to the biblical promised land. The prophetic interventions when things went wrong also captivate the minds of the Black Christian community. These and many other areas of the Bible constitute the canon for Christians at this stage of our "exodus" The history of theology has indisputable evidence which proves that the de facto canon of a particular Christian community is determined, among other factors, by the context and challenges of the historical trajectory of that community. The same applies to the South African theatre of Christian life and political struggle. Black theologians who are organically connected to the above Christian hermeneutical communities but who also stand with both feet in the liberation struggle do not frown on this hermeneutical approach of lay Christians. On the contrary they lift the above hermeneutical exercise to a higher formal level. In a positive response to Anthony Mansueto, they search for analytical tools that can be helpful in the search of Black Christians for the right hermeneutical links in the Bible. Using these analytical tools as members of a silenced, marginalized and sometimes ignored race, they discover the silenced, ignored and marginalized people in the Bible and develop an affinity with them. They also discover the text behind the text of the Bible – a text that has been silenced but one that speaks through this silence about the struggles of the silenced and marginalized people of the Bible. As members of a people whose story of pain, fears and hopes has been suppressed, they are enabled, by their physical and psychological scars, together with the analytical tools they have chosen, to discover the suppressed and forgotten stories of the weak and the poor of the Bible. These seem, according to them, to be the stories wherein God is identifying with the forgotten and the weak and is actively retrieving them from the margins of the social world. It is through these stories that God the creator of humans is manifested as the God of the oppressed and accepted as such. This creator God acts incarnately in Jesus to end the rampant enmity in creation and restore real humanity to people. Only the reading of these stories of the downtrodden God among the downtrodden of this world strengthens the tormented faith of the oppressed of our time, as well as enhancing the quality of their commitment to the physical struggle for liberation. This discovery constitutes the liberation of the Bible from the clutches of the dominant in the Christian fold who impose the stories that justify their victories onto the oppressed.

Read by Dr. Takatso Mofokeng at an international congress on AFRICA AND THE BIBLE held at Cairo on 14th – 21st August 1987 and organized by the THE ECUMENICAL ASSOCIATION OF AFRICAN THEOLOGIANS (EATWOT).

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

Dr Timothy L.L. Dlamini*

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 organizations[2] 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 Schroeder[7] 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 resposibilities – 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).

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The Christian's Political Responsibility (or the Christian attitude to the state

by Mnyama Sizwe*

In view of the present conflict between Church and state and the allegations made by certain politicians that certain church leaders have overstepped their limits it has become necessary to examine the New Testament material that has a bearing on the political responsibility of the christian. The passage that is most commonly abused by the government and its supporters is Romans 13:1-7.

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement

For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of him who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval,

for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer.

Therefore one must be subject, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.

For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing.

Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.

We shall examine this passage sentence by sentence: "*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities*": "*Governing authorities*" are governments, civil authories (the state). *hyperechusais* (supreme) means the higher grades of authority. (cf. 1 Tim. 2:2 en hyperochē ontes = "those in authority").

hypotassesthō = The verb *hypotassesthai* (used also in v. 5) is a key word in this section. It is usually assumed that this word means "to obey", and it is in this sense that the government and its supporters use it. In the New Testament it occurs thirty times and in the majority of cases obedience is not the predominant idea. In 1 Cor. 16:16 it is used to indicate the proper attitude of a christian to the leaders of the church. But in Eph. 5:21, it is used to show a *reciprocal* obligation: *hypotassomer allēlois en phobō Christou*. Significantly Calvin's Comment on Eph. 5:21 reads:

"God has so bound us to each other, that no man ought to avoid subjection. And where

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love reigns, there is a mutual servitude. I do not except even Kings and governors, for they rule that they may serve. Therefore, it is very right that he should exhort all to be subject to each other."[1]

In a democracy there are areas of life where the rulers subject themselves to the will of the people. C.E.B. Cranfield puts it this way:

"... a King, if he be a christian, ought to regard his meanest subject as superior to himself in the sense of having a greater claim on him than he has on himself, since his meanest subject is Christ's representative to him."[2]

Even if we restrict the meaning of the word *hypotasesthai* to mean that the subject must obey the rulers, it still does not mean unconditional obedience to the rulers. A responsible christian will obey the rulers so far as such obedience does not conflict with God's laws. When it does conflict with God's laws he will seriously and responsibly disobey the laws of the state. Like Peter and the apostles he will say: "We must obey God rather than men". Therefore, Tutu, Boesak, Chikane and a host of lesser luminaries are right when they tell this government: "We must obey God rather than men". Moreover, the christian has a duty to see to it that the state rules justly; and that every citizen has a responsible share in governing, that is, in voting responsibly in parliamentary elections. In order to use his vote responsibly the christian will make himself informed about government policies and political issues. Thus he will be able to support just policies and oppose unjust ones.

"*For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.*"

When Paul wrote these words the Emperor, Nero, was ruling well, with the help of his Provincial governors, magistrates and the army. He had not yet begun to persecute christians. At that time the government benefited the church. There was peace throughout the empire and christian workers, like any other people within the empire, had the protection of the government. Christians admit that government is an order of creation instituted by God for the olderly running of human society.

Paul here was writing from the background of the Jewish theocracy where the king (Saul, David, Solomon, etc) was appointed by God and anointed by God's prophet. This includes even pagan kings like Cyrus who is called God's "anointed" and is addressed by God as "my shepherd."[3] Paul and the christians of his day had to deal with a pagan government but they still had to acknowledge it as divinely appointed. God who is Lord of human history is Lord and ruler of all nations. Therefore, the authorities that do exist have been sanctioned by him for his own purpose. This does not mean, however, that God under – writes all that governments do. Certainly the acts of Hitler, and Amin and the apostles of apartheid cannot claim God's sanction.

A point which is often over-looked by the advocates of unquestioning obedience to the state is that being "instituted by God" puts a heavy responsibility on the shoulders of rulers. They are accountable to God for the trust which he has committed to them. When they abuse this trust it is the duty of God's prophet to tell them so, and to point out to them the limits of their authority.

