

*Journal of*

**BLACK  
THEOLOGY**



**in South Africa**

**Vol. 1 No. 2**

**November 1987**

The **JOURNAL OF BLACK THEOLOGY IN SOUTH AFRICA** is published by the **BLACK THEOLOGY PROJECT** as a forum for the exchange of theological ideas and a contribution to the development of Black Theology in South Africa and elsewhere. The articles in this journal represent the views of the authors and not of the project, editorial board or publisher.

**EDITOR:** Takatso A. Mofokeng

**ASSOCIATE EDITOR:** Simon S. Maimela

**EDITORIAL BOARD:** Itumeleng J. Mosala  
Buti Tihagale  
Lebamang Sebidi  
Mokgethi Motlhabi

**CONTRIBUTING EDITORS:** James H. Cone, Professor of Systematic Theology, Union Theological Seminary, New York, U.S.A.

Cornel West, Professor of Philosophy and Religion, Union Theological Seminary, New York, U.S.A.

Jacqueline Grant, Professor of Theology, Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A.

N. K. Gottwald, New York Theological Seminary, New York, U.S.A.

Theo Sundemeier, University of Heidelberg, West Germany

Theo Witvliet, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

B. Goba, University of South Africa

Welile Mazamisa, University of Cape Town

G. M. Setiloane, University of Cape Town

Lizo Jafta, Federal Theological Seminary

**PUBLISHED BIANNUALLY** in May and November.

#### **Subscription Rates**

Southern Africa (including Zambia, .....	
Zimbabwe & Malawi) .....	R10,00
Libraries .....	R15,00
Elsewhere .....	R15,00
Libraries .....	R25,00
Single copies .....	R4,00

**Correspondence and subscriptions may be sent to:**

**THE EDITOR  
P O BOX 287  
ATTERIDGEVILLE  
0008  
SOUTH AFRICA**

# JOURNAL OF BLACK THEOLOGY IN SOUTH AFRICA

November 1987

Vol I, No. 2

## EDITORIAL

## ARTICLES:

- Black Resistance to Apartheid  
Future Prospects – *Mokgethi Motlhabi* ..... 3
- The Social-Cultural Analysis of the Origins and Development  
of Black Theology – *Cecil Mzingisi Ngcokovane* ..... 13
- Following the Trail of Suffering: Black Theological Perspectives,  
Past and Present – *Takatso A. Mofokeng* ..... 21
- Black Theology in South Africa and North America:  
Prospects for the Future; Building of Alliances  
– *Itumeleng J Mosala* ..... 35
- The Emergence of Black Feminist Theology in  
South Africa – *Roxanne Jordaan* ..... 42

## BOOK REVIEWS:

- The Politics of Compassion*  
– by J Nelson-Pallmeyer  
reviewed by S A Maimela ..... 47
- Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr  
and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*  
– by David J Garrow  
reviewed by Mokgethi Motlhabi ..... 48
- The Humanistic Christology of Paul*  
– by J L Segundo  
reviewed by S A Maimela ..... 51

## BOOK NOTES:

- Education in Mission/Mission in Education*  
– by Bongani Mazibuko ..... 53
- Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*  
– by Itumeleng J Mosala ..... 53

# EDITORIAL

Black Theology is and has always been a dialogical theology. It emerged when black christians and theologians plucked up courage, broke their long theological silence and started to reflect enthusiastically and vocally on their communal efforts of breaking the stranglehold of the history of national humiliation in the light of scripture. Only when they asked their own burning theological questions from within the struggle to throw off their burden and personally searched the scriptures again and again for answers that could dry their tears and produce sweat instead, did Black Theology emerge. It is, in that sense and for that reason, a dialogical theology.

This theology evolved, grew and continued to change in response to various challenges and in different circumstances. It evolved and changed as black theologians here and in the diaspora engaged in a critical exchange of ideas among themselves on the correctness of formulations and urgency of questions. It continued to develop as they considered whether they had searched the scriptures deeply enough and listened obediently, humbly and attentively enough to the God of the oppressed.

This theology was also sharpened as a polemical theology and forced to mature quickly by constructive critique that came from non-black theologians who wished to express their theological solidarity that way.

All these dimensions of a dialogue which is still going on appear in the present set of articles. These articles, all but one, are the reworked papers which were read at a Black Theology consultation between a team of black South African theologians and pastors on the one side and black American theologians and pastors on the other. We reported briefly in our last issue on that consultation which was held at Union Theological Seminary, New York in November 1986. We are now, almost a year after it took place, in a position to offer you the South African side of the presentations. Consider this issue as an invitation to join in this dialogue.

# Black Resistance to Apartheid

## Future Prospects

by Dr Mokgethi Motlhabi\*

During the last five years much coverage has been given in the Western media to the black struggle for change in South Africa. Such coverage has often given the impression that blacks in that country are only beginning to take their oppression seriously and so to react to it accordingly. Whereas ten years ago there was similar coverage of unrest as a result of the Soweto school boycotts and their country-wide impact, the death in detention of black consciousness leader, Steve Biko, and the clampdown on twenty organizations, two newspapers and one periodical, the intervening years brought less and less coverage as the news became less spectacular and memories began to fade. The spectacular returned again in 1984 when we began once more to hear of mass murders by the police resulting from the Vaal rent boycotts, followed by the Langa incidents in the Cape six months later; when we heard of witch-hunts of suspected police informers who were invariably subjected to the notorious so-called necklace punishment; the state of emergency which was declared by the government in 1985 and then renewed and extended in 1986; and the resultant press clampdowns in 1986, which continue to this day.

During this period Bishop Desmond

Tutu, the most vocal leader against apartheid since the late seventies, was honored to become South Africa's second Nobel Peace Prize winner; apartheid was declared a heresy by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches through the instigation of Dutch Reformed Church minister and leader, Allan Boesak; and a multitude of demonstrations against apartheid occurred abroad in front of South African foreign missions, as well as at university campuses – symbolized by the erection of shanties. All these events have added to recent press coverage and but for the current news blackouts, there would be much more to learn about what in that part of the world are considered newsworthy events by Western press standards.

The fact that the Western press reports only sensational news from South Africa does not mean that black people there are for the most part doing nothing about their condition. Black resistance to white domination and subjugation is not a new development. Nor did it begin with the apartheid regime in 1948. In fact, resistance to white domination in South Africa began right from the start of colonialism when the Khoi people in the Western Cape abandoned trade with

---

\* *This paper was originally read to an undergraduate political science group in May, 1987, at the University of California in Los Angeles.*

---

Dutch traders as soon as they realized that the latter intended to settle and demand land for their use. This was after a fleet of the Dutch East India Company, under the leadership of Jan Van Riebeeck, had landed in the Cape in 1652. After this there followed eight so-called Kaffir Wars during the period when the colonists, now under British administration in the Cape, moved inland and began to displace people from their lands, creating borders to determine where they should be restricted, and allocating to themselves fertile and wet lands. The last armed revolts before the apartheid era occurred in 1881 and 1906 when Mampuru in the Transvaal and Bambatha in Natal made their unsuccessful attempts to stage resistance against foreign domination and their impending, final dispossession.

Early in the 20th century, after South Africa had been declared a Union under exclusive white rule, the blacks vainly continued their protests to Britain – the colonial overlord – against their legal subordination to complete white rule in their own land. Black political organizations were established all over the country to plead their cause at local level. Political negotiation and persuasion replaced armed resistance. It followed and continued to be supplemented by political journalism, which appealed mainly to the consciences and fairness of white political leaders rather than to black resistance. In 1912 most of these local political groups were brought together to form the first national political organization, known as the South African Native National Congress. The name was later changed to the African National Congress. Later it was also adopted by blacks in Northern and Southern Rhodesia, now Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Even before the present ruling National Party took over government in 1948, the African National Congress (ANC) struggled with various government administrations in the country – from General Botha to General Smuts – for a change of their policy toward blacks. Under the Union government, which was established in 1910, blacks had no franchise except for a few teachers in the Cape who still qualified in terms of property or specified financial minimum in savings; they had to carry passes to prove their legality to remain or work in urban areas; stock taxes in rural areas ensured that they would be forced to seek work on white farms and the mines to be able to afford the taxes, later having to choose between keeping these stocks and working fulltime on a contractual basis; those living in urban areas resided mostly out of sight of white areas and social and political separation was strictly enforced; blacks throughout the country had two white representatives in parliament who served as their spokespersons on political matters. These parliamentarians were later replaced by non-parliamentary Native Representative Councils, which were variously condemned by blacks for their toothlessness. Throughout this early period of its existence, the ANC's goal was to try to achieve relief from the hardships imposed by this system and to gain self-representation in government.

Then, as now, South African white politics was largely concerned with the so-called black problem. Briefly, this problem can be summarized in three main questions: <sup>(1)</sup> how to dispossess blacks completely of their land without causing much reaction; <sup>(2)</sup> how to exploit black labour without giving much in return for it; <sup>(3)</sup> how to tax blacks – thus ensuring their labour –

without giving them a say in government or political representation. All this amounted to wishing that black people were mere zombies who provided all the needs of white people but remained dispensable in all other respects. Hence South Africa's legislation from the very beginning concentrated on increasing the power of whites and their government, and diminishing black civil and human rights by restricting the ability of blacks to exercise these rights in various ways.

In 1913 and 1936 blacks were restricted to 7½%, then to 13% of South Africa's entire territory. Today this mostly infertile chip of land is what has been declared a "homeland" of various black ethnic groups. Until today, through its restriction on black urban living, South Africa depends on so-called migrant labor, using mainly contract labor of people from the so-called homelands for its mines, farms, and industry. This is the cheapest form of labor in that it guarantees no security for the worker, no pension and family benefits, no guaranteed pay increases, etc. In the urban areas black workers are the lowest category of employees, no matter what their status or qualifications are. The top category is that of whites. Blacks are divided into Africans, "coloreds," and Indians, with the Africans holding the third rank after these two and rewarded accordingly. Their earnings are not in keeping with the cost of living anywhere in the country. This accounts for the ghetto conditions of most black townships, the diseases that are fraught in them, especially malnutrition, and – needless to say – crime in sprawling townships like Soweto.

As for representation in government, the government has continued to invent ways of avoiding it through

the years. The white parliamentary representation of all three black groups was systematically eroded until none of them had any form of representation at all. Then the homeland system was devised for Africans, the Colored Representative Council for "coloreds" and the Indian Representative Council for Indians. In these structures they could take care of their own affairs and forget about asking for representation in the white government of the land. In 1984 the latter two groups were invited back to participate separately in a three chamber form of government representing whites, Indians and "coloreds." The Africans remained left out in the cold. They have their "homelands," it was said. As for city blacks, it was said that they could have local authorities to take care of their local needs. But they could hope for no representation in the national government, even in the form of a fourth chamber, as their primary political structures were meant to be those in the "homelands" or bantustans, as they were originally called.

(By now it should be clear that we have already made an unannounced transition from conditions in the Union government to the situation as it is today.) South Africa changed from the status of a Union to that of a Republic in 1961 under the premiership of Dr Hendrik Verwoerd. Although Verwoerd did not introduce the concept of apartheid, he can be said to have been its prime architect. While racial segregation was advocated and practiced throughout the years of the Union government, as it was prior to it, the idea of apartheid as a consciously legalized form of comprehensive, racial discrimination came with the advent of the ruling National Party to power in 1948. Apartheid was used as a presidential campaign slogan and promise

by Dr Malan, who became the first apartheid prime minister. Malan, however, did not believe in total territorial segregation because of the economic dependency of whites on blacks. Strijdom after him ensured that apartheid was strictly enforced in social and political life and facilities. Job reservation became a law; black universities were established to limit the number of blacks going to the few white universities in the country (Bantu education had been introduced in 1953); "mixed" residential areas of Africans and "coloreds" were segregated and the latter given a slightly preferential treatment; later, even African residential areas were sorted out according to ethnic background as the government implemented its divide and rule strategy. It became Verwoerd's lot to implement the "homeland" system through displacements of people and their resettlement and he did so ruthlessly, without regard to human suffering and sentiments. John Vorster, after him, became even more ruthless. The only difference between these past Prime Ministers and the present State President, P W Botha, is that they carried out their policies without being or seeming to be apologetic about them. While the current President is continuing to fulfil the apartheid tradition with the same determination externally, he is nevertheless certainly not as steadfast about it as his predecessors. Despite all protestations to the contrary, he has adopted a rather apologetic approach and seems less certain about the righteousness of the cause. Yet he is caught in the dilemma of having to please his electorate, on the one hand, and recognizing the need for drastic change, on the other. So much for the historical background.

After the National Party take-over, the ANC continued to react to increas-

ing legislation by the government and its resultant restrictions on blacks. Even before this, it had become so preoccupied with this immediate concern that it gradually came to concentrate more on black representation in the existing government than explicitly on a future of non-racial majority rule in a reconstituted government. Hence the ANC at this stage of its struggle is characterized as having been a reformist organization. In 1944 new blood was introduced into the organization through the formation of a youth league. Under the leadership of dynamic personalities like Muziwakhe Lembede the Youth League began to question this reformist stance of the ANC. It advocated the restoration of the land to the people, one African nationality under an African majority rule, and the drafting of a program of action to give direction to the struggle. The program of action, drawn up in 1949, shunned empty negotiations with the government and adopted a policy of non-co-operation with the government. There were to be self-assertive activities such as strikes, boycotts, and other forms of protest, including the refusal to pay taxes.

The ANC, with the cooperation of the South African Indian Congress (SAIC), implemented this program of action in 1952, in what was known as the defiance campaign. This campaign involved the defiance of a multiplicity of apartheid laws such as: separate facilities in railways, post offices, and other public facilities; the defiance of curfew laws and prohibitions to enter black areas without a permit. The campaign took place in the context of a stayaway from work, thus affecting the country's economy. Though initially about 90% successful, the campaign ended in riots which were believed to

be largely the work of agents provocateurs.