1. *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, tr. by T.H.L. Parker, Edingurgh, 1965, p.204.
2. *C.E.B. Cranfield: The Service of God*, London, (1965) p. 662.
3. Isaiah 44:28; 45:1.

"The state exists for the sake of men, women and children, not they for the sake of the state." The state exists to serve the best interests and welfare of its people, especially the underprivileged and the disadvantaged.

"*... he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed.*"

This does not mean that to resist the government is necessarily to resist God himself. It has been stated above that in certain circumstances obedience to God implies disobedience to the laws of the land. According to J.A.T. Robinson: "It is just when the state becomes identified with the demonic forces that it is *not* to be obeyed."[4] Such disobedience may sometimes mean active resistance to the state.

When a government is guilty of tyranny, when it denies human rights to some of its people, and when it commands what is forbidden by God, or forbids what God commands, then christians may disobey or resist such a government knowing fully well what the consequences may be since governments have the power of life and death over their subjects.

"For rulers are not a terror to good conduct ... For he is God's servant for your good ... to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer."

The assumption here is that governments always support good conduct and punish the wrongdoer. No account is taken of the possibility that the government may be so unjust as to punish good conduct and support the wrongdoer. There are instances in South Africa at the present time where the peace-makers are in detention and the killers go free. It is worth remembering that both Paul and Peter were eventually condemned and put to death by the Roman government for doing good.

"*For the same reason you also pay taxes ... Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due.*"

Because christians know the place of governments in the divine purpose they pay taxes. They know also that they are under obligation to pay taxes to the state in return for the protection and other amenities which the state provides. No state can function without financial support from its citizens. But, as Calvin puts it, governments ought to behave in a way worth of God's "officials" and "to remember that all that they receive from the people is public property, and not a means of satisfying private lust and luxury."[5] A citizen may, in certain circumstances refuse to pay a particular tax.

That christians should pay taxes goes back to traditions about Jesus. One such tradition is recorded in Matthew 17:24-27 who alone records the incident when the collectors of the half-shekel tax went to Jesus' home in Capernaum and found Peter alone. They asked Peter if Jesus did pay the tax. Peter's reply was that Jesus did, in fact, pay the tax. And when Jesus came home he initiated the following conversation with Peter:

"Simon, what is your opinion? Who pays duties or taxes to the kings of this world? The citizens of the country of the foreigners?

"The foreigners," answered Peter.
"Well, then," replied Jesus, "that means that the citizens don't have to pay. But we don't want to offend these people. So go the lake and drop in a line. Pull up the first fish

4. J.A.T. Robinson: *Wrestling with Romans*, London, 1979, p.139.
5. Calvin: op. cit. p.284.

you hook, and in its mouth you will find a coin worth enough for my temple-tax and yours. Take it and pay them our taxes."

So as a citizen Jesus paid the tax and encouraged his followers to do the same, Christians today have an obligation to pay tax. But they also have an obligation to see to it that benefits accruing from the payment of tax are justly distributed to all citizens who pay tax.

In South Africa all citizens are taxed on the same basis since 1984, but do not derive the same benefits from the paying of tax.

For example, payment of pensions is based on racially differentiated scales with Africans receiving the lowest benefits. Social services, such as roads, sanitation, water, lighting etc, are the poorest for Africans. Moreover, Africans are taxed, without representation in the central parliament which makes the executes laws for everybody. William Pitt told the British Parliament that "taxation without representation is tyranny."[6]

Paul must have known from tradition the incident concerning the payment of taxes to Caesar which is reported by all the Synoptic Gospels: (Matthew 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26): Clearly this was a burning issue at the time. Many Jews had refused to recognize the legitimacy of the authority of a foreign ruler over them, and therefore refused to pay taxes to the Roman Government. Whether he answered the question positively or negatively he was sure to fall foul of either the Jewish masses or the Roman authorities. As is well-known the reply of Jesus to their tricky question was:

This saying is often misinterpreted to mean that secular and spiritual matters should be kept apart. This was certainly not the aim of Jesus who knew the Jewish theocratic background, where there was no distinction between the secular and the spiritual. In his life and teaching Jesus never made this separation. What the saying meant was that the Jews should pay their taxes to Caesar who was responsible for their welfare as citizens and give their ultimate loyalty to God who is responsible for the whole of their lives. The worship which some gave to Caesar in Emperor Worship rightly belongs to God who alone is our object of worship. Noteworthy also is the observation of Tertullian that even Caesar is made in the image of God.

Christians do not deny that they have a duty to respect and honour their rulers. Thoughts similar to Romans 13:1-7 are found also in I Peter 2:13-17; and Titus 3:1-2

In I Timothy 2:1-2 christians are urged to *pray* "for kings and all who are in high positions." Christians have done this from the early days of the church inspite of virulent persecutions by the Roman government. As early as 197 A.D. Tertullian wrote:

"We christians are always interceding for all the Emperors. We pray for them long life, a secure rule, a safe home, brave armies, a faithful senate an honest people, a quiet world – and everything for which a man and an Emperor can pray."[7]

Unlike the Romans passage which has been subjected to a variety of interpretations, Revelation 13, has generally been accepted as a condemnation of the state. Nevertheless all political power is the gift of God. Here the Roman state has over-reached itself. By demanding Emperor Worship it abbrogates to itself that which

6. Quoted in C. de K. Fowler and G.J.J. Smit: *New History for Senior Certificate and Matriculation*, Cape Town, n.d., p.6
7. Quoted from R. Owen: *A Guide to Romans*, London, 1975, p.170.

by right belongs to God. Therefore, it is called "The Beast". It has ceased to be human and has become bestial.

To conclude then Christians accept that the state is part of God's arrangement for the well-being of human society. But not all government laws and policies are in line with the christian ethic. When such laws and policies conflict with the christian conscience the christian has a duty to resist. As Martin Luther King once wrote: "To disobey such a law is to show the highest respect for law."[8] Therefore, civil disobedience to unjust laws may be a christian duty.