After this campaign the ANC continued to put pressure on the government in various ways, mostly stayaways. In 1955 it assembled a gathering known as the Congress of the People and adopted a Freedom Charter for a free South Africa. This Charter was the result of a co-operative effort among four main organizations: the ANC itself, the SAIC, the South African Coloured People's Organization (SACPO), and the Congress of Democrats. They were known jointly as the Congress Alliance, which was later joined also by the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). In 1956 charges of high treason were brought by the government against 156 leaders and supporters of the ANC. The charges focussed mainly on the Freedom Charter, which was seen as a revolutionary, communist document. After about five lengthy years of trial, however, all the defendants were acquitted on the basis of insufficient evidence of their revolutionary motives and treason.

In the meantime another organization was established in 1959, called the Pan Africanist Congress. It was critical of the ANC's continued mild approach. It accused the ANC of having diluted the 1949 program of action by implementing it in the way it did. It objected to communist influence in the ANC through the dual membership of some black Marxists and the membership in the Congress Alliance of the Congress of Democrats (COD). It rejected the Freedom Charter as a sell-out document which represented an abdication of the black cause to white interests and a yielding to communist blackmail, which claimed that the struggle was not a racial or national one but a class struggle. The PAC,

under the equally brilliant leadership of Mangaliso Sobukwe, claimed to be the rightful successor of the ANC under its original mandate, as well as a rightful heir of the Congress Youth League. These traditions were allegedly dishonored by the ANC through its actions and alliances. Even before the PAC breakaway, there had been a division in the Youth League since the adoption of the Freedom Charter. Those League members who supported the Charter had come to be referred to as Charterists. Those who objected to it were called Africanists. This is the wing that established the PAC later.

The PAC had a short life-span of less than two years. Its position remained firmly that of the Youth League and it rejected white leadership and any claims of some whites to be truly desirous of change. It believed that only those who were real victims of the status quo could wish for its complete annihilation. All whites, on the other hand, benefited from the system and would always introduce checks and counter-checks in any attempt to do away with the system completely, it was alleged. They were all regarded as "shareholders in the South African Oppressors' Company, Pty., Ltd." The PAC asserted that its opposition to white co-operation was not motivated by racialism, as it was often charged, but by facts of white dishonesty. Nor was this rejection part of the ultimate goal of the organization. It was only a temporary strategy. When the struggle had been won, the only determinant to being a free citizen of a non-racial South Africa would be the paying of full allegiance to Africa and to the principles of majority rule. Anyone who subscribed to these conditions, black or white, would be regarded as an African, "and a man's colour

[would] be as irrelevant as the shape of his ears.”

On March 21, 1960 the PAC engaged in a national campaign against passes and called for a work stay-away. Its president and other leaders of the organization burned their passes and submitted themselves for arrest, urging people to do the same. The campaign, which was peaceful throughout the country, turned violent when police opened fire on crowds at various places, killing and injuring masses of people. The name which has become symbolic of this national campaign and the police brutality it provoked is Sharpeville. The township of Sharpeville in the Vaal area suffered the most casualties of this brutality, with 69 people killed and 178 injured in the end. Sharpeville is thus symbolically a forerunner of Soweto in 1976, the Vaal in 1984, and Langa in the Cape in 1985.

The turmoil which followed the Sharpeville events finally led to a state of emergency and ultimately the banning of the PAC and the ANC in April 1960, thus being forced underground. Thus, having campaigned non-violently for change since 1912, black national resistance only resorted to violence after 1960 when these two organizations could no longer operate legally. The PAC adopted a terroristic approach in its underground operation, killing marked whites and suspected black informers. The ANC, on the other hand, engaged in sabotage and avoided the deliberate killing of people. In 1963 both underground wings of the organizations were hunted out and finally unearthed and convicted. Nelson Mandela, representing the ANC's *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, remains the symbol of this crushed effort to work for non-violent change.

His last words on receiving a life sentence in 1964 were:

... there comes a time, as it came in my life, when a man is denied the right to live a normal life, when he can only live the life of an outlaw because the government has so decreed to use the law to impose a state of outlawry upon him. I was driven to this situation, and I do not regret having taken the decisions that I did take . . .

During the lull that followed the crackdown on the ANC and the PAC the government took strides in implementing its “homeland” policy. Few people dared speak out openly against the government because of the proliferation of informers and the special branch spy police. In the “homelands” themselves those chiefs who continued to resist the policy were deposed and replaced by those more receptive to it. People continued to be moved from their traditional lands or areas in the cities and resettled in their supposed homelands. The term used for this in the case of urban blacks was to be “endorsed out,” meaning having your pass stamped to indicate that you were an unwanted resident. Almost all “homeland” townships consisted initially of single tents or corrugated iron shacks, later converted into two, three, or four-roomed houses, depending more on the renter's income than on the number of people in a household. People had to wait for up to five years or more before being allotted a house to rent. All open resistance had seemingly died down and the government was having a free hand, at last. In some cases people moved “voluntarily” to the “homelands” after encountering frustration in trying to find houses in their urban areas, where waiting lists for houses are always overflowing. The system was seemingly beginning to be self-fulfilling, at last.

When in the late 1960s a new stu-

dent organization, calling itself the South African Students Organization (SASO), started campaigning for membership with condemnations of the government and its multiple injustices, some of us wondered whether they were from Mars. Did they know what was happening in the country? They did, indeed, and they analyzed the situation very convincingly in their monthly newsletter which was a very early development of the organization. Many of us did not know even as members of this organization who the main analyst, Frank Talk, was until a book of Steve Biko's essays appeared soon after his death in 1977.

SASO became the movement of the seventies, giving birth to the Black People's Convention and inspiring the establishment of multiple other organizations, which adopted black consciousness as their philosophy. Black consciousness was defined as an attitude of mind – a way of life. It resembled in many respects the PAC's general policy but differed mainly in the primary focus of its strategy on conscientization. This meant withdrawing briefly from socio-political action directed to the state while working toward remotivating the people and helping them to redefine their goal and inculcating self-reliance. The main slogan was, "Black man, you are on your own." Hence blacks had to close their ranks and rediscover their strength before they could join forces with whites either in the struggle itself or the running of the country after liberation. The Black Consciousness Movement's approach was thus people centered. While the government was challenged verbally, all aggressive political action was suspended until a later, unspecified period. In the meantime, there was a proliferation of black self-help pro-

grams, including literacy campaigns, mobile clinics, student workshops, physical programs such as school constructions in rural areas, publications, and enquiries into dozens of community development programs.

During this time of construction, overt political action in the BCM was mostly accidental rather than planned action. Student protests such as those instigated by the expulsion of Onkgopotse Tiro from the University of the North in 1972 do not fall strictly under political action. The 1974 Viva Frelimo Rallies organized to celebrate Frelimo's victory in Mozambique were not meant to be a direct challenge to the government, except insofar as the government tried to stop them and sent the police to disperse the gathering and make arrests. The 1976 Soweto uprisings were more a manifestation of the black consciousness influence in school pupils than the direct execution of policy by any of the existing black consciousness organizations. Thus when the twenty odd black consciousness organizations were declared illegal by the government in 1977 following countrywide unrest which began in Soweto the year before, the BCM had not yet evolved or at least implemented an aggressive, government-oriented program of action. It may thus be concluded that the BCM was declared illegal prematurely. Perhaps even then it already gave the government a sense of what was to come, were it to be allowed to continue operating.

Unlike the period following the banning of the ANC and the PAC, the interval between the declaration of the BCM as an illegal organization and the establishment of another national organization was brief – only over a year. Before the establishment of the Azanian People's Organization as the

political successor of the Black People's Convention in 1978, a number of civic associations were formed in several black townships mainly to intervene in the student question and the crackdowns that followed the police massacres and people's anger after the Soweto uprising. While abiding by the black consciousness philosophy to a large extent, AZAPO decided to embark on the second stage of the black consciousness approach and engage in direct political action and challenge of the government. Until 1984, however, such challenge was rather indirect, focused on instigating sports and cultural boycotts of South Africa by overseas performers, campaigning against foreign investment, contributing toward the formation of trade unions and their activity, and other people-oriented kinds of activities and campaigns.

In 1983 AZAPO was chiefly instrumental in the establishment of the National Forum, which was an alliance of black consciousness and non-black consciousness organizations. Though not entirely a black organizational alliance, the National Forum's membership consists of organizations which are predominantly black. Hence it displays a black consciousness tendency. Like the UDF, established three months after it, the NF was formed mainly in reaction to the government's constitutional reforms which involved the participation of "coloreds" and Indians in government through a tricameral form of parliament, thus abolishing the Westminster system of government in South Africa. Africans were not included in this scheme. Instead, three Bills were introduced in parliament to take care of them. They were called the Black Local Authorities Bill, which

was calculated mainly to re-christen the Urban Bantu Councils which would now be known as municipalities or city councils; the Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill – a euphemism for influx control, which sees to the restriction of black inflow and movement in urban areas; and the Black Community Development Bill. The immediate goal of these alliances was to gain support in opposing proposed "colored" and Indian elections as the government's first step in the implementation of participatory reforms. Urban Africans were also to be discouraged from participating in council elections under the new Local Authorities Bill.

Both alliances and AZAPO were successful in their campaigns, which took place in 1984. All African, "colored," and Indian polls were less than representative of the majority of the people. But the government still continued with its reform plans. After the results of the elections, though, the two alliances continued to operate against other government policies. The NF continued to work in close cooperation with AZAPO, while the UDF developed an organizational structure through which it continues to mobilize the people, often in conjunction with labor unions and/or student organizations. Both AZAPO and the UDF have been warned by the government at various stages of their operation that they were overstepping their limits. In 1986 the UDF was declared an affected organization, making it illegal for it to receive funds from overseas. It was accused of playing to a foreign audience and trying to impress its overseas supporters. Since 1985 several supporters of the UDF and its affiliate organizations have undergone treason trials, involving

about fifty people in all. More than a dozen of these have been acquitted as the trial progresses.

Many AZAPO and UDF leaders and supporters have been playing hide and seek with the authorities since the declaration of the current state of emergency in 1985, which has resulted in thousands of detentions. It was reported that by the end of 1986 more than 22 000 people were in detention without trial and the number continues to grow as only a few are released occasionally while more are brought in. At least three deaths in detention have also been reported since 1985. While there have been serious curbs on the media since late 1986, from what we have been able to gather thus far the situation remains critical and tense and apartheid continues to claim its victims in detentions, convictions, and deaths.

During the last few years many people have expressed the confidence, as a result of both the internal and external pressure that has been brought to bear on the government, that the end is in sight. This remains a big question to those of us who, as fate would have it, are pessimists. Is it, really? Certainly any such speculation on the imminence of the fall of the apartheid regime can only be a matter of hope rather than absolute conviction. Did we not feel the same after Soweto? And yet the government summoned its ultimate weapon for dealing with persistently "troublesome" organizations. The BCM was declared illegal in its representative organizations. Were not similar sentiments expressed twenty-seven years ago following the Sharpeville incidents? Yet the ANC and the PAC were banned. We do have short memories indeed. This is not to imply that the present government can never be overcome.

Rather, the main question is whether current strategies of resistance have changed in any significant way from those of past organizations in order to anticipate any drastic government action. Listen to what Mandela has to say: "South African history has conditioned Africans to the fact that if their demands are made strongly enough to have some chance of success, they will be met by force on the part of the government." I submit that the South African government does not summon its ultimate weapon against an organization unless it feels really threatened, as Mandela implies. The strength of a national organization in South Africa is measured by the government's endurance against it.

That the government has not yet summoned this weapon against current political organizations should be an indication that it is not yet threatened, or rather quite threatened, by them. It is probably still confident that it can deal with them in other ruthless ways, as it is presently doing. Furthermore, current political divisions among whites are against the significance of the Afrikaner Laager concept, which is the ultimate fortress against any threat to white survival – national or political. Under this concept all party-political differences are shelved when there is an "external" threat and all whites join the fortress of the Laager to fight together as one. Yet today, there are three Afrikaner parliamentary political parties, ranging from conservative to ultra-conservative; one non-parliamentary, swastika-wielding opposition; in addition to two largely English-speaking parliamentary oppositions. These divisions, particularly among Afrikanerdom, are not indicative of a government concerned about what is often referred to as the total onslaught against it.

For blacks it is quite a relief that political resistance is still allowed to continue in the country, in spite of its casualties. In this way at least everyone, both inside and outside the country, can witness that blacks do not condone the system. The government has often given that impression after imposing silence on black opposition and its publicity, as shown by the current curbs on the news and the media. However, when the government becomes really threatened, it will definitely declare the organization or organizations responsible for this threat illegal and will call on white unity by appealing to the Laager. Joining the Laager at such times is used as a sign of white patriotism and a fulfilment of the age-old proverb that blood, indeed, is thicker than water. To those outside, the idea of the Laager is generally used as a blackmail instrument, when the government responds to any external pressure by threatening to withdraw into the Laager.

Hitherto the banning of a political organization in South Africa has meant that it will either disappear underground or begin operating from exile. In either case it means that the government has managed to get rid of it – to remove it from its sight and make it less effective. If being declared an illegal organization is a real indication that the government is threatened, as I am trying to argue, should the organization being thus declared cease to operate openly upon receiving the order? Is ceasing to operate in this case not submitting at full impact and thus removing the pressure that the government can no longer bear, offering it

relief? Perhaps the real end to apartheid will come not while organizations are still able to operate legally above ground, in spite of their persecution and the indignation it arouses; and no matter how they are able to harass the government. The end will probably come when they shall decide to defy their illegal status and continue to operate as usual in spite of it. No doubt, the total wrath of the almighty apartheid regime will be unleashed. But how will it differ from yesterday and today? Legality in South Africa has always been only nominal in the operation of black organizations.

In conclusion, may I point out that this paper has deliberately concentrated on political resistance. Any detailed consideration of black resistance to apartheid will in future have to include the role played by the Church, by the trade union movement, and more explicitly by the students and their organizations particularly since the beginning of the present decade. These sectors of South African society are increasingly playing a significant role in waging opposition to white supremacy and apartheid laws in that country. Also to be considered, confirmed or refuted, are the disputed claims of the Chief Minister of the Kwa-Zulu homeland, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, and his Inkatha Movement. My personal opinion of this last organization, based on my experience as a black South African, though not examined through deliberate paper research, is that it does not constitute a part of the black resistance movement in South Africa.