During the American War of Independence an American wrote: "Rulers are bound to rule in the fear of God and for the good of the people; and if they do not, then in resisting them we are doing God service."[9]

The Significance of the Homoousios in Patristic Thinking and in Our Time

Dr S. Dwane*

In the year 325 C.E., the Emperor Constantine convened the Council of Nicea as to deal with a controversy sparked off by the teaching of one called Arius, a presbyter of the Church in Alexandria. It was about the year 318 that Arius began to make his influence felt in Alexandria. It would appear that his fundamental assertion emphasised of God the Father as the absolutely unique and transcendent being, the unoriginate Source. For him the Father alone is unbegotten, alone eternal, alone without beginning, and alone ruler and judge. Arius took monotheism very seriously, and wanted to rule out any possibility that Jesus might be another divine being. The Old Testament prophetic tradition had witnessed against the polytheism of the ancient world, and there could be no going back on that. Arising out of this is the belief that the being of God cannot be communicated to another, His *ousia* or substance is unique, transcendent, and indivisible. For if any being were to participate in the Father's divine nature, then there would be a duality or even plurality of divine beings. God would then be divisible and not unique.

From the above Arius deduced yet another proposition which, when taken to its logical conclusion has far reaching theological implications. If God is unique and indivisible, then everything else which exists must have come into being not by way of communication of his being to another, but by an act of creation. Since God the Father alone is uncreated, and since he created all else besides, not out of his own being, but out of nothing, then it follows that the Son is also a creature called into being out of nothing. Arius did allow a measure of difference between the Son, and the rest of Creation. The son alone, he maintained, was created outside time, though of course he could not be co-equal with the Father, as that would entail two self-existent and unoriginate sources. There would then be no ultimate source of being, no first cause, and God's sovereignty would be called in question. The Son therefore must be a finite being who cannot comprehend the infinite God. His famous way of putting is: "There was when he was not". Athanasius quotes the following from Arius: "The Father remains ineffable to the Son, and the Word can neither see nor know His Father perfectly and accurately ... but what He

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knows and sees He knows and sees in the same way and with the same measure as we know by our own powers".[1] Consequently, the title 'Son of God' is for Arius, merely a symbol which designates the bestowal of honour upon one who led a perfect and meritorious life.

Faced with all this, the Nicene Fathers had to repudiate Arius, and condemn his teaching, and in response to it, to construct the orthodox answer. There are a number of issues involved in the dispute between Arius and the Council. The first and most important one is his doctrine of the Person of Christ which cut across the church's affirmation that he is the Son of God pre-existently from all eternity, and, as such, very God of very God. The church had arrived at this position after a long process of careful and prayerful reflection upon the teaching of Holy Scripture as a whole, and upon its own life of worship and witness to the incarnate life of the risen and ascended Lord. The Arian doctrine of the Person of Christ therefore called in question not only the outcome of the Church's reflection, but more seriously, the fountain from which it derives its life and inspiration.

It could be argued that Arius did not challenge the authority of the Scriptures themselves, but only particular interpretations of the Scriptures which were current in the Church of his time, and which did not, in his opinion, have the monopoly of the truth. One has to admit that the Arian doctrine of the Person of Christ is an attempt to give expression to certain fundamental biblical affirmations. The one is the strict monotheistic faith which Christianity inherited from Judaism, and the other is the fact of Jesus' humanity.

It was his attempt to reconcile these two principles which led Arius to his theological position. However, the weakness of the Arian position is that it does not adequately account for the impression made by Jesus on his followers, that, in what he said and did, and supremely in what he was, he radiated uniquely to man, God's love for the world, and his sovereign rule over it. The claims which Jesus made for himself could only be made by one who either had an intimate relationship with the Father, one who could address God as Abba, or by a crank with delusions of grandeur. If Jesus had been the latter, no more would have been heard about him after what would have been a mighty crash and an open exposure on Good Friday. On philosophical grounds the Arian heresy simply cannot stand up to scrutiny. For if Christ is before time and yet a creature, he is a kind of demiurge, a sort of cross between divinity and creatures. Monotheism is thereby undermined by one such lesser deity. Once the floodgates are opened, what is there to stop the postulation of other lesser divine beings brought into being in the same way, and entrusted with a plethora of responsibilities to be undertaken between creation and consummation?

The second question raised by Arius' teaching has to do with soteriology. Athanasius thought of salvation as divinisation. The Son of God in other words became man in order to make humanity divine. It is a nice thought for the oppressed and the underprivileged to entertain. But it is an idea to which I personally do not subscribe. I

1. See Kelly, Early Christian Creeds, p. 233

do not, however, propose to go into all my reasons for not accepting the idea of salvation as divinisation because that is not the issue at stake. Whether one understands salvation as divinisation or as humanization, the point at stake is that it comes from God. We have to go back therefore to the Athanasian affirmation that for salvation to be real, Christ must have been fully human and fully divine. Amongst many other things, salvation must entail the restoration of man to full communion with God, an act which calls, not just for a divine decree, but for a personal involvement of God with his creation. The work of salvation comes from above, but it has to be accomplished within the ambiguities of space and time. It is only as God with us and as one of us that he can rescue us from the quagmire of sin, and the punishment of death, and so restore our brokenness. This is the work of God himself which he cannot delegate to another, lesser being. The Athanasian formula therefore that Christ is and has to be fully human and fully divine meets the requirement that the initiative for salvation is God's, but that he has to work it out and accomplish it in our situation as one of us, Immanuel. The Arian Christ does not meet this requirement because, according to his scheme, God is out there, and in his remoteness he is not able to reach us. Jesus is yet another messenger, one of the prophets perhaps, but he is not God with us and for us.

The third difficulty raised by the teaching of Arius is that it reduces God to a monad, and thereby undermines the doctrine of the Trinity. For if Christ is not God the Son in the fullest sense, neither is the Holy Spirit. To reach such a position one needs to do a lot of explaining away of what the New Testament has to say, a procedure which, I suspect, would put a considerable strain on the evidence.