# The Social-Cultural Analysis of the Origins and Development of Black Theology

by Dr Cecil Mzingisi Ngcokovane

For almost two decades, Black Theology has bordered on definitions and has not successfully outgrown such a stage. Hence a Black Theology Conference held in Wilgespruit-South on 16-19 August 1983, felt the need and urgency to move out of such impasse.<sup>(1)</sup> The consensus among contemporary perspectives is that Black theologians must now address themselves, *inter alia*, to the content of Black theology and its methodology.<sup>(2)</sup> Beyond, if not, within the definitional stance of Black theologians, there is a problem with regard to conceptual tools of analysis. Black theologians have hitherto, employed race analysis in their theological reflection. But the crucial question to be raised is: To what extent is the racialistic conceptual analysis adequate to understand problems of Blacks in South Africa, North America, African continent and the rest of the world? I will focus this question on South Africa in order to be contextual in my approach to the topic under consideration.

I would like to argue that any social-cultural analysis of the origins and development of Black theology in the world, especially in South Africa must of necessity take into serious account the historical materialist background. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is not to dismiss the tools which have been used for a discourse on Black theology so far. Rather, to find out whether such tools of analysis cannot be extended to deal with the reality of political economy of race and class in God's world. Thus an adequate social-cultural analysis of the origins and development of Black theology needs to take such an approach as one of the starting points.

Both the content and methodology of Black theology in South Africa has not taken into serious account the exploitation of African labour.

The objective of this paper is to show why and how this labour was and continues to be exploited. Thus I am more interested in the relations between social-cultural facts of Black

1. Cf. Conference Report entitled: Black Theology Revisited, sponsored jointly by The Institute for Contextual Theology and New Horizon Project, Wilgespruit, 16-19 August 1983, p 1.  
2. Ibid

exploitation both as a working class and as peasants. I would also like to show how such facts influence the development of racism in our land.

I regard the identification of causal relations as a key to an adequate explanation of how racism developed to be what it is in South Africa today and, how such a development has, in turn given rise to Black theology. Moreover, I would like to probe into the reasons why the origins and development of Black theology have not dealt with questions of black labour exploitation.

### **The Problem and its Matrix: Towards a Theoretical Framework**

According to R Turner, most people make choices within a very narrow context, defined by a set of implicit and explicit social-cultural, religious and economic values which they do not realise can themselves be chosen or rejected. Black Christians and their theologians have been victims of such blind choices.<sup>(3)</sup> They have been victimised by religion (Christianity) with its Western theological presuppositions that are rooted in the Euro-American cultural ideology. At the bottom of such a cultural ideology are the western capitalist and imperialist interests. How is it the case that Black theology has not been able to unmask such latent presuppositions? I will come back to this question later.

A close look at the socialisation process will help us understand the problem faced by Black theologians today. I agree with Turner that socialisation prepares people not just for social living, but for living out specific roles in specific social structures.

Hence Turner contends that:

The social structure may be one of gross inequality, but if the socialisation mechanisms are working effectively the independent kicking child can be turned into the passive, accepting adult at the bottom of the pile, who accepts her/his role because he/she has been deprived of the capacity to conceive of any other way of existing. That is, the effect of the process of socialisation is to make a particular social structure and a particular human model seem to be natural, and to hide the fact that it is not natural, and could be changed.<sup>(4)</sup>

Indeed, Turner is correct when he contends that the process of socialisation can thus narrow down a person's range of perceptions and choices to a predefined social reality.<sup>(5)</sup> It is in such an ideological-cultural captivity that the Church in the "Black World" finds itself. Black theology needs to hang loose of such captivity in its theological reflection. Black theologians ought to uncover how the socialization process can induce acceptance of inequality by the oppressed masses in an unequal social structure. Black theologians must unmask those latent social-cultural and ideological forces that make the oppressed masses come to believe in their "own" inferiority and in the natural rights of their exploiters and oppressors. How such blind acceptance of inequalities works has been clearly pointed out by Turner when he says that:

This is not something necessarily brought about by the Machiavellian cunning of the dominant group. Once a social structure is in existence, mechanisms take over which tend to keep it going. The dominant group are also being socialised. They are being socialised into dominant roles, with the concomitant belief in the naturalness of their dominance, of their superiority,

3. Turner, R *The Eye of a Needle*, Christian Institute, Braamfontein, 1972, p 10

4. *Ibid.*, p 11

5. *Ibid.*

whether it be race superiority in South Africa, caste superiority in classical India, or the superior virtues and intelligence of the middle classes in the 19th century Europe. The system seems to perpetuate itself, . . .<sup>(6)</sup>

In South Africa, a social structure such as the one mentioned in the above statement is perpetuated by capitalism.

Turner correctly points out that the human model characteristic of the dominant white group in South Africa is the capitalist human model. He also contends that the values imposed by the socialization process in capitalist societies are those that particular form of society needs in order to survive.<sup>(7)</sup> Turner identifies some essential elements of capitalist society as follows:

1. "Some people control the means of production. The rest of the population, having no tools or land of their own, have no option but to work for those who do own the tools or the land. And the owners naturally expect to get something out of permitting them to do so. The basis upon which they are employed is that some of the products of their labour should be given to the capitalist in return for the 'right' to use the capitalist's means of production. To put it another way, the worker receives wages that are less than the value of his/her labour. The capitalist accumulates capital by taking the surplus product, which he/she has not worked to produce.  
This is exploitation . . .
2. The capitalists' objective in exploiting workers is not, as might be expected, simply their own personal good, in terms of a comfortable life and a high level of consumption. If it were, they would, once they had made their first million,

retire, relax and enjoy themselves. But they do not. They ruin their health competing for a level of wealth which they could not possibly consume, even if they wanted to.<sup>(8)</sup>

Capitalists continue to accumulate because for them, accumulation becomes an end in itself instead of being a means to an end.

Such an activity results in the social system becoming an independent thing and people becoming subject to it.<sup>(9)</sup> This leads to Turner's third essential element of capitalist society, namely, that:

3. At an advanced level of accumulation, the need for markets as an outlet for the products of all this accumulated capital becomes important. It therefore becomes necessary to boost the consumption of that sector of the population which has surplus cash. They have to be forced to consume the product, whether they "want" to or not . . . This is the role played by advertising . . . . This forced consumption can occur among certain social groups at the same time as other social groups are being forced to restrict consumption by being paid low wages so that their employers can accumulate more.<sup>(10)</sup>

If one were to use J Habermas's expression of labour, one would contend that labour is a fundamental category of human existence.<sup>(11)</sup> Hence Buti Tlthagale drawing upon Gregory Baum could say that "through labour (people) transform nature. Through labour human beings build their environment, their world and in so doing they simultaneously build themselves. In a collective labour engagement, (people) build themselves together.

6. Ibid

7. Ibid p 12

8. Ibid, pp 13-14

9. Ibid, p 14

10. Ibid, pp 14-15

11. Habermas, *J Knowledge and Human Interests*, Hienemann, London, 1972, p 25

Thus (people) in their collective labouring efforts become co-creators. They are the effective subjects of what they create.<sup>(12)</sup> Such a conception of labour is ideally sound, but the capitalists' system upsets the whole scheme of co-creation. How such a process takes place, has been well articulated by Turner when he says that:

In (a capitalist) society, acquisition, ownership and consumption of material goods is the greatest aim of human beings. Work is only a means to this. It is not something an individual does because of the inherent meaningfulness of creative activity. It is an unpleasant necessity to be got over as soon as possible so that you can go home and consume.<sup>(13)</sup>

What this statement means is that the worker is a means for the capitalist's end of accumulating. Hence Turner contends that this means that work is often objectively as unpleasant as it is described to be. "The capitalist employs the worker for an objective other than the worker's own satisfaction, so the nature of the work and the work environment are designed for that other purpose. They are designed to maximise profit, not to give the worker satisfaction from a meaningful task."<sup>(14)</sup> Blacks, both in the U.S.A. and in the "Republic" of South Africa are victims of such an economic system. However Black theologians are still hesitant to take a plunge and vigorously attack this issue head on. Hence the origins and development of Black theology have been extremely lacking in this regard. Thus I shall now look at how the capitalist system and its values has actually influenced theological reflec-

tion in capitalist societies such as U.S.A., S.A. and Western Europe. Imbued by western capitalist and cultural values, the carriers of Christianity have, in turn, influenced theological discourse among Black theologians. To understand this process, we must take a close look at cultural domination in a particular context, for example, South Africa, and also at an ethical system that places limitations on human community.

### Conquest and Cultural Domination

Bernard Magubane has correctly pointed out that the supremacy of the whites, their values and civilisation, was only won when the cultural and value system of the defeated African was reduced to nothing and when the Africans themselves loudly admitted the cultural hegemony of their conquerors.<sup>(15)</sup> Such a notion came also true in the religious sphere.

Christianity carries in it, *inter alia*, two kinds of ethical system. According to Turner, one kind accepts the predominant human model and tries to rationalise it, to smooth the edges. Turner calls such an ethical system an "internal morality" which he articulates as follows:

... pay your debts, give to the poor, don't tell lies, don't steal (i.e. don't deprive people of property which is theirs in terms of the given legal-property system in ways that the system does not permit). In a slave society, feed your slaves properly, don't sell their children until they are eight years old. In war, kill people with bullets, but not with poison gas.<sup>(16)</sup>

Such an ethic justifies or legitimizes institutionalized violence, racism and economic exploitation. But it also does

12. Conference Report on Black Theology, op cit, p 25

13. Turner, R, op cit, p 15

14. Magubane, B M *The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1979.

15. Turner, op cit, p 17

16. Ibid, p 18

more. It creates passivity on the part of the victims of such a system and also imbues them with a sense of guilt whenever they question such unethical values. Consequently, they accept such an ethical system as a given not to be challenged. Hence the exploited and the oppressed find themselves in a vicious cycle of pain. This kind of an ethical system also makes life easier for people within the system who find themselves not challenging the human model implicit in the system. Black theologians are constantly haunted by this kind of ethical system.

Although Black theologians employ the second kind of ethical system, namely "transcendent morality" in their theological reflection, they nonetheless fall short of their essential task. Transcendent morality is defined by Turner as:

(An ethical system which goes beyond the given and asks the fundamental question – 'what is human life for, what is the meaning of human life?')<sup>(17)</sup>

It is an ethic which challenges the human model implicit in the system. The "transcendent ethic" demands that we question our taken-for-granted ways of behaving, that we must continually question them. It is on the basis of the "transcendent ethic" that Black theologians like other religious leaders, have continually attacked both old religious forms and social forms. They have attacked religious forms which have, in fact, lost their transcendence and which have instead become merely repetitive rituals. Black theologians have attacked social forms which have become both unquestioned, hence mechanical and

non-human, and unjust, hence de-humanising.<sup>(18)</sup> But such an attack is not new because we find it in Hebrew prophets, Jesus Christ and Muhammad. Such a view is best articulated by Turner when he contends that:

We have seen the Hebrew prophets attacking the worship of the Golden Calf—both an idol with a ritual attached, and a way of life in which personal material satisfaction turns one way from one's neighbour. We have seen Christ breaking the Sabbath to cure the sick—so showing that the mechanical ritual of Sabbath observance must give way to an intelligent understanding of the transcendent significance of the Sabbath as a day in which I cease from my own selfish pursuits and consider the needs of the whole, and hence of other men and women. We have seen Muhammad challenging the way of the wealthy merchants of Mecca, who believed that their wealth gave them power over both people and gods, by asserting the universality of the one God, who cannot be bought, and by asserting that wealth must be used for social purposes, not for individual purposes.<sup>(19)</sup>

However, history of religion shows us that it is one of gradual decline of such transcendent beliefs and practices into the given,

a decline whereby they become nothing more than a 'traditional way of life' in which religious observance is mere ritual and in which the transcendent ethic gets moulded into the very untranscendent social structure, and becomes an 'opiate of the people'; until a new reformer shatters the structure, either by creating a new religion (Muhammad), or by appealing to the pristine transcendence of an earlier religious genius (Calvin).<sup>(20)</sup>

Nevertheless, the social relevance of religion does not only lie in the fact

17. *Ibid*

18. *Ibid*

19. *Ibid*, pp 18-19

20. *Ibid*

that it commands us to question accepted human models and the accepted social structure in which they are embodied, but also lies in the clinical examination of such accepted human models and social structures.

Thus I J Mosala has indicted Black theologians of being blind to the fact that in their attack/criticism of "white theology", they are actually using the same tools of analysis that whites have traditionally used to justify their case. According to Mosala, while Black theology has advocated black liberation and the black experience as a focus in its analysis it has continued to draw its biblical hermeneutical assumptions from white theology. Mosala's strongest point is that Black theology does this irrespective of the class character of the Bible. In doing this, Mosala slashes J Cone, C West, A Boesak, S Gqubule, E Mgojo, S Dwane and M Buthelezi.<sup>(21)</sup> But I think that Mosala's indictment is selective relative to these Black theologians, especially with regard to J Cone and C West.

C West, for example, has long claimed that Black theology and Marxist thought share three characteristics as follows:

1. Both adhere to a similar methodology, the same way of approaching their respective subject matter and arriving at conclusions.
2. Both link some notion of liberation to some future socio-economic condition of the down-trodden.
3. And this is most important, both attempt to put forward trenchant critiques of liberal capitalist America.<sup>(22)</sup>

For C West, "Black theologians and Marxist thinkers must preserve their own existential and intellectual integrity and explore the possibility of promoting fundamental social amelioration together".<sup>(23)</sup> While Mosala has raised a thought provoking criticism one begins to realise the need to ask him the question: What tools of analysis is he using? Who has given him and other Black theologians (including myself) the right to theologise about the black working class and black peasants if we are not part of their struggle? Have the poor, the oppressed and the black working class given us the mandate to do theology about them? What does the record show in terms of our daily participation in the struggle of black people?

B Tlhagale contends that "if Black theology is to talk meaningfully about Christian symbols and how they affect the socio-economic conditions of the Black people, it will have to grapple with the fundamental contradictions that explain the nature of the present society."<sup>(24)</sup> If the historical materialist background is not taken into serious account by Black theologians, Black theology as in the past, would have been done in a vacuum. Hence the need for Black theologians to boldly unmask the falsehood of white theology with its cultural ideology in a manner that will clinically deal with the question of political economy of race and class not only in South Africa but throughout the world. Thus, Black theology in its development, needs to outgrow the two kinds of ethical system which I mentioned earlier on (i.e. "Internal Morality" and "Transcendent Ethic").