The fourth and final issue has to do with the fact that God in the Arian scheme of things becomes the recipient of Christ's meritorious work. It's Pelagianism before Pelagius, and in no sense can one say that it is God acting graciously in Christ for the benefit of his creatures. There is no room for grace, but salvation has to be attained through good works.

In dealing with the teaching of Arius and all that it entails, the Council of Nicea had dual task; first of stating that the Arian position was not consonant with the thinking and the formulations of the primitive church, and secondly the task of reformulating the earlier affirmations in contemporary idiom in order to meet the new situation adequately. Here was a challenge to be relevant and contextual. The Council Fathers found that they could no longer rely upon the method of using certain biblical passages to settle the issue, because the Arians had a way of interpreting those same passages to suit their case. The Arians approached Scripture with a set of presuppositions which were quite different from those of the Orthodox party, and the latter found the exercise of direct appeal to what had been considered to be weighty evidence a futile exercise. A different kind of strategy had to be devised. Consequently, the full weight of the Council's response to Arius rested upon its interpretation and usage of the word *homoousios*, a word which had some unfortunate associations, and therefore a measure of stigma attached to it. The first stumbling block was the fact that Arius himself had used it in his denial of the Son's divinity. The Son, Arius asserted, does not share the *ousia* of the

Father. Maurice Wiles observes that this distinction of the Son from the Father was for Arius "the necessary means of giving expression to the essential transcendence of the Father over everything else, including the Son".[2] Another person to use *homoousios* was Origen who borrowed it from the gnostics, through whom it had joined the currency of Christian terminology. Origen used this term in a generic sense when he referred to the "community of substance" between the Father and the Son. He maintained that the emanation is *homoousios* with the body from which it emanates. Therefore, the Father and the Son participate in the same kind of essence or reality. There is a certain measure of subordination in Origen's doctrine of God which is exploited to the full by Arius. He speaks of the Father as the *Arché* or Source, and of the Son as *deuteros Theos*, God by participation in the Father's essence. But in his own thinking *homoousios* designates kinship between Father and Son.

Another group of people who used this term, and whose association with it is unfortunate, are the Sabellians. They are reported to have made a formal complaint to the Pope against Dionysius of Alexandria in which, amongst other things, they accused him of failing to describe the Son as *homoousios* with the Father.[3] The Sabellians who emphasized both the unity of the Godhead and the divinity of Christ regarded Jesus and the Holy Spirit as but temporary manifestations of the one divine being. For them *homoousios* became a watchword to safeguard their two concerns. *Homoousios* before the Council of Nicea then had come to be associated with Origen's subordinationist doctrine of the Person of the Trinity, the Sabellian idea of numerical identity, and of course the Arian assertion that the Son is not *homoousios* with the Father. Professor Wiles[4] argues that what determined the use of *homoousios* by the Council of Nicea was the fact that Arius had used it, and that therefore any attempt to counter his teaching would leave his position intact, if it did not enter his own battle ground, and make use of his own weapons. He says that it was not a happy choice, but "rather it was admitted with reluctance as being the only available means of excluding Arianism".[5] What then were the positive results which the Council achieved by including *homoousios* in its credal statement?

Arius had insisted that the Son is not *homoousios* with the Father, but that on the contrary he is a creature brought into being out of nothing. On the other hand, the Orthodox teaching upheld by the Council was that the Son is fully divine, co-eternal with, and equal to, the Father. The Son is not merely like the Father, but is identical with the Father in all respects, except in his filial relationship with him. In his earthly ministry, God the Son renders total obedience to the Father, and by so doing cancels man's disobedience and restores him to communion with God. God the Son in his humanity accomplishes God's work of recreation and renewal.

Secondly, *homoousios* dealt Sabellianism a severe death blow. For the term in its generic sense implies a plurality of beings who nonetheless belong to the same category. It implies a plurality of hypostases because a member of a particular species can

2. See Wiles, The Making of Christian Doctrine, pp. 34-35
3. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, p. 133
4. Wiles, The Making of Christian Doctrine, pp. 33-36
5. Op. cit., p. 33

only be said to be *homoousios* when it is compared with other beings of its kind.

Thirdly, once the Church had accepted a modified version of monotheism, the way was opened for the Cappadocians in a subsequent era to formulate the doctrine of the Trinity more fully. Once it had been established that Jesus is the incarnate Son of God who shares the *ousia* of the Father, the Church could now turn to the exposition of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and ultimately of the Triune God. It could now do this without fearing to damage the fundamental assertion that God is one. For it had established that the diversity of the Persons of the one Godhead is within the context of a single undivided will to be the external reservoir of love which unites and makes life possible and meaningful.

God, the Council of Nicea teaches, is not one but three persons who together constitute reality in the ultimate sense.

Fourthly, *homoousios* created a much healthier climate for soteriology to flourish. It is, I believe, a mistake to presuppose that the chief concern of Arius was not soteriological, but philosophical and speculative. For the rest of the Church had its Christological affirmations heavily influenced by the salvation motif. It is therefore not unreasonable to suppose that Arius, presbyter, differed from the rest of the Church in that, having begun with a different perspective of the work of salvation from that of the Orthodox school, he arrived at a different Christological picture. If he rejected the notion of salvation as divinisation, he could well have had the idea that all that one needs is an intermediary through whom God out there reaches out to man down here. But, of course, as Athanasius so aptly puts it, "created beings cannot be saved by one who is himself a created being".[6]

God, in order to reach us, had to extend his own hand to us, and not the hand of one of his creatures. This, I believe, is the crux of the matter. Only the sovereign Creator can effect recreation and renewal. *Homoousios* has to do with the primacy of God's initiative and of his grace. As such it not only dealt with Arianism, but it also prepared the ground for a decisive victory against Pelagius in a subsequent encounter with heresy. We are saved not by pulling ourselves up by our own boot strings, but by God's graciousness to us, and the power which he himself supplies, to enable us to make the response of faith and thankful acceptance of what he has accomplished for us, in and through the life, death, and resurrection of his incarnate Son.

When *Nicea* used homoousios it planted a seed which was to take some time to grow and come to fruition. One of the reasons for this is the fact that in the patristic period, this word had another meaning which was prevalent at the time. It was a term used for individual substance, what Aristotle had intended by his "primary substance". In this sense, *ousia* was for all practical purposes treated as the equivalent of *hypostasis*. So for example Marcellus of Ancyra spoke of three *ousiai* in the Godhead, and St Basil's own formulation concurred with this.[7] The equation of these two terms in theology accounts for the fact that after Nicea, though the storm had subsided, the dust did not settle immediately. A polemic debate continued between Athanasius on the one hand, and Marcellus on the other. For Marcellus, to

6. See Wiles, op. cit., p. 97
7. See Kelly, Early Christian Creeds, p. 244

say that there are three *ousiai* in the Godhead was another way of saying God is three hypostases or Persons. Marcellus and his party therefore saw in the insistence by Athanasius upon *homoousios*, a tendency towards Sabellianism. On the other hand Athanasius regarded the teaching of Marcellus as polytheistic and therefore pagan. The debate was bedevilled by the fact that on both sides *ousia* and *hypostasis* were being used or understood as synonymous terms.

At the Council of Alexandria in 362 the impasse was not resolved, but at least the two sides explained to each other their respective positions, and so created an atmosphere of good will and better understanding. Athanasius explained how he was not a Sabellian, and the party led by Marcellus explained how they were not tritheists. It was the Cappadocian Fathers who made a positive advance in this debate by adopting the formula "one *ousia* in three *hypostases*".[8] It is therefore imperative that *homoousios* should be used in this context in the generic sense only, and that it be separated from *hypostasis*.

It is now sixteen and a half centuries since the Council of Nicea met and settled the dispute between Arius and the Orthodox party. The Council condemned Arianism, and came down firmly on the side of Athanasius by endorsing his teaching that the Son is of one substance with the Father. It is of course true to say that a lot of water has gone under the bridge since Nicea, but the debate concerning the uniqueness of Christ continues in at least two areas. On the one hand, faced with the phenomenon of flourishing world religions, the Christian Church has had to re-evaluate its claims for Christ, and modify some of its wild, and perhaps over zealous assertions. The assumption made by people like Karl Barth and Emmil Brunner in the previous generation that outside the Church there is no salvation, has had to give way to a more eirenic approach. Perhaps one of the characteristic features of our time is expressed in Eugene Hillman's 'The Wider Ecumenism' in which the author pleads for a new assessment of the position of Christianity in the contemporary religious scene. Dialogue with people of other religions, and the need for a common engagement with them on the socio-economic and political front, calls for a greater sensitivity and generosity, as well as for faithful witness to the Gospel. The one requires an acknowledgement of the fact that the Church is not itself the Kingdom, but only a provisional manifestation of the presence of God's rule on earth, while the other compels Christians to bear witness to Christ the light, and to invite non-Christians to participate more fully in the accomplished work of God in Christ. The wider ecumenical context therefore is one area in which there has to be a facing up to the implications of the statement that Christ is *vere Deus*, and as such, he confronts all people with the call of God to which the answer can only be a yea or nay.

On the other hand the search for an authentic expression of humanity with its tendency to focus more upon the Antiochene approach, calls for a full investigation of the extent to which Christ can be said to be human. For some people, the qualification 'without sin' poses a problem, seeing that sin is a key element in the understanding of emperical personhood. But then how could God's holiness and honour be party to human sin? There is a real dilemma here. For

8. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, p. 264

others who come in at a slightly different angle there is the matter of his natural sonship, and ours by adoption and grace. Maurice Wiles for instance argues in 'The making of Christian Doctrine' that *homoousios* becomes problematic at the point where it separates our humanity from Christ's. He maintains that if he is the unique Other, then surely his otherness must be one in degree and not in kind.

It is true that we cry with him 'Abba Father', and that as the New Adam, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood. But then it is precisely because he is one of us that he is able to be God with us, Immanuel. And it is his authority as God's Son which makes it possible for him to be the mediator of a new Covenant. In and through this man, God stands where we stand, and does his great work for us. Christ is not simply a channel through which God's grace comes to us, but he is God in action, loving and treating us graciously. As the New Adam, he is our brother, the first born among all creatures. But as the Eternal Word made flesh he is God in his majesty and sovereignty, the One who stands over against us as the Eternal Thou. This is the paradox of him who though rich yet for our sake became poor, the King whose crown is the crown of thorns and whose throne is the cross of shame. And here, I believe, is, for us the disenfranchised and dispossessed, the crux of the matter. The cross is such a powerful symbol to us precisely because it represents God himself suffering with us and for us. It is a constant reminder that his victory is heralded by the words of the man dying on the cross, his power is manifested in weakness. God himself knows what it is to suffer pain, anguish, and rejection. He knows this not by standing somewhere on the periphery of human experience as a dispassionate observer, but as himself the recipient of the cruellest forms of torture and torment. The Cross therefore is a sign of hope because the Son of God suffered and died there victoriously.

Suffering without hope can be cruel, obscene and seemingly pointless. Such was the agony and dying of the impenitent thief on Good Friday. But it can also be used by God in his overall plan for the world's healing, if it is borne in the name of Christ, and in hope. The faith of those who suffer makes all the difference because they know that the crucified Christ shares their affliction, and is therefore able and ready to give them a helping hand in their struggles. They know too that he is reliable and faithful to his promises, and will not let them down. For many generations Christians have leaned on this Rock, and have not been disappointed. That is why we in our generation are able to affirm the Nicene teaching that this man is God with us, Immanuel. He is the Good Shepherd who works tirelessly for the sheep. His name is 'Steadfast love' because we know him as the One who is always for us and will never turn against us even when he comes to us in judgement. We may not like Athanasius's choice of the word *homoousios*, but the fact of the matter is, it represents the truth that Jesus is equal to the Father as touching his divinity. A lesser being simply won't do either philosophically or for purposes of man's salvation.