21. cf Mosala, I J "The Use of the Bible in Black Theology" in *Unquestionable Right to be Free*, by Mosala, I.J. and Tlhagale, B (eds), Skotaville Publishers, 1986, pp 175-196.

22. West, C "Black Theology and Marxist Thought" in *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979*, by G Wilmore & J Cone (eds), Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1979, p 553

23. Ibid

24. Tlhagale, B "Towards a Black Theology of Labour" in Conference Report on Black Theology, op cit, p 25

## Conclusion

Black theology both in its origins and development has been held in captivity by a theology which is grounded in Euro-American capitalist interests and cultural values – a theology that has never given room to the democratization of the Church structure (as an institution) and theological enterprise. Thus democratization can only be done by and/or with the masses themselves. Here I am talking about “people’s theology” and/or “ministry by the people”. The starting point for such a ministry or theology is a sober look and clinical criticism of the present theological captivity in which Black theologians find themselves. Indeed, such a starting point will constitute a realistic vision for the future of Black theology.

Since theology is done within the confines of a Euro-American cultural ideology and capitalist interests, Black theology must now begin to take the notion of democratization into serious consideration. This will be a new stage – a stage when the masses assume full control of their lives in all spheres of life, especially religious life.

One of the problems of capitalist societies and their Churches, is that they allow democratization only in the sphere of politics or the state and deny the masses of society democratic participation in the economic sphere. This is due to the notion of the maintenance of the sanctity of private property in the means of production. Thus there is democracy in the political sphere and lack of democracy in the economic sphere. Consequently, the dominant theologies of the Euro-American traditions are bound up in such a captivity and, in turn, such a captivity has affected Black theology.

The lack of democracy in the economic sphere, that is to say, the

black working masses not having their own representatives, and participation in the decision-making corporate bodies, and in the political sphere, consequently creates the pattern for the lack of democracy for the black working masses in all other institutions of society – including the Church and its seminaries.

The biggest problem Black Christians face in undemocratic, bureaucratic society, such as South Africa is that theology is designed and controlled by a white group ruling over blacks. Since South African society is one that is characterised by racial and class oppressions, all theology for the oppressed group of lower classes is irrelevant because it is designed and controlled by a group other than the oppressed themselves. Hence theology in a situation of class and racial oppression tends to justify the existing socio-cultural, political and economic inequalities. Theology, therefore, has perpetuated ignorance and acceptance of the system on the part of Blacks in the world. It is precisely at this point that a Black theologian has need of a stern theological education from the people below. This is the basis of the demand for “people’s theology” or “ministry by the people”.

In South Africa, for example, “people’s theology” must include the following elements: A clinical examination and critique of traditional western theology in light of the issues addressed by the KAIROS Document and contextual theologies that have emerged; a reflection on the South African political, economic and educational situation and its international dimensions; and, a reflection on one’s perception of one’s faith and experiences inside and outside the Church. There must be a thorough democratization of theological system with the

Church providing funds and equipment as well as minimum control over theological education.

The Church can also provide general guidelines which will, of course, be formulated by people themselves based on their own daily experience and faith. Such an approach to theology will enable Black theologians to realize that beyond racism lies the economic question. The dynamic forces which are operative in the capitalist economic system can be best

understood only when Black theologians interact and listen to the Black labour force. Only when oppressed black masses control and design their theological education and seminaries, can we even begin to talk about the curriculum and philosophy of theological education. But at the heart of all this, is the economic question, without which, our theology is bound to be wide off the mark. Thus our theological reflection will fizzle out and die before we start.

# Following the Trail of Suffering: Black Theological Perspectives, Past and Present

by Dr Takatso A Mofokeng

## I. INTRODUCTION

The people of South Africa live during difficult times when crucial decisions have to be made. With the state of emergency widened to embrace the entire black South Africa (there are no signs of it in white towns) there is no doubt any more that there is a great measure of intransigence and desperation on the part of the white state. Large scale indiscriminate detentions of black leaders and activists of all ages; the tear gassing of people in churches and at funeral services and the brutal shootings of unarmed school children provide irrefutable concrete evidence of this intransigence and desperation. The entire black South Africa has been forced to retreat to a low level of resistance because of increasing and deepening repression and harassment. This situation of crisis has brought black politicians, economists, social scientists, religious leaders and theologians who are in prison as well as those who are still outside, to a tactical stop. They had to stop and review the situation of stalemate and search for new and more meaningful answers to pertinent questions which are posed by it and devise new strategies of advancing the cause of liberation.

The present setback which we are experiencing in our exodus is also an

opportunity that cannot be missed. It is a setback in that what appeared a year ago as an unstoppable thrust to bring about the emergence of a new future and the birth of a new nation has been abruptly and ruthlessly intercepted. While it is a lamentable setback, it is one that can and has to be converted into an opportunity which if properly and carefully utilized, can benefit the struggle for liberation. The state of emergency is for black people, an epistemological moment to which all thought and language have come. It is not certain anymore that old theological language and communal activity will continue to be the best ways of expressing the presence of God among the oppressed in the most effective manner in and beyond the present state of emergency. It is not certain anymore that this language which used to kindle the light of hope and the fire of active faith in the oppressed will continue to be the most effective witness to God as God continues to bring down opposition to God's sovereignty and to the liberation of God's oppressed creation. It is also not certain anymore that this theological language which we now use will continue through the entire state of emergency to give appropriate expression to and even inspire new "emergency" responses of black people to God's

command to engage in a radical discipleship in pursuance of justice and liberation.

It is therefore imperative that in our attempt to be theologically vigilant and our continuing obligation to test and reconcile black concrete discipleship with verbal articulation of that discipleship we should grab the epistemological moment which has been forced upon the black theological community and struggle. While standing firmly in the present, we have to re-examine the past in order to fashion a better and more crisp and sharp theological language that can cut open the door to a future of liberation for black people of South Africa.

## II. LIGHT ON METHODOLOGY IN BLACK THEOLOGY

From 1978 when, according to S Biko, "essentially the black community is a very religious community, which often reflects on being, in other words, what is my purpose in life, why am I here, who am I"?' going through 1980 when Bonganjalo Goba stated that "... black theological reflection as a communal praxis cannot be separated from the ongoing commitment to political change in South Africa"<sup>2</sup> to 1986 when Itumeleng Mosala asserts that Black Theology has to be a theoretical weapon of struggle in the hands of the exploited black masses,<sup>3</sup> this theology has always been a theology of praxis which emerged in the heat of the historical struggles of black Christian workers and peasants and has always retained that base. Initially, however, the link with this praxis was not pro-

nounced and vivid because black praxis had not yet evolved into a deliberately organized historical project. But as soon as the South African Student Organization (SASO) and the Black People's Convention (BPC) launched the earliest concrete social projects for purposes of economic upliftment and psychological liberation under the banner of Black Consciousness, this important methodological link became explicit and visible. It immediately had a direct and forceful impact on the determination and arrangement of theological themes in order of priority. In fact Black Theology, as a theological articulation of Black consciousness in the religious realm became one of the many projects of conscientization. It continues to play an important role in the ideological formation of the black political agents. This is evidenced by the successful leadership of archbishop Desmond Tutu, Dr Alan Boesak and other black pastors.

This complex relationship was misunderstood by white theologians who wrongly attempted to link Black Theology with some European theologies in order to acquire the right of placing it on their agenda in the arena of their struggle for orthodoxy<sup>4</sup>.

The blame can as a matter of fact not be put entirely on the acquisitive instinct of European and other Western theologians. Black Theologians in South Africa are also to blame. They did not make the distinction between their theology and others sufficiently clear. They also continued to use dominant theological categories

1. Biko S 'statement made in court during the SASO-BPC trial' as quoted by A Millard. See his "Testimony of Steve Biko" New York: Panther Books, Granada Publishing, 1979 p 94.

2. Goba B "Doing Theology in South Africa: A Black Christian Perspective" in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, June 1980, p 25ff.

3. Mosala I J "The use of the Bible in Black Theology" in I J Mosala and B Tlhagale (eds): *The Unquestionable Right to be Free* Skotaville, Johannesburg, 1986 p 175ff.

4. See Bosch D "Currents and crosscurrents in South African Black Theology" in G S Gilmore and J H Cone (eds.): *Black Theology, a Documentary History, 1966-1979*, New York, Orbis Books, 1979 p 233ff.

which are household categories in european theology without even explaining the difference that emerges when the same categories are used in their theology. Neither did they make a total break epistemologically with european theology. They continued to be dependent on it for a long time and thereby opened their theology for european theological meddling, long before they were ready to deal with critique from outside.

James Cone, a black American theologian, was very clear from the very beginning that he was not satisfied with euro-american theology and that he was attempting to leave it behind him. His *A Black Theology of Liberation* is evidence of this noble effort. In that way other black theologians who shared the same concern could come in and say whether he had succeeded in his goal or not. This is how G Wilmore and C Cone came into this debate and assisted J Cone through their critique to go further and complete the epistemological break which he had initiated and make a real new beginning for Black Theology.<sup>5</sup>

It was the case on the issue of the identity of Black Theology. Wilmore asked for factors that made black theology black and thus distinguished it from white theology. He pushed Cone to get to the basic issue of the sources and the norm, which is what determines the identity, content and methodology of a theology.

In the above mentioned book J Cone can be seen vigorously grappling with the theological constructions of K Barth, P Tillich and to a lesser extent that of R Niebhur. He criticizes some parts of their theology in the light of

the social challenges and theological needs of the black community and appropriates some of its useful methodological elements. In that way Cone released himself from the grip of euro-american theology and went further in his development of Black Theology, as it is evident in his book, *God of the Oppressed* especially.

South Africa black theologians were not so fortunate in that regard. They did not have a Wilmore at that very early and crucial stage of the development of their black theology. Consequently their theology suffered from a lack of selfcritique which did not last very long as we can see from the present debates among black theologians in South Africa.

When most black theologians focused as a matter of priority their entire attention on the black community and its praxis as sources of material for reflection, and neglected public methodological debates, B Goba plunged into these debates in which he was later joined by I Mosala and B Tlhagale who lifted the debate to a higher level. At a time when the acting subject in the struggle for liberation was not yet clearly identifiable in group or class terms B Goba, M Buthelezi, D Tutu and others, consistently identified the entire black community as the acting subject of its liberation.<sup>6</sup> It was only later when black trade unions for both men and women made a forceful appearance on the labour scene and took their rightful place at the forefront of the fierce battle for a society of unshackled people that Mosala and B Tlhagale identified our interlocutor as the black workers.<sup>7</sup> It is necessary to say that this change of the

5. See G S Wilmore's *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* New York, Anchor Books 1973 p 295f. Also see Cone's *God of the Oppressed* Seabury Press, New York, 1975 p 252f; also see Cone's *My Soul Looks Back* (Abingdon, Nashville, 1982) p 82.

6. See Mokgethi Motlhabi (ed.): *Essays on Black Theology*, Johannesburg, U.C.M. 1972.

7. See B Tlhagale's "Towards a Black Theology of Labour" in C Villa-Vicencio and J W De Gruchy (eds): *Resistance and Hope* David Philip: Cape Town, 1985 p 126ff.

identity of the acting subject did not imply disillusionment with or a rejection of the black community. It was a necessary deepening of the concept "black community" whereby this community is named in relation to the primary activity – economic activity – that determines its oppression and also serves as a trustworthy criterion of national liberation. Black people have been dispossessed of their land which is the basic means of all production and subsistence as well as a source of power. They have been turned into dispossessed workers whose only possession is their labour power. By identifying black people as workers these theologians have lifted our struggle beyond civil rights to human rights, from an exclusive struggle against racism to a social and national revolution.

This deepening in the identifying of the black interlocutor is very important for black theology. It introduces theology into the area of the material basis of theology which has been rather largely neglected by euro-american theologians in favour of spiritualization. This is to my mind, an important theological deepening and corrective.

Recent publications by our american brothers and sisters also show evidence of a further development in this area.<sup>8</sup> In the earlier stages of the development of their version of black theology the interlocutor was the black community as an undelineated whole. The acute and urgent problem was racism as it affected the entire black community and as it permeates the entire fabric of american society. This

viewpoint was carried forward into international theological dialogues, especially into the dialogue with Latin American theologians where it was presented forcefully by Cone and Wilmore among others. Latin Americans on their part approached theology from the class paradigm and also forcefully presented class as the determinant in society.<sup>9</sup>

In the ensuing difficult debate that took long before positions softened, both sides acceded to the point made by the other side. Black theologians recognized that racism is not the sole problem facing blacks and that capitalism posed a serious problem and that it has to be addressed theologically, combated socially as well as politically and eradicated simultaneously with racism. What is important for us at this stage of our discussion is that in addition to convincingly presenting the painful concrete issue of racism and acknowledging that the latin americans had a point about capitalism, Black americans also addressed the issues of religion of the oppressed as well as the culture of the oppressed within the framework of marxism. They pointed out that these two areas are the achilles' heel of marxism.<sup>10</sup> In fact as far as religion is concerned, marxism generally regards it a negative factor in the life of oppressed people, i.e. as an ideological instrument that is used by the dominant classes against the dominated classes. And as we all can attest from our own experience as well as that of many people in our black communities, this is not completely true. Oppressed black people continuously remold

8. See C West: *Prophesy Deliverance*: Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1982, Cone's *My Soul looks back*; also see Frances Beale's "Double Jeopardy: To be Black and Female" in *Black Theology: A Documentary History*.

9. Sergio Torres and John Eagleson (eds.): *The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities*-New York, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1981.

10. See especially Cornel West's paper in *The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities*. Also see Cone's *Arguments in My Soul Looks Back* as well as in *For my people*.

religious ideas which are imposed upon them and produce a religion that is capable of functioning as a defensive as well as combative ideological weapon.<sup>11</sup>

This position is based, as we know, on the marxian principle that dominant ideas in every society are the ideas of the dominant class. This leads to ignoring ideas of the oppressed or relegating them to a position of insignificance in that entire society even among the dominated classes thus clearing the field for dominant ideas to dominate unchallenged. The experience of the oppressed is that their ideas, in the present case their dominated religion, continues to survive and play a sustaining role as well as that of contesting the hegemony of the religion of the dominant classes.