J.N.D. Kelly: Early Christian Doctrines
Early Christian Creeds

G.L. Prestige: Fathers and Heretics
God in Patristic Thought

Maurice Wiles: The Making of Christian Doctrine

Book Reviews

Also appeared in *Missionalia*: 13:2, August 1985 pp. 84-85

The Crucified Among the Crossbearers
Mofokeng, Takatso A.
Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1983, pp. 273

Mofokeng's book, originally submitted as a doctoral thesis at the Theologische Hogeschool van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, constitutes an important step in the development of Black theology; it goes beyond the prolegomena that has characterized much of the publication so far by Black theologians, which merely called for the doing of Black theology rather than doing material theology itself. Mofokeng shows how Black theology can be done.

The work comprises five long chapters. In the first chapter, he critically analyses the sociopolitical factors that have given birth to Black consciousness as well as its theological correlate: Black theology. Both chapters are critical of traditional theology which supports the oppressive status quo, and are a manifestation of emergence of new Black subjectivity which struggles to fashion its own history and destiny. Mofokeng concludes the chapter by developing a Black Christology that is rooted and grounded in a thorough-going trinitarian understanding of God's involvement in history to redeem fallen humanity and to recreate it, thereby empowering even the oppressed peoples to become co-creators of history with God.

In chapter two, the author discusses Sobrino's Christology with a view to finding some help in developing Black Christology which is historical and concrete in response to the needs of the poor and oppressed Christians of today. He is attracted to Sobrino's focus on the historical Jesus whose life unfolded, matured and revealed God in conflict with historical forces at play with all their political, social, economic and religious contradictions in the Palestine of Jesus' time. In particular, Mofokeng draws our attention to Sobrino's dialectical interpretation of Jesus' life, characterized by temptation and attacks on his mission by those who benefitted from the status quo, and by Jesus' progressive overcoming of those attacks by facing the wrath of his attackers and by dying vicariously at the hands of his assissins. This dialectic was carried to its heights when Jesus suffered on the cross, dying a lonely death as one foresaken by God, and by his triumphant resurrection, thereby giving the oppressed a stubborn and militant faith and hope able to withstand their own historical oppressions and destructions. He concludes the chapter by comparing and contrasting the Christology of Sobrino and Black Christology, noting that the former is unhelpful in its overemphasis on the cross at the expense of the resurrection, because this fails to provide hope for Black South Africans who have experienced a "long Good Friday" at the hands of their oppressors.

In chapter three, Mofokeng discusses Barth's "high" Christology, noting that Barth's pastoral involvement at Safenwil Parish and political involvement during the World War II influenced and coloured his concern for a theology which advocated for the creation of a new human subjectivity so that men and women can become subjects in the creation of a new world of justice and freedom. He notes with deep satisfaction Barth's trinitarian grounding of Christology and its special emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus, from whose vintage point we come to understand the salvation and elevation of fallen humanity, thus creating new subjectivity in them through the Spirit so that humanity could become the agent of liberation. Mofokeng finds Barth's Christology relevant in our situation in which Black humanity has been shattered by oppression and alienation, because it declares that God can recreate them out their "nothingness", activate and empower and move them to some positive actions for justice and liberation. The emergence Black consciousness and Black theology in response to Black dehumanization are confirmations of this recreativity of God, according to Mofokeng' appropriation of Barth's theology.

Chapter four comprises a comparison of the Christologies of Sobrino and Barth, noting the strength and weakness of each, thus laying the foundation for Mofokeng's own development of Black Christology in chapter five. This is the chapter in which Mofokeng is at his best, and really makes a substantial contribution toward the construction of Black Christology. In a very persuasive way, he tries to show that Jesus was in solidarity with the poor, taking their side, accompanying them in their search for their humanity, and assuring them that the crosses they bear will not be in vain but will be rewarded with victory – in the same manner that he triumphed over evil through his resurrection from the dead. And this victory of resurrection is a source of inspiration and empowerment for oppressed peoples as they become the agents of their own history; it gives them faith against the destruction of faith, love against hatred, and hope against hopelessness and resignation.

This is a book worthwhile reading, even though it is not an easy book to read due to its complexity of expression and tortuous style.

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Also appeared in *Missionalia* 14:2, August 1986 pp. 114-115

A place in the Sun
Witvliet, Theo
Mary Knoll: Orbis and London: SCM Press, 1985. 1x+ 182 pp. $8.95

This volume is a courageous attempt to understand, interpret, and mediate various features of liberation theology of the Third World to the western Christian churches in which that theology has so far not struck a responsive chord. Indeed, Witvliet is doing to the European churches what Brown has done to the North American churches through his book *Theology in a New Key* (1978). In both books

there is a serious attempt to come to terms with what Third World Theologians are saying and to highlight what is of value in the theological claims of those theologians without compromising their critical stance.

Witvliet's book comprises seven chapters. Chapter 1 provides a very useful and perceptive analysis and gives useful insights about the historical contexts of the Third World that gave birth to this new theological phenomenon known as liberation theology. Chapter 2 looks at the methodological contribution of liberation theologians that led to a break with western theology and to the construction of an alternative liberation theology. Chapter 3 discusses the problem of racism both in North America and South Africa as well as the emergence of Black Theology in response to racial oppression. Chapter 4 provides a useful analysis of the problem of colonialism in Africa and the concomitant cultural and religious domination of Africans by the West. The chapter also discusses African theology as well as attempts at cultural liberation by Africans. The author also suggests ways and means by which South African Black Theology and African Theology could be brought into meaningful and creative relationship with each other. Chapter 5 critically looks at the hitherto unknown theology in the Caribbean in responsive to colonialization, slavery and domination. Witvliet concludes the Chapter with useful information about the emergence and contribution of non-Christian Rastafarian Movements in the Caribbean struggles for liberation. Chapter 6 discusses at lengthy the Latin American theology of liberation. This in my view is perhaps the best and perceptive chapter in the entire book as well as a good introduction to the contribution of Latin American theologians not only in their continent but also in the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians. Chapter 7 takes up Asian theology in the context of other Eastern World religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, etc. The author notes with deep insight the destructive features that characterize Asian theology, such as the theme of liberation and the inculturation of Christian religion in a non-Christian culture.