(So far the Italian communist party is the only marxist party that has acknowledged the positive role of religion especially the religion of the oppressed.)

The implication of the above for black social analysts is that black theologians and other social analysts should not rely exclusively on marxism in their attempt to understand their predicament in a capitalist and racist world. They have to find within their own cultural heritage other tools which will be used complementarily with marxism.

This is a lesson which is very important for South African black theologians because there is a significant section of the oppressed in South Africa today that insists on the validity of the orthodox marxian assertion that race is not a co-determinant of oppression of black people. Those who hold that view are bound to ignore the culture

and religion of black people in their search for weapons of struggle.

The redefinition of the identity of the black community also coincided with a new issue on the agenda – women's oppression and their struggle against it. Black Theology had up to that point not addressed it and for this gross neglect black theologians have to hang their heads in shame and ask for God's forgiveness and that of our mothers and sisters.

All attention had up to that point focussed entirely on national issues in which black people as a group stand over and against white people, white economy and the white state. Many black women, especially at a time when they too were in the forefront of the battle facing the wrath of the army and the police and suffering equally if not more, demanded the issue of their subservient position during times of relative peace to be addressed. The entire black community, especially men, were challenged to widen and deepen sanctificatory processes within itself and practice internal justice and distribute power to effect equality in order to enhance the external thrust of communal praxis and theology in combat against oppressive forms of white theology. Black women who have tasted equality in battle, in suffering and in victory are not prepared to return to their former status in the community and at home after combat or when the struggle is over. They called for internal dialogue to redress this situation so that the gains of their struggle would not be lost.<sup>12</sup>

The church and theology have not escaped from this justifiable critique. It is indeed true that black women constitute the largest group in the church

11. I J Mosala's "African Independent Churches: a study in socio-theological protest" in *Resistance and Hope*.

12. Bernadette Mosala's "Black Theology and the Struggle of the Black Woman in South Africa" in *The Unquestionable Right to be Free* is along these lines.

and also that they provide the material means for the survival of the church. But paradoxically, they are the objects of a male created, monitored and imposed power structure and theology. Women are in most cases, not allowed to exercise power in the church wherein they are almost the sole audience and activists, be it political, religious, financial or theological power.

They are allocated some space yes, but it is space at some remote corner and not at the center stage of the church. That remote corner is the only space they are allowed to use for articulation of their own theology, a theology which they create in response to the challenges which face them specifically as well as those which face their families and community.

Black women in South African churches are starting to stand up against this exclusion in church and theology. They have started to articulate their theological thoughts and demand an audience and dialogue.

As we are all aware and have come to accept, doing a relevant theology demands a rigorous analysis of society. This is the area in which the overwhelming majority of black women in South African churches are in my opinion not yet well grounded. And this is the area in which black american women are well developed. They can therefore be of great assistance to black South African women, church women and theologians.

As we have stated above, the advance to which we are referring is in the area of analysis of society and that determines the questions and priorities for the theological agenda. We have noticed that black female theolo-

gians in the U.S. distinguish their predicament from that of white women. This is because of the peculiar way in which racism operates in a capitalist society. It leads to more suffering for black women in society. On the other side, capitalism in a racist society favours white women and exploits black women together with black men as well as the entire black community.

This understanding of their society has led to a development of black theology from a feminist perspective which is different and separate from white feminist theology.<sup>13</sup> Its agenda is also different from that of white feminist theology because black women stand in the black community and the black church. They are not undistinguishable members of american society and church. This is what most black South African women of the church still have to learn, accept and defend. Since feminist theology came to South Africa wearing a white garb and was introduced by white feminist theologians at a time when the black consciousness perspective had lost ground to the so called progressive democratic perspective, women's theological reflection is also being dominated by the dominant perspective and the questions and priorities of white society and the white church. Black questions take a back seat as a result.

The social developments in South Africa have inevitably led to a greater appreciation of the value of social sciences and their analytical usefulness in bringing clarity to an often muddy and confusing situation. Calls in this regard were repeatedly made by Goba in the past and are presently renewed by Tlhagale and Mosala. They loudly call for a search for an appropriate

13. See the articles by Frances Beale, Jacqueline Grant, Theresa Hoover, Pauli Murray and Alice Walker in *Black Theology: A Documentary History*.

biblical hermeneutic which would deal with these new issues satisfactorily. It is especially Mosala's timely critique of Black Theology on its failure to become the property of the masses that really hurt. Black Theology, he said fairly recently quoting K Marx, "... has not yet become a material force because it has not gripped the masses".<sup>14</sup> He called for a new way of going about with the biblical text, a way that will enable the hidden and silenced but struggling oppressed people in biblical communities to become visible, and to break their silence and speak up clearly and loud enough to be heard by the equally silenced black people today as they stand up to demand God's justice and liberation. As history shows, radical calls of this nature are not readily heard or speedily responded to. Black theologians in South Africa are, however, slowly responding and in their struggle to read Scripture in the light of the perspective of the black working people as their loyal "organic intellectuals" they are amazed at the dynamite that lies hidden deep in the bowels of the scriptural text. It will, however, take some time before the results of this new effort reach the international theological market in large consignments.

Inevitably, the above hermeneutical question raises again a related issue which, we thought, had been adequately dealt with and closed in the 1970's by A Boesak, T Mofokeng and others, namely the relationship between scripture and a social praxis which is informed by social sciences, especially by dialectical sociology of

marxian derivation.<sup>15</sup> While Boesak, in his argument with Cone in the 1970's insisted that "the light of the Word of God" is the only final judgement of all action and reflection, other black theologians disagreed and contended that light shines both ways because of the unifying and enlightening presence of Jesus the Messiah in the struggles of faith of both the communities in the biblical text as well as that of the suffering black people of South Africa whose text is being written with their blood.

It's interesting to see that black theologians in the US have also had a similar debate. I'm thinking here of J Cone and Deotis Roberts.<sup>16</sup> In this debate Cone took the position that God is not absent from the life of the oppressed as they struggle in life and as they read the scriptures in the light of their actual concrete actions. And that consequently, that practice is of revelational importance. In other words the light of that practice shines on the scriptural text making certain things in the text perceptible as it does on the practice, improving it qualitatively and driving it forward. Roberts I think, takes the traditional reformed view that light can only shine from the bible, which is the view propounded by Boesak in his first book *Farewell to Innocence*.

I'm of the opinion that, when discussing this matter we should bring the Spirit of God into the picture and ask what the role of the spirit is in the communal practice as the spirit that dwells among those who are occupied with being obedient to Jesus' command of loving their neighbour. If this spirit is

14. Mosala's article entitled "The use of the Bible in Black Theology" in *The unquestionable right to be free* addresses this issue.

15. See Mofokeng T A: *The Crucified among the Crossbearers: Towards a Black Christology*- Kampen, J H Kok, 1983 and Boesak A A : *Farewell to Innocence*- Kampen, J H Kok, 1976.

16. See J Deotis Roberts' *Liberation and Reconciliation*- Westminster Press, Philadelphia and Cone in his *A Black Theology of Liberation*- New York, J B Lippincott, 1970.

God and if this God is, as the bible teaches, involved in that practice in both its concrete and theoretical forms, is it too far-fetched to conclude that spirit brings the two practices together? To put differently, I don't see how and why the spirit of God can be involved in the life and practice of the biblical community of faith as well as in contemporary community of faith and not be involved in bringing the two communities together when the contemporary community desires to dialogue with and learn from their predecessors. I think that the God who has promised us his presence continues to use our own practice to enlighten our reading of the scriptural text. I would therefore agree with Cone on this matter.

For those who would fear contemporary textual domination of the biblical text and would want to protect it, I would say that we should emphasize the dynamic character and nature of the spirit of God in the community of faith. God's spirit cannot be held hostage or prisoner in the practice or life of the contemporary community just as this spirit could not be imprisoned in the biblical communities. The bible witnesses to many occasions and situations where people or communities were abandoned by God and from whom the spirit of God deserted. The spirit of God is free and frees.

Coupled with the above issue is the closely related one of the "authority" of scripture as a whole which especially Mosala addresses very provocatively and posing very pertinent questions. According to him, too many black theologians still approach the text with awe as the "Word of God"

and consequently use, uncritically, texts which can have no other impact than that of frustrating the total liberation of black people.<sup>17</sup> This mystification of the text still stands in the way of its rationally and liberating reading and appropriation. It hides the class struggles which were going on in biblical communities of which the biblical text reports. It also hides the fact that the text itself is a product of such struggles, one that has to be approached with great analytical care lest black theologians make wrong textual connections.

Unfortunately we can only report that not many of our theologians, especially biblical scholars, have entered this discussion. It is therefore not evident whether this proposed approach will make Black Theology grip the black Christian masses and enhance their faith as well as stimulate and radicalize their struggle for justice and liberation.

Black american theologians approach the scriptural text from within the black church and read it using all the available reading tools from within this church. This is important because it is this church or christians within it who read that text and have to be helped to understand it better or go further with it. So far evidence has shown that this community has always read this text in such a way that it contributed to their struggle to survive in a society which militated against the life of black people and denied their humanity. Their reading has even encouraged them to engage, as Wilmore has shown so clearly in his *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, in different acts of rebellion in the past

17. See *The Use of the Bible in Black Theology*. See Cone's *God of the Oppressed* and also J Deotis Roberts' *Roots of a Black Future: Family and Church*- The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1980.

and present. There was therefore no general opiating influence of the bible evident.<sup>18</sup>

But since many black people who belong to the working class and are aware of their class position and class interests have to be reached with the biblical text, it remains a question whether they can be reached and impressed with the traditional reading of this text. I have my doubts. I would suspect that they would rather prefer to read it in such a way that they would hear it is addressing their working class problems which are not absolutely identical with those of the black community per se. If that be the case, then black american theologians will benefit something from engaging in the dialogue which Mosala is calling for.

### III. DEEPENING THE SOURCES

Right from the inception of contemporary Black Theology the definition of the concept "black" has been problematic. While there was unanimity right at the beginning that all the oppressed black people of South Africa i.e. Africans, Coloureds and Indians – are black people, the same cannot be said regarding inclusion of black culture, black history and African traditional religion in Black Theology as formative factors. M Buthelezi explicitly and emphatically talked about the culture of blacks having been totally destroyed – and was followed by A Boesak in that he excluded it in his first book while including black history. S Biko on the other hand firmly held that black culture had only been severely damaged but not totally

erased from the memory of the oppressed as well as removed from their daily lives.<sup>19</sup> Many theologians including those who contributed towards the publication "A relevant theology for Africa" concurred with him on this.<sup>20</sup> At the end one was confronted by two parallel streams in our black theological thinking which still persist despite slight narrowing lately. Many black theologians of the former persuasion have come to acknowledge the pervasiveness of black culture as well as recognize the importance of black history for Black Theology. Those who were first in regarding black culture as important were already sifting through it to distinguish useful elements from those which, if displayed to whites, wrongly give an impression of our readiness to submit to white oppression. Others were searching for cultural parallels with the culture of the Hebrew people of the Old as well as New Testament and identifying concepts like "corporate personality" and "solidarity" which are central to African and Hebrew perception of being human. S Maimela even explored the contribution which an African concept of salvation can make towards Christianity in general and to theology in particular.<sup>21</sup>

The case of African traditional religions was more difficult especially as found in the African Independent Churches – the principal religious custodians of African culture and traditional religion. Some students in SASO during the early days of the black consciousness movement were rightly very critical of the African Independent Churches for their apolit-

18. See G S Wilmore's *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*.

19. See *Farewell to Innocence* for Boesak's position and *Essays on Black Theology* for that of M Buthelezi. S Biko's position on this issue comes out clearly in his "Black Consciousness and the quest for true humanity" in *Essays on Black Theology*.

20. See Hans-Jurgen Becken (ed): *Relevant Theology for Africa* - Durban, Lutheran Pub. House, 1973.

21. S S Maimela: "Salvation in African Traditional Religions" in *Missionalia* Vol. 13, No 2, August 1985.

ical stance which significantly reduced the numbers of black Christians in the forefront of the struggle. They subsequently advocated the total eradication of these churches, a task which would have been impossible given their relatedness to the black working class and working class conditions that still exist. The situation has fortunately changed, though not significantly. Notwithstanding persistent criticism of these churches' intolerable neutrality which is tantamount to support of the racist state, there is an increasing understanding among a significant number of black theologians of these churches and appreciation of their positive role in enabling the lowest in the black community to at least absorb the sting of oppression and survive.<sup>22</sup> We therefore anticipate an increase in research interest in this area of church activity as well as dialogue with theologians and religious leaders of these churches on the part of black theologians. One can only caution that this new appreciation should not lead to idealization of these churches. They still have great problems like all the historic churches.

As we all know, the areas of African culture, history and traditional religions have been both areas of unhappy separation as well as possible bases of Pan African dialogue, co-operation and unification of black people in the world. In the 1970's there was unfortunately less success in the dialogue which went on between Afro-Americans and many Africans who took part in it. While G Wilmore and J Cone tried hard to bridge the differences by pointing at areas of possible common interest and cross fertilization, J Mbiti on the African side seemed irrevoca-

bly bent on widening the gap by stressing the differences between these theologies at the expense of commonalities.<sup>23</sup> It was not until Bishop Desmond Tutu entered this discussion as an African and a black person i.e. as one who combines in his life and thought African culture and politico-economic commitment on the African continent, that prospects for Pan-Africanism in theology improved. Since that intervention by a black South African, many of his countrymen have joined the discussion and more African theologians in free Africa accept the validity of the critique made by J Cone that African theology is impoverished by neglect of socio-political issues. We are thinking here of people like J Chipenda Kwesi Dickson and Jean Marc Ela. This shows the key strategic position in which our situation of oppression and our struggle have put South African black theologians in regard to this Pan-African theological dialogue. It remains to be seen whether we will live up to the challenges that face us and use opportunities which are open to us.

In their own appropriation of African culture, history and traditional religion as formative factors some black theologians in South Africa are going further and consistently apply class analysis on them in order to eliminate their negative elements and discover positive ones. This they do not withstanding recognition of weakness of marxism on issues of culture and religion. Mosala asserts for instance, regarding culture and black theology, that "for this reason the task of a black theology of liberation is, amongst other things, to identify the

22. See I J Mosala "The Relevance of African Traditional Religions and their relevance to Black Theology" in *The unquestionable right to be Free*.

23. See Sergio Torres and Kofi Appiah-Kubi (eds.): *African Theology en Route* - Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1978. See Cone's *A Black Theology of Liberation* and Cornel West's *Prophesy Deliverance*.

distinctive forms of working class culture and use them as a basis for developing theological strategies of liberation". When doing that we should search in the past struggles of our working people how this culture informed and transformed their struggles so that we can deal critically with their contemporary culture. It is necessary to do that because as Marx says, "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles". We should therefore investigate the cultural history of the struggling classes and learn from it. This is how Cornel West and J Cone deal with black culture in the U.S.<sup>23</sup>

As far as African history is concerned, I am of the opinion that while we accept the symbolic importance of certain African personalities of the past as bearers of the tradition of struggle against oppression in its many different manifestations we should dig deeper and unearth the real bearers of those struggles, the lowest men, women and children in our African societies of the past and be informed by them in our reading of scripture and subsequent formulation of black theology. We should not get stuck in valorization of African feudal kings especially in present day South Africa where most of their descendents are being co-opted into the apartheid system and are consequently a serious distortion of the history of their forebears.

As far as African traditional religion is concerned, as it is practised inside as well as outside of the African Independent Churches, we should be very careful especially now. Too many missionaries and former missionaries who were actually denying the validity of these religions and actively cam-

paigned against them are now glorifying them. In the past they tried hard to elicit black support in their campaign to eradicate these religions, now they are again asking for black support for the rehabilitation of these religions. This we should not do. Instead we should follow our own path and critically appropriate only those elements which appeal to and sustain the black poor and most powerless in their struggle for survival. These we should consider incorporating in black theology.

#### IV. DOMINANT THEMES OF THE PAST AND PRESENT

Racist oppression and capitalist dispossession of blacks in South Africa has always undergone a historical development and manifested itself differently during different historical periods. This happened, of course, in such a way that the suffering of our people broadened and worsened progressively. Not only men and women became the victims but old people and babies as well. The different official names which were used to refer to the indigenous people reflect this. They were initially called kaffirs, then natives, later bantu and now Blacks (with a truncated connotation). They worked hard to create an appropriate psychological resistance among blacks and also made necessary adjustments to means of resistance, continually evolved new strategies in order to be more effective in such worsening conditions. Since assault on blacks was not limited to the economic, social and physical areas but extended to include ideological manipulation which took – among many forms – a theological one, black Christians, pastors and theologians were called upon to

24. See C West's *Prophecy Deliverance*.

respond theologically to counteract and restrict mental damage on black christians. They had to join hands with black sociologists, economists, psychologists and other scientists.

In the field of Black Theology it is evident that the selection of themes and determination of priorities was related to the historical development of objective conditions as well as the subjective state of christian faith of the oppressed. At no point in time did Black Theology follow the european and white American agenda because it was part of the problem. That would not have helped to build theological resistance against further corrosion of the mind of the oppressed. And as S Biko aptly put it "the mind of the oppressed is the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor". To deprive the oppressor of this precious mind Black theology had to determine its independent agenda which more often than not, contradicts that of most white theologians.

In the actual systematic development of Black theology two poles of reference stand out: the Exodus and the praxis of Jesus, the Messiah (Christology). Much of the earlier black theology revolves around them as events that provide a powerful paradigm of liberation. In both cases the notion of history which is generally insufficiently dealt with, if not totally neglected by traditional white theology, is regarded as very important. A historical approach to those events brings out their dynamic theological character. All the different theological concepts which are dealt with – creation, liberation, justice, reconciliation etc. are defrozen and injected with a dose of historicity by a people for whom history and time had stood still until they decided to move them. Black people have been

awakened to regard "the world as history in the making" and themselves as active participants in its making and moulding. To them history is not simply harmonious but conflictual as well because of inherent contradictions and antagonism among blacks and whites. It is dialectical and stumbles through moments of harmony and conflict in its forward movement. In opposition to a notion of history which moves independently of the human agency, with God alone in action, a notion that creates passivity among the oppressed who cannot wait an extra day longer for change, black theologians emphasize black people's agency as co-workers with God. They work with God in the historical destruction of structures, institutions and attitudes that make acquisition of life and dignity by black people impossible. Black christians – men and women, young and old – are shown biblically that they should be on the cutting edge of the struggle to create new structures and institutions which they can use to gain their economic justice, social equality and political empowerment as a people and as individuals. It is their Christian vocation to do this in anticipation of the coming of the Kingdom of God. To stimulate this active discipleship Black Theology emphasizes people's God-given potency for revolutionary action and encourages black people to believe in themselves as well as in their abilities to define, shape and reshape their world and social relationships. It is in connection with these emphases that A Boesak discussed the biblical basis of black power in the middle 1970's and S Maimela does today in the middle of the 1980's. (As things are today in South Africa this notion of black power in various forms – its channeling, direction and utilization will

continue to be emphasized by Black theology.) An understanding of the central position and role of the modern racist state in organizing and utilizing power to foster injustice and violently resist all efforts towards peace makes these emphases imperative.

In this area Cone and Albert Cleage have remained loyal to the earliest positions of black consciousness and black power. When Cone enters dialogue with black marxists he does so without abandoning that position which deals so aptly with racism. He complements it with a paradigm that is capable of dealing better with capitalism. In that way he is strengthened instead of weakened. C West is open to critique in this area.<sup>24</sup> For him racism is only responsible for the extra suffering of black people and not for their basic suffering. The tragedy with many black South African theologians and activists is that in a situation in which racism is still rampant and promises to be more so as the struggle heats up they have dumped black consciousness in favour of the more attractive and fashionable orthodox marxian paradigm. They believe that it is more adequate in dealing with both racism and capitalism in spite of the absence of evidence supporting that claim. These groups can learn from the American experience that these two paradigms complement each other and be more open in their dialogue with fellow theologians of the former persuasion.

Black Theology also deals at length as it is evident in the writings of the period around the 1976 Soweto uprisings, with the experience of suffering and death both within the Exodus journey as well as in Christology as the major fountain head of the Christian faith. Since 1976 the cross continues to hang heavily over black South Africa. Institutional resistance (sin) which

violently confronts all followers of the radical prophets and Jesus the black Messiah in the Exodus of black people, results in inconceivable suffering and genocidal killing of our people all over our country. Their suffering through heinous forms of torture, shootings and callous rape of our school children is related to the suffering of Jesus and his death at the hands of the state that acted in the name of the economically, politically and religiously powerful. As early as 1974 the endless killing of so many young people before their time, let alone the invisible internal bleeding of millions of our people as a result of economic and psychological torture, already constituted a crucial theological problem for M Buthelezi. Dying in the path of a radical discipleship was made even more of a problem because there was then no visible convincing sign that the wall of apartheid was cracking. Instead it was toughening and thickening day by day, making it imperative for theology to descend deeper and deeper into the dark mysteries of the suffering and death of Jesus in search for the presence of God and his promises for our people. Black theology cannot but continue to search for the christological meaning of their suffering and death because their innocent blood continues to scream to God for justice like the blood of Abel. Within the South African valley of death of innocent black children who try to do God's will by following in the footsteps of Jesus the Messiah, Black Theology is bound to stand with both feet. It will have to seriously explore in this overshadowing atmosphere of death and despair a new and meaningful way of understanding and articulating the faith of a resurrection that denies death a word of finality in the world. Black Theology owes this to the black departed,

living and unborn whose history is characterized by death and the absence of God. The power of resurrection which is produced from the tomb

of Jesus is desperately needed to break the umbilical cord of racist oppression that ties black people to the South African inferno.

# Black Theology in South Africa and North America: Prospects for the Future; Building of Alliances

by Dr Itumeleng J Mosala

Two insights may provide a useful starting point for an attempt to develop a vision of the future of black theology. Both of these are inscribed in Marx's celebrated political text: *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. The one insight concerns the discursive weapons of struggle that activists in oppositional struggles invoke; and the other involves the qualitative differences that Marx observes between bourgeois and proletarian revolutions. About the first he writes:

"Men (sic) make their history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.

And just when they seem engaged in revolutionising themselves and things, in creating something entirely new, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle slogans and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language. . . .

The awakening of the dead in those

revolutions therefore served the purpose of glorifying new struggles, not of parodying the old; of magnifying the given tasks in imagination, not of taking flight from their solution in reality; of finding once more the spirit of revolution, not of making its ghost walk again . . . .

Earlier revolutions required world-historical recollections in order to drug themselves concerning their own content. In order to arrive at its content, the revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury the dead. There the phrase went beyond the content; here the content goes beyond the phrase.<sup>1</sup>

Concerning the second insight Marx asserts;

"Bourgeois revolutions, like those of the eighteenth century, storm more swiftly from success to success; their dramatic effects outdo each other; men and things seem set in sparkling brilliants; ecstasy is the everyday spirit; but they are short lived; soon they have attained their zenith, and a long depression lays hold of society before it learns soberly to assimilate the results of its storm and stress period. Proletarian revolutions, on the other hand, like those of the nineteenth century, criticize themselves consistently, interrupt themselves continually in their own course, come back to the apparently accomplished in order to

1. Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, in One Volume, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1968, pp 96-98.

begin it afresh, decide with unmerciful thoroughness the inadequacies, weaknesses and paltriness of their first attempts, seem to throw down their adversary only in order that he may draw new strength from the earth and rise again more gigantic before them . . ."<sup>2</sup>

In America and South Africa, black theologians have done both of these two things. They have appealed to their history and culture for tools of self-defense and struggle. By doing this they have affirmed the significance of Gayraud Wilmore's assertion that "the first source of black theology is the black community itself".<sup>3</sup> Similarly, albeit thinly and unsystematically, they have faced the question which J Ngubane poses as *the* challenge of black theology: ". . . is it more comprehensive, concerned not only with oppressive societal issues, but also with cultural and philosophical issues?"

Black theologians have taken their cue from the *past* traditions of struggle in order to stage a revolution in the *present*. The value of this has been to maintain a historical perspective without which present struggles retain a fatal blindspot. The concern remains, however, whether in this appropriation of history and culture the "phrase goes beyond the content or the content beyond the phrase".

But that is precisely the reason for this conference of Azanians and African Americans. We are here to criticise and interrupt ourselves; to return to our apparent successes in order to start again. We are gathered here to allow ourselves an unmerciful self-criticism on our weaknesses and the paltriness of our first attempts. And even more

fundamentally, we are here to remind ourselves that our adversary has fallen down only in order that he/she may draw new strength and rise again more gigantic than before. The recent-re-emergence in South Africa of white liberalism under the guise of "left progressivism" is a case in point.

Thus a consideration of the future prospects of black theology implies an appraisal of its projective, critical and appropriative functions.<sup>5</sup> This is necessary if black theology is not to degenerate into a theological fad. It is better to start again, in the spirit of Marx's second insight, than to pass quickly from one contentless revolution to another. Black theologians must make clear the nature of the society they struggle for. It is inadequate to get by their "projective" responsibility by uncritically adopting the abstract values of western liberal democracy, like justice, peace, reconciliation, etcetera. Also, if black theologians are not to fall prey to the oppressive aspects of the dominant capitalist cultural discourses, they need autonomous "critical" apparatuses. This is especially indispensable in areas such as biblical hermeneutics. The reason is that here, in particular, theologians have been captive to the hermeneutical and exegetical assumptions of white theology.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the question of how black theologians "appropriate" received religious and cultural traditions is of vital importance. The future of black theology is as much dependent on its ability to create new practices as to utilize received discourses.

Assuming the validity of these points I have just made, four areas of

2. *Ibid.*, p 99.

3. G Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1983, p 235.

4. I J Mosala and B Tlhagale (eds), *The Unquestionable Right To Be Free*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1986, p 89.

5. T Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin Or Towards A Revolutionary Criticism*, Verso, London, 1981, p 113.

6. I J Mosala and B Tlhagale, *Op. cit.*, pp 175ff.

concern immediately suggest themselves as requiring urgent critical activity.

### 1. Definitions

In the early days of black theology, the definitional task was taken very seriously. Black theology was defined as reflection on the black experience in the light of the "Word of God". Later this definition was qualified, especially in South Africa, by explaining that blackness here did not refer to the colour of the skin.<sup>7</sup> Since then, there has been a shift in emphasis from definitions to the formulations of content and form within black theology.

Clearly, this shift to the actual "doing" of black theology is to be welcomed. Mokgethi Motlhabi is certainly correct in insisting on the need for "stage two" of black theology.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, an enormous price will be, and is being paid, consequent upon a complete abandonment of the definitional task. In order to appreciate this, let us look again at the implications of the definition of black theology in South Africa.

The initial definition of black theology implied that only black people could do black theology. In fact, in the early days there was no question that this was unequivocally the case. At this point the black theological project was still inseparably tied to the black revolt against the totality of the white world. Neither black nor white people had any doubt about the nature of this revolt. However, as black theology sought accommodation within the discursive terrain controlled by the beneficiaries of the white world, prob-

lems arose. In the domain of academic activity where the ideology of liberalism provides the controlling metaphors, black theology needed to readjust in order to be accommodated. This was particularly serious in South Africa where the white world is *really* white. Liberal theologians had been grieved, while emerging black theologians, the latter being invariably the products of the former, were contradicted, by the demands of the black revolt and its consequences for black theology. Was it not the case that white liberal theologians had helped to create the mood, at least discursively, that led to the rise of black theology? But of course, as Mafeje argues, they did not understand the principle of the negation of the negation.<sup>9</sup> And so black theologians came to their rescue; they qualified blackness to include those white people who are supposedly black in thinking. Since then black theology has had nothing but trouble in South Africa, with white people virtually silencing it in favour of Latin American liberation theology. This debate needs to be aggressively revisited. What for instance is the difference between contextual theology and black theology in South Africa? Is there an ideological-cultural explanation of white "progressive" theologians' predilection for Latin American liberation theology?<sup>10</sup>

But of course there was a fundamental weakness in black theology which made the onslaught on it possible. This weakness has to do with our failure to do "internal", critical definitional work. If in the beginning it was clear that white people could not do

7. A Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1977, p 27.

8. In I J Mosala and B Tlhagale, *op. cit.*, p XII.

9. A Mafeje, "The Problem of Anthropology in Historical Perspective: An Inquiry into the Growth of the Social Sciences", *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 10, no. 2, 1976, p 319.