Although Witvliet has regrettably omitted the feminist theology of liberation for reasons that are not persuasive, this volume commends itself for its comprehensiveness, and courageous attempts to discuss such a broad topic as liberation theology. It is one of the best comparative studie on liberation theology to come out in print and I recommend it to all students of theology who want to come to terms with theological developments in the Third World.

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God's Creative Activity through the Law
Maimela, S S
(Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1984) pp. VIII + 241 R20.95

The Law-Gospel debate is one of the most fundamental issues in Protestant theology. Luther maintained that nobody who is unable to distinguish between Law and Gospel can call himself, a theologian while Barth attributed the failure of German theology during the Hitler-period to a separation of the Law from the Gospel.

The debate is one of the prime training grounds of theological thinking, compar-

able in complexity and consequence to the Christological and Trinitarian doctrines. To struggle through this problematic will be a foundation-laying exercise for students.

Maimela analyses the positions of the two main opponents in the debate during the 20th century, Barth and Elert. He handles the contrast with considerable expertise although there will always be differences of judgment in such complicated material.

After this analytical section Maimela proceeds with his own constructive statement in which, I believe, lies the strength of his work. He chooses the so-called civil use of the law, which was rather neglected in the debate between Barth and Elert, as his point of departure. This use of the law has had a traditional affinity with the doctrine of creation but the relation has always been somewhat foggy. Apart from that, both the civil use of the law and the doctrine of creation have traditionally been seen in rather static terms. By linking up the Old Testament concept of the creative command of God with the traditional doctrine of the *creatio continua* and the related doctrine of providence he comes to a concept of law which is the instrument of God's ongoing creative activity, a creativity in which man is involved.

The significance of this procedure lies in the following. Maimela adds a new perspective to the debate in that he approaches it from a novel angle. With that he opens up an avenue for a theological ethic based not on redemption (thus restricted to Christians) but on creation (thus common to all humankind). But he goes beyond similar traditional attempts by stressing creation as an ongoing dynamic process. By doing so he established an inner link between traditional Western theology and new trends such as Latin-American liberation theology – a link which has been missing in most cases. But he also attempts to avoid the traps of a "natural theology" by stressing that the inner rationale of God's creative activity is identical with the inner rationale of his redemption in Christ, viz. love.

Although a host of new problems emerge, I feel that this is a substantial contribution to the modern theological debate. As the first major work of an emerging black South African theologian it deserves to be read by us all.

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Jesus in Latin America
Sobrino, Jon
Maryknoll: Orbis Books. 1987. xvi & 189 pp. $11.95

The volume consists of 8 articles written between 1978 and 1982. Although they were written for different audiences, the articles overlap a great deal and constitute a unity because they all address the central question of who Jesus is and what his significance is for human life.

The author also provides useful resume for Chapters 1 and 2, spelling out their purpose, namely, to respond to and clarify questions and doubts generated by Latin American Christology, to defend it aganst wrongful attacks, and to make a

theoretical contribution to the question of the "historical" Jesus and its relevance for Latin America.

In Chapters 3-4, Sobrino addresses the relation between the Church and the kingdom of God, highlighting the messages which Jesus preached, namely the kingdom of God and its relation to justice issues and the transformation of unjust and oppressive world. Sobrino persuasively shows how Jesus struggled against sin and its social consequences in order to procure life in all its fullness for humanity, especially the downtrodden.

Chapters 5-8, are devoted to the relation between Jesus and the Christian life. With deep insight, Sobrino notes that Christian discipleship involves a double conversion to Jesus' gospel: It brings about a radical inner personal, transformation and gives rise to a Christian commitment towards the transformation of the sociopolitical and economic structures of society in favour of the poor and oppressed. Put somewhat differently, Sobrino argues that an intrinsic link should be made between faith and ethics, and between confession of faith in God and confession of justice in society. For only if such a link between personal conversion and Christian commitment to social justice is maintained, will it be possible for Christians to work jointly with God to build up the kingdom of God. In one of his perceptive statements, Sobrino writes: "Christ's Lordship is exercised by his followers in the repetition of God's deed in the raising of Jesus; it is exercised in giving life to history's crucified, in giving life to those whose lives are threatened. This transformation of the world and history in conformity with God's will is what gives actual form to Jesus' Lordship ... . Those who devote themselves to this live as risen in history". (p. 156).

Sobrino's book is a thought-provoking and balanced account of the spirituality of liberation theology which integrates faith and works.

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The Option for Inslusive Democracy: A theological-ethical study of appropriate social values for South Africa
by Bernard Lategan, Johann Kinghorn, Lourens du Plessis and Etienne de Villiers.
University of Stellenbosch:
Centre for Hermeneutics, 1987. 30pp.

Reviewed by Mokgethi Motlhabi

This booklet, published under the auspices of the Centre for Hermeneutics of the University of Stellenbosch, is divided into two main chapters. These chapters may in turn be dissected into three parts or sections. The first section analyzes and spells out what may be considered to be an acceptable quality of life in any society, with particular reference to South Africa. The second section adopts the principles outlined in the first section and further analyzes them into negative, unacceptable values and positive, acceptable values. It also describes the disturbing limitations in any attempt to bring the acceptable values into realization in South

Africa. The book concludes with an appendix of an experimental declaration of human rights.

The authors begin in a rather negative tone and conclude with the same tone after offering very encouraging views in the main body of their essay. After stating in the preface that even whites in growing numbers in this country now appear willing to abandon the system of apartheid, they caution that the "criteria of race and ethnicity have become so ingrained in people's value judgements and consequently entrenched in the structure of our society that a dispensation free from these criteria is hard to imagine." These words remain like a dark cloud in one's mind even as one is inclined to derive some encouragement from what follows. Then, as if to wipe out any lingering optimism once and for all, comes the conclusion that the positive values described should not be striven for hurriedly because of the great deal of mistrust and misunderstanding which have been entrenched through forty years of the apartheid regime.