10. The Kairos Document's silence on black people and on the theological discourses of black people, namely, Black Theology and African theology, should be viewed in this light.

black theology, did it follow, though, that all black people could do black theology? Was it correct to be so loose in our definition of the black theological practice as to imply that it amounted to any theology done by any group of black people? The need to tighten up the theoretical and ideological screws in this area cannot be over-emphasised. This applies equally to the U.S.A. and South African situations.

I argue for an ongoing concern for the definitional task of black theology for two reasons. First, because this task is inseparable from the equally important responsibility to "do" black theology. The function of naming reality is an integral part of the process of creating that reality. We name and rename as we execute the production of the black theological discourses. And this terrain is not an ideologically neutral one. The very existence of black theology bears witness to the fact that the definitional function of theological practice is a site of fierce class, gender and cultural struggles.

Second, and tied up with the first reason, the definitional task is crucial to the ongoing practice of black theology because of the present historical conjuncture: the era of monopoly capitalism. This is the period of capitalist development when the "commodity form" extends its influence to all aspects of human life. It is the period of the Universal Market. In this period all discourses, status quo-oriented ones as well as oppositional ones, are vulnerable to co-optations by the "commodity form". Thus in this conjuncture the question of the "images of struggle" always calls to mind its dialectical counterpart, the "strug-

gle for images".<sup>11</sup> In the area of black theology this issue is of pivotal significance. For here, as anywhere, Marx's words ring true that "In every epoch the ruling ideas are the ideas of the ruling class".<sup>12</sup> What needs to be added, though, is that in *no* epoch are the ruling ideas uncontested. The discursive sphere of society is as much an arena of struggle as the non-discursive sphere.

The danger, however, of "neo-young-Hegelianism" must be avoided. The definitional task, and the struggle for images which goes with it, is not a matter of abstract rearrangement of furniture. On the contrary, genuine liberative definitional work requires concrete involvement in actual historical struggles. This task should not be seen as an alternative to "fighting in the streets or in the mountains".<sup>13</sup> Rather, it is an integral part of the same process.

I must underline this point of the unity of theory and practice. For indeed that is what the "definitional task" is in fact about. Presently, this task defines the nature of the crisis of black politics as was illustrated by the Tottenham uprisings in England and the KCT/Cross Roads fiasco in South Africa recently. For as Stuart Hall so poignantly articulated in relation to the Tottenham problem:

"Keeping faith with the people who, in the teeth of relentless oppression, spontaneously resist, is alright on the night. But it is not enough when the next day dawns, since all it means is that, sooner or later, the front line troops, with their superior weapons and sophisticated responses, will corner some of our young people on some dark night along one of these walkways and take their revenge on Tottenham".<sup>14</sup>

11. B Hilton-Barber, "Images of War, War of Images", *Vula!*, (June, 1986), passim.

12. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, edited by C J Arthur, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1970, p 64.

13. A Mafeje, *op. cit.*, p 332.

14. S Hall, "Cold Comfort Farm", *New Socialist*, November 1985, p 12.

The ongoing task of defining black theology, therefore, must not be separated from the continuing production process of the black theological discourses of liberation. Cornel West's *Prophesy Deliverance*, T Mofokeng's *The Crucified among the Crossbearers*, James Cone's *For My People*, and the Azanian production, *The Unquestionable Right To Be Free*, should all afford us a moment to pause and ask, what after sixteen years do we mean by Black Theology?

## 2. Black Feminist Theology

The area of black feminist theology presents one of the biggest challenges to black theologians. This, not because there is any doubt as to its importance. On the contrary, precisely because, as is commonly held in revolutionary circles, the measure of the success of any liberation struggle is the extent of the liberation of women in that struggle.

Even more importantly, the problem of the "struggle between struggles" makes the question of a black feminist theology exceedingly urgent. The tendency by some struggles to want to subsume other struggles under their aegis is a characteristic feature of "discourse imperialism" under monopoly capitalism. The experience of women and blacks in supposedly socialist organizations is salutary in this regard.

Thus not only is an autonomous black feminist theological discourse a necessity of the objective and subjective conditions of black women's struggle, but it is also a condition of the successful execution of the black liberation struggle. Without such an autonomous discourse of struggle black theology is dangerously truncated.

In this area, a sharing of resources between Azanians and African Americans could help correct the deficit and

drag black theology out of a backwardness which only reinforces white cultural hegemony. A moratorium on other areas of black theological study and production may not be out of place at this time. This is particularly significant given the super-exploitability of black women under conditions of monopoly capitalism.

## 3. Methodological Frameworks and Racism

So far an area of dependency, and in many ways neo-colonialism, for black theology is that of methodological frameworks. Almost invariably, we have been independent on the nature of our theological project but depended on the discursive tools by which we carried it out. This was true of the radical liberal critique of racial imperialism as well as the recent class analysis of capitalist society and culture, both of which underscored our methodological resistance of oppression.

In and of themselves the methodological and theoretical frameworks borrowed from other social and historical *praxes* are not wrong. The dangers do exist, however, of them becoming the means by which new forms of cultural and racial chauvinism and domination may be inaugurated.

In the contemporary South African political discourse, for instance, this is an area in which some black oppositional practices have been debilitated by white theoretical and epistemological paternalism. White people's privileged "ideological-methodological" competence in this area has been, more than anything, the sole legitimator of their inclusion in the progressive circles. In fact the emergence recently of an autonomous, politically legitimating, discourse known as

"progressiveness" is a function of this specifically white privileged domain of methodological competence. Of course, this "competence" is itself the product of the privileged position of white people, especially in areas such as education.

I do not make this point in order to devalue the contribution of this kind of injection into the oppositional practices in South Africa. Indeed the change from liberal democratic and moral rhetoric to quasi-socialist terminology of struggle in South Africa should be credited to this infusion of "progressive" methodological frameworks into the black struggle in recent times.

The question, however, of the racism of the left which is as evil as the racism of the right, needs to be addressed by black theologians. In this regard we can learn an enormous amount of lessons from the feminist movement. This latter movement has an experience of working within the so-called progressive organization.<sup>15</sup>

#### 4. Black Working Class Culture

The fourth area which black theology needs to address seriously and concerning which lessons from both sides of the Atlantic must be drawn is that of the black working class culture. The black churches in the U.S.A. and especially the African-Independent churches in South Africa provide a wealth of resources in this regard. The black working class culture represents the framework within which black oppressed and exploited peoples either succumb to or revolt against the dominant economic, political, bureaucratic and cultural discourses of their

societies. A systematic and critical exploration and appropriation of the black working class culture is indispensable in the future development of black theology. The following questions could provide a starting point in such a quest:

1. What is the nature of the structure of black existence that makes possible the super-exploitability of the black labour-power?
2. What conditions of social life are necessary in order to ensure the permanent availability of black people as an exploitable form of cheap labour?
3. How are the cultural practices of the black communities made vulnerable to exploitation by the imperialist cultural discourses of monopoly or settler capitalism (e.g. Soweto art being displayed overseas while back home it is militarily and culturally repressed; Cosby show; Mr T., etc.)
4. In what way are black people made participants in their own oppression through manipulations of their consciousness as well as by more overtly repressive mechanisms, and how can this be dealt with; and more importantly, what is the role of the Church, Christianity, the Bible and some of the inherited reactionary black cultural-religious traditions?

#### Conclusion

I would like to end by reiterating what I think is the fundamental problematic facing the black Christian religious wing of the opposition to oppression and exploitation. It is this, that when

15. For a helpful analysis, see Iris Young, "Socialist Feminism and the limits of Dual Systems Theory", *Radical Religion*, vol.V, no. 1, 1980, passim. Specifically relevant to Black theology here is James H Cone's neglected classic: *The Black Church and Marxism*, Institute for Democratic Socialism, New York, 1980.

white people first encountered black people they had the Bible or Christianity and the black people had the land; the white people and the black people prayed; after the prayer, the white people had the land and the black

people the Bible and Christianity. Now the question is that black people have chosen to use the Bible and Christianity to get the land back; but can they get the land back and keep the Bible and Christianity?

# The Emergence of Black Feminist Theology in South Africa

by Rev Roxanne Jordaan

## INTRODUCTION

When God created the earth, the human being (male and female) was created in God's image. God then gave to both of them dominion over all the earth. This very fundamental biblical account of the creation story gives to the human being a tremendous sense of power and responsibility. The power vested in the human being to rule over all the earth, has embedded in its very essence the nature of responsible people. Surely God could not have filled the earth with all its beauty and splendour without realizing that it would take responsible people to exercise this authority in order to maintain the grandeur of creation, without becoming self-centred and selfish, oppressive and exploitative. At the moment of creation, we are supposed to be crowned with this responsible oversight.

However, because of some irresponsible act in the garden of Eden, authority has been usurped and for greed and disobedience the human race has a history of fighting and wars, all clamouring for power, one over and against the other. People are taken captive by others, reduced to slaves, servants, dumped in prison cells and left to be forgotten. People's land is taken away from them, and they are forced to

work as labourers on their own land. More often than not the very people, also commissioned by God to have dominion over all the earth, do not have enough strength in their starved bodies to wipe away a filthy fly from their parched lips, God then appeared in human flesh to restore to the oppressed people a hope for liberation, in the form of Jesus Christ to set us free. God made us to be human beings and to live accordingly and to have life abundantly. Being Black, this seems like a part of creation not intended for us because: For more than 300 years now, Black people in South Africa have been brutally forced to live as aliens in their own land. Their land was stolen from them, and they were subjugated to become slaves under a master on their own land. This "master" class of whites also brought along with them a religion, named Christianity, for what they taught and lived was not the Christianity of a Christ who had come to set the captives free, but rather of one who said to Black people to be submissive to their bosses and indoctrinating them to believe that they are inferior beings, reducing them to nothingness. Thank God we've never allowed ourselves to be reduced to nothingness. Rather, a theology speaking to the situation and lives of the

oppressed and exploited, giving real concrete hope was born – Black Theology.

Being Black is synonymous to being oppressed and exploited. It means to earn less than what is humanly sufficient to eat, to be housed, to be schooled properly.

It is to see desolation all around you, but not to give up hope. It is to experience total unbelief in the face of army rifles and caspirs, but not to be silenced by fear, and to keep on believing. It is to smell the stench of injustice from the armpits of mineworkers, domestic workers, factory workers, to walk along the roadside, making your way through heaps of faeces and forests of flies and not to have your guts wrenched from your body by nausea, but still to feel clean.

It is to be faced by a board stating whites only to a beautiful park, and not to feel your humanness diminished.

It is to be thrown into prison for saying that you cannot stand under the authority of an unjust system, and being prepared to be imprisoned without ever standing trial.

It is being employed in backbreaking low-paid jobs, or to have no job but still having the inborn desire to work.

It is to see a pregnant woman, a four year old child killed in cold blood by S A riot police, shots ripping their bodies apart, but not giving up the fight.

It is to be restricted in your movements, your speech, but still to have the freedom to sing the Lord's song.

It is to be uprooted from your dwelling place and to be placed in temporary tents, have your family wiped out by the cold of the night and the fumes from heat generating appliances, but still have the will to live.

It is Being. . . . Black. . . . Living.

This is the generally accepted idea

of our oppressions as Black people. Added to this atrocious way of life, is the position of the oppressed and exploited woman in her own community. Now both Black and white woman suffer from a denial of independence and dignity, but no white woman knows the augmented tensions of racial oppression. And so Black women in have an added burden of the effects of oppression and exploitation. Black women are the lowest paid work force in S A. It is known that in boom times they are hired at low wages, and fired during necessary periods. They form 70% of the unemployed community. They have to cook, wash, clean in their own homes after a hard day's work. (Those who are lucky to have jobs.) They form 60% of the church members, but are labelled as weaker, subordinate, and non-thinking people by their own men. They can raise the funds, but are not allowed to determine how the funds will be spent.

With the rise of political violence, more women have been raped by troops in the township than ever before. There are times when the women would fight side by side with their men in street wars against the army, but would have no say in the decision making body of the liberatory struggle. Black women have to leave suckling babies behind to try to find work in a big city, often eventually becoming prostitutes.

The very beginnings of humankind are challenged when living in the face of these demoralizing, dehumanising conditions. It takes a superhuman being to survive. These dehumanizing situations are totally out of line with God's intention as at creation. For dominion over all the earth was given to both male and female, with no specific colour attached to it. God used

Moses to deliver the people of Israel, but it was his mother who had the strength to disobey Pharaoh's orders and save the life of her child, and eventually the house of Israel. The whole Moses' story gives to the oppressed a renewed vision for liberation.

It may be that Jesus chose men to be disciples, very representative of the way in which the patriarchy was designed, and from what jobs the men were doing. But, God so designed the body of the woman that it would bear Christ, the liberator. Mary was not only concerned about her spiritual being only, but also about the social, political and economic well-being of her people. (Lk. 1: 46 – 55). The greatest event in the lives of God's people was performed through an agent – the women. Despite this (and I single Mary out) in the rise of Black Theology, the feminist aspect of liberation was not initially considered.

Any form of liberation which does not address itself to the emancipation of the whole person should be seriously challenged for misrepresenting the concept of liberation. For no person can be free when part of that which gives you your humanity is in chains. A part of the wholeness of black womanness is also caught up in Black Theology, and more specifically, Black Feminist Theology.

(When the women marched to Pretoria in 1956 most of them were Christians.) There needs to be some theological reflection on the doldrums of society in which Black women find themselves. Therefore Black Feminist Theology has to be an integral part of Black Theology.

Our personal experience of God in our oppressed situations has given rise to the inevitable acceptance that God is on the side of the oppressed, the downtrodden, the poor, and God acts

violently against those who perform degrading acts of oppression. God allowed the Red Sea to close up upon the military force of Pharaoh. Now whether we believe that the sea opened up and then closed or not, is not the issue. What is important is that those troops were washed away. I do not want to contend that God will violently wash away our male oppressors, but because male domination over female submission is not God ordained, the position has to be rectified, and reconciliation together with repentance, between Black male and female takes place in a just fashion, each recognizing the one is not the enemy of other, but rather focussing on the real enemy. It has to be accepted that Black women suffer the worst oppression and exploitation. God is no neutral God. God is a God of the poor. (Is 65 : 17ff. and Lk 1 : 46ff). It could then be claimed that Black Women have a greater claim to God's compassion. This might be so, but Black women have come to identify the real enemy, and are committed to struggle for justice and peace, and are prepared to accept that God gave dominion over all the earth to the human being: both man and woman.

Black Feminist Theology in S A has only just begun, although it was written on the table long before people consciously got together to articulate and develop Black Feminist Theology. With the Birth of the I C T in 1982, Black Feminist Theology got off the ground. An exciting new era was evolving in our communities. As the tension, crisis erupted in this country, more women were taking up positions as equals with the men on the battle field, at the drawing table (if and when there was time to sit down, for things were happening at an damning rate). But back home they still became the

slaves in their own homes. Black Women started getting together, and added to the general thrust of Black theology, Black Feminist Theology, not as counter-movement, but as a part of Black Theology.

Black men, at a Black Ecumenical Consultation held at Koinonia, Botha's Hill in 1985 laughed at the cries of anger and distress of Black Feminist Theologians. Nobody laughs at jokes about blacks. The cries of anger were real. The disappointment of realizing the insensitivity of other oppressed people was sad, but not disheartening, for a Black women never loses heart – we cannot afford to. I remember when I was a student at the Federal Theological Seminary (supposed to be the most progressive and Black orientated theological school in S A) some men students would not participate in Communion at the Lord's table when served by me, or my friend and colleague, Muriel Burrows. To add insult to injury, when my husband and I decided that we would like to have a baby and my tummy started pushing out, many of those who had originally received the bread and wine from me, refused to accept the communion.

As the political crisis heightened, the awareness of total liberation grew, and women became more intensely aware of their position in the church and church related organizations, and that our destiny as black women would not be determined by our position as the worst off in the struggle, but by how much we were prepared to fight a war for total liberation.

Jesus says in Luke 4:18-19

The spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me to  
preach good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release  
to the captives

and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are  
oppressed,  
to proclaim the acceptable year of  
the Lord.

•From our own experience we know that the poor, the captives, the blind, the oppressed refer to both male and female.

Jesus died for all of us as he identified himself with those who did not support the Roman Emperor. Jesus was resurrected for us, or else we would have no reason to live and/or die for justice.

The Black Feminist Theologians in South Africa are not all highly qualified or trained pastors. Black Feminist Theology is preached in the Nyanga bush in Cape Town, in the streets of Soweto, in the shacks of Veeplaas, in the forced removal tents in Kabah. Black women in South Africa are involved at grassroot level in the development of a Theology from both their intellectual capacity as well as their inner strength from their gut feelings.

For this reason we find that Black Feminist Theology does not distance from liberatory political tendencies. They all work together, for it is from the political oppression that Black Feminist Theology emerged.

Since then, slowly, but surely, and now in the 80's a theology challenging the inferior position of Black women has evolved. We are on the way to rediscover our tremendous power as Black women in S A. Obviously, there are still many women who have blossomed from their germinating period, but in the liberating moment, and I have to add, in the light of Black Feminist Theology emerging, the ground has been tilled and now the rains – a fight for total freedom – shall

pour down and beat life into its once dominant receptors, heralding in a new wave of awareness from the shackles of our oppressed beings.

Black Feminist Theology (B.F.T.) does not intend to disqualify oppressed men from the saving grace of Jesus Christ, but rather to instil in them a commitment to view the struggle for liberation in a holistic way. All of the oppressed has to be set free in order to accept that the struggle is a just struggle.

We now have the Bible, the oppressors have the land. Such a reversal of roles is not desirable, for now the oppressor is the better off. It was from the soil of Africa that we were called into a community with God. Now we have no soil of our own. Even the wealth of the soil in the homelands is controlled from Pretoria.

Both men and women were affected by this reversal. Men were forced to leave their homes to go cities and find better jobs, and poverty became a way

of life. Women took control over the whole household and ran the affairs of the family. It was only when money ran out altogether or there was sickness in the home that wives travelled to their husbands in the cities for help, and so the visit of a wife at the workplace of the husband became a symbol of misfortune.

Nothing much has been written about those brave women, but books upon books have been written depicting the struggle for survival of the men.

Black women today still know what it is like to nurse those injured in streets where the struggle for liberation continues – what it is like to care for children not their own.

To cry at the graves of some unknown comrade not having personally known the person, but having known the spirit of person.

To form support groups for victims of the system. They are laying the foundation of a theology that makes God relevant – a Black Feminist Theology.

# Book Reviews

## **The Politics of Compassion**

*J Nelson-Pallmeyer*

Maryknoll, Orbis, 1986. 132 pp. \$8.95

Nelson-Pallmeyer's book is a passionate call to his fellow North American Christians to become compassionate people who are moved by the unacceptable suffering conditions in which Latin Americans find themselves. This compassionate crying out against the pain and suffering of our fellow human beings is, in his view, a necessary precondition if Christians in the North are going to do something to change the unjust world into a humane one. This American writer was converted to this new standpoint through his exposure to, participation, and contact with Bible study groups commonly known as "base communities".

Reading the Scriptures from the standpoint of the poor, Nelson-Pallmeyer was persuaded that the rich Christians of the North could understand the Bible correctly only when they allow themselves to be taught by the poor. This will also lead to the understanding of history, economics, and theology, from the vantage point of the poor (pp 1-4).

The book comprises of six chapters. In chapter 1, the author examines the problem of death of human compassion, the hardness of human heart against widespread hunger, poverty and oppression. He believes that this is the consequence of the inauthentic Christian faith which refuses to honestly confront the agony of the human situation by asking: what kind of God is in charge of such an unjust world? Those who confront that situation soon realise that the biblical God is essentially a compassionate God who identifies the Godhood with the suffering humanity in order to overcome suffering. Christians too should become compassionate so that God might work through their compassionate actions to overcome hunger, injustice and exploitation (pp 8-16).

In chapter 2, the author, while discussing liberation theology, laments over the fact that the gospel has been misused and so distorted as to become a principal obstacle towards compassion, justice, peace and a major contributor towards world hunger and economic injustice. He believes that theology should be liberated from its complicity with injustice so that it could be re-established as a potent force for personal and social compassion and change. This function is fulfilled by liberation theology which emerges out of Christian passion for social change, as Christians seek to be faithful to the liberating message of Christ. For it is believed, in liberation circles, that the unjust relationships between the rich and poor, between the oppressor and the oppressed, and the distorted economics that underpin them, have profound and destructive *material and spiritual consequences*, thus calling into question the efficacy of the Christian faith. Therefore, for the sake of the integrity of our faith Christians are invited by liberation theology to become creators *not of perfect societies or perfect economic systems hoping thereby to*

*fully realise God's kingdom on earth.* Rather the objective is a modest one: *to make life and economic systems more just, more compassionate and more hopeful* (p 34).

In chapters 3, 4 and 5, the author analyses in greater details and depth the root causes of world hunger, by focussing on Latin American which best illustrates the exploitation of the poor by the rich, the South by the North. He concludes the discussion by calling for a profound moral and spiritual conversion which alone could overcome human oppression by their fellow humans.

In chapter 6 the author returns to the theme of hope and compassion. He notes that the Christian faith is essentially one of hope; yet it has been misused to support life-destroying economic and military policies. Against this distortion Nelson-Pallmeyer invites Christians to confront the pain and suffering of their fellow humans, thus confronting those difficulties as people who are imbued with Christian hope. But this hope should be accompanied by actions that seek to transform the unacceptable unjust material relationships. Further, Christians are called upon to balance their seriousness of purpose with humour, realising that *they are not responsible for saving the world*, even as they participate in God's salvific works which seek to transform our world into a humane and just one. It is a hope that is tempered by the realism of the cross.

This book is a profound statement on the Christian faith, a faith that is unwilling to accept defeat in the face of persistent sin, both individual and social. I recommend it highly for those who are struggling to find ways and means to embody a bold faith that wills to be active in both love and compassion as that faith seeks to transform our world for the better.

**Prof S A Maimela, Department of Systematic Theology, University of South Africa, Pretoria.**

### **Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference**

*by David J Garrow*

William Morrow & Co., Inc. 1986 800 pp \$19.95

This book may be called a leadership biography of Martin Luther King, Jr, as head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). It is also the story of the American Civil Rights Movement (CRM) and the role subsequently played in it by the SCLC. The author leads us through the campaigns of this movement, from the time King was introduced to it through the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955 to the Memphis march and King's assassination in this southern city in 1968. The successful highlights of the CRM come forth as the desegregation of buses in Montgomery, Alabama, and later in other southern cities; the desegregation of the southern interstate public transportation system; the integration of lunch counters and other public facilities; the passing of the civil rights act and later of the voting rights act by the U.S. Federal government; and the concessions for the integration of public housing in Chicago.

King's role in all this is depicted as one of a prophet who gradually comes to view his leadership responsibility as a vocation to bear the cross – that is, to suffer

with and for the deprived black community as well as for his convictions. Hence the title of the book. He later comes to adopt non-violence as a weapon for bringing about change and the extension of rights to blacks – still referred to as Negroes or the Colored people. In his moments of fear for his life because of numerous threats to it, King would turn to God in prayer, until one day an intense spiritual experience at his home helped him do away completely with his fear and self-doubt. This experience becomes his strength and inspiration in his leadership until almost the time of his death.

King's convictions on non-violence, the book shows, were not an automatic occurrence for him but evolved through time. From his original emphasis of the love ethic as the spirit behind protest against racial discrimination, he was in time introduced to the writings of Ghandi – even visiting India – through friends. Eventually he adopted not only the spirit but also the language of non-violence. While originally distinguishing between non-violence and pacifism, in later years he seemed more comfortable than previously to refer to himself freely as a pacifist. He clung to the end to his conviction on non-violence as the only method likely to bring about conversion to White America, although he more and more experienced frustration as a result of White intransigence. This frustration became more intense with the rise of the black power movement.

The origin of the black power movement was a disturbing factor in King's life and his strong belief in the power of non-violence. He mostly thought that the name of the movement was unfortunate because of its connotations of violence and nationalism. He would be more comfortable with the term black consciousness. He was not against power as such but against the misuse of power. Indeed, he was convinced that blacks needed some form of power – call it love power – to assert their human dignity and ensure the restoration of their God-given and man-usurped rights. Thus he believed in power that could be used positively to bring about justice, and at the same time decried any negative use of power for the enjoyment of privilege at the expense of others. Though highly critical of black power, King tried to keep his public reaction to it within bounds.

Although the author spells out King's opposition to black power in no uncertain terms, no attempt is made to sum up this ideology as it is layed down by its proponents to give perspective to King's objections. Only passing mention is made of King's encounters with black power stalwarts like Stokely Carmichael, Rap Brown and other proponents. Nor is King's position discussed in the context of the changing black mood at this time, represented by black power itself and by the views of nationalist black leaders like Malcolm X, King's arch opponent. Certainly this would have been more informative than treating King and the CRM in isolation. Significant reference is made only to almost like-minded organisations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the National Urban League (NUL), Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and others, with their well-known leaders like Roy Wilkins, Whitney Young, James Farmer, etc. We also learn of King's association with prominent black American figures known to South Africans such as former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Andy Young, and 1980 black presidential candidate Jesse Jackson.

The book draws significantly from FBI files. It describes how the FBI kept King under a microscope and how they continuously tried to scare him out of the CRM by various threats of exposure. McCarthyist tactics were used in leaking informa-

tion to the press charging King with keeping bad company: two of his closest advisors were former communists. At some stage he engaged in a media duet with FBI director J Edgar Hoover, but later found it advantageous to adopt reconciliatory tactics.

Throughout the book, especially in the latter part, the author is concerned to draw the human side of King to the surface and to show that he was not a saint. Depending chiefly on FBI file and records based on wire-tapped information, he discusses King's extramarital relations.

These portray King as a "women-man" who was very popular with women and often sought consolation from family and organisational problems in special women friends. Garrow has come under severe criticism for this in certain circles of American life. Several quotations from some of King's associates in his post-script seem calculated to justify inclusion of this aspect of King's life in the book. They serve to demythologise the legendary King and to give a semblance of objectivity in the treatment of King.

A strong advocate of integration and originally very optimistic about White America's capacity to change, MLK increasingly became very pessimistic about the good intentions of Whites. At first he believed that most American Whites supported black rights, wanted a better deal for them, and hence supported the CRM. Toward the end of his life, however, he became increasingly despondent and more than once repeated statements such as: "Most White Americans are more interested in law and order (stability) than in justice". Such statements, rather than those expressing his original optimism, abound in the latter part of his life and struggle for justice, as portrayed by Garrow. At this time he also stressed the need for economic justice and advocated some form of democratic socialism rather than only civil rights and capitalism of the privileged. He also became an outspoken critic of the war in Vietnam, amidst continuing threats of exposure of his personal life by FBI chief, Hoover. King saw the honor given to him in winning the Nobel Peace Prize as imposing on him an extra burden and responsibility in the struggle for justice and peace. Somehow he expected himself to die a violent death and often referred to this in conversations with his close friends.

This book is a straight-forward narrative of the events described. It is meant more as a historical documentary of these events than as an attempt to interpret or evaluate them. In this sense it is a valuable and detailed source of information for those who wish to learn more about King and the CRM. In spite of its size and detail, however, some important information is often glided over without necessary elaboration and occasionally discussion trends seem to be interrupted by new paragraphs not necessarily connected to the preceding thought. This does not detract from the value of the book as a whole, which is certainly worth reading and very informative.

It would have been helpful to the student of King if the author had dwelt a little more on King's intellectual grounding of his views on non-violence and the black struggle. This could have been done by briefly discussing some of King's books and important speeches which try to explain "where he is coming from". What the author does is only to announce each new book in progress, but makes little attempt to discuss