At this stage one no longer knows what conclusion exactly to draw from the book as a whole. Nor can one help but feel that it is precisely this kind of "realism" – as often advocated – that helps perpetuate the apartheid system with its inherent evil. It also indicates the confines within which the authors themselves are able to operate in criticising the system from within as members of the white community.

Notwithstanding the sour taste with which one is left in the end, the central part of the book is a source of some hope for future reflection in the quest for solutions to apartheid and white domination. Here apartheid with its injustices – its inculcation of "man's" inhumanity to "man" – is denounced as being in opposition to God's law and plan for humanity. The authors openly advocate an open society based on the will of all the governed, with no race, colour, or any other form of negative criteria. They prescribe the limits of government in a manner reminiscent of Martin Luther's "Secular Authority: To What Extent It Can be Obeyed." Because all human beings are created equal by God, no human authority has the power to put some in a privileged position while others are given the status of an underdog: "In Christ there is neither bound nor free ...". Accordingly, all must enjoy freedom, human rights, state protection and provision of basic needs, as well as equality before the law. A government which is no longer for the good of all cannot be condoned, they conclude.

This booklet is certainly a must for all who are engaged in the search of a theological solution for South Africa's "man"-made problems. The authors must be commended for their positive recommendations and, at the same time, ruthlessly criticized for their hesitance and pessimism in endorsing obvious solutions.

Book Notes

An Agenda for Black Theology
Hermeneutics for social change
by Dr Bonganjalo Goba
Publishers: Skotaville Publishers, Johannesburg, 1987, 126 pp.
Price: About R14.50

Writing as a deeply committed christian within the heat of the Black struggle for liberation in South Africa, Dr Goba explores the rich resources of the Christian tradition and their relevance for this struggle. He further explores the importance of the struggle for liberation as a means of opening the eyes of Bible readers enabling them to see the involvement of God of the oppressed in historical struggles of the downtrodden, not only in biblical times but also in our own here and now. Through this hermeneutical exercise Dr Goba wishes to stimulate Christian participation in the struggle for liberation, a more intense reading of the relevant biblical texts as well as a critical reassessment of white theology that has failed to empower black people.

Beatific Comradeship. An Exegetical-Hermeneutical Study on LK 10, 25-37
by Dr Welile Mazamisa
Publisher: J H Kok-Kampen, The Netherlands, May 1987, 212pp/W Eerdmans, Grand Rapids (± July, 1988)

This is an exegetical-hermeneutical study concentrating on the interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan. Countless studies on this parable have seen the light of day, but the bulk of these works has emanated from the relatively wealthy capitalistic North, where it is more convenient to identify with the notion of a "charitable" Samaritan rather than with the idea of a wounded man on the side of the road.

The first part of the study deals with methodology in which the author discusses modern theories of literary analysis. Modern literary theories are discussed to point out the correlation between biblical interpretation and literary theory, although the former is not a subcategory of the latter. Secondly they are discussed because issues concerning the temporal dimension of texts and their actions, the function of narrative, as well as the class status of the reader, are equally relevant to biblical and literary hermeneutics.

The biblical text is not only a record of theological statements; it is language and literature as well. Literature goes beyond merely projecting a self-contained or self-referring world. As recorded language it reflects the close interrelationship between language and society. In this respect, it is logical that some of the rules

and theories that apply to literature will also apply, mutatis mutandis, to the biblical text.

The second part of this study is analytical. An examination and survey of the interpretation of the parable at hand is undertaken. What is specific about the parable is that the story is not presented in the language of myth; rather it is presented in the language of human history, of the profane, that of open drama. In the parable Luke's Jesus portrays a *skandalon*, but the scandal is not that the priest and the Levite pass by the wounded man. What is new in the parable is that the Samaritan, a member of a despised community, does something different from what Samaritans are expected by the Jews to do when they encounter a wounded Jew lying in a ditch. What is new is that he does loving kindness and thereby becomes a comrade to the wounded man.

Further, the work looks at the interpretation of the parable by various communities. The reading of Lk 10:25-37 by the under-class of Solentiname (Nicaragua) is used as an example of a materialistic reading. The parable becomes human as it is conveyed through a series of profane interpretations and politically engaged allegory. It takes flesh in the womb of the daily experiences of this community and comes to birth as a materialistic reading of Scripture. Moreover, this reading is an example of reception-oriented hermeneutics as well. In this kind of hermeneutics the class position of the receptor/hearer is carefully considered. It is, therefore, no wonder that oppressed and exploited communities would tend to identify with the wounded man of the parable (e.g. the poor peasants of Solentiname before the Nicaraguan Revolution, p. 160, and the old woman in one of South Africa's Bantustans, p. 162).

Proclaim Freedom to my People
by S.S. Maimela
Publishers: Skotaville, Johannesburg, 1987, 152pp
Price: R15,00

It is an open secret that South African society is riddled with many contradictions, and foremost among them is the fact that we pride ourselves on being a Christian country; yet our society has fashioned, nurtured, tolerated and carried to its logical consequences one of the most brutal and oppressive social systems known to humanity: *Apartheid*. This political system of racial domination, created and upheld by White Christians, is one which is committed to the denial of human rights and liberty to the majority of South African citizens, especially those of the African ancestry, regardless of what the Gospel of Jesus might proclaim and teach to the contrary. In consequence, the history of South Africa has been marred by continuous racial clashes and deadly military confrontation as Whites struggled for the subjugation and domination of Blacks.

In order to maintain its position of dominance over the Black majority, the White minority has had to resort to ruthless means of suppressing Black political and economic dissent, however peaceful that dissent might be. Put somewhat differently, fearing that they might some day be toppled and subjugated by the Black majority, Whites not only turned their backs against Christian values best sum-

marized in the "Golden rule" (Mt 7:12, 22:39), but also lost faith in democracy and its rules of fair play.

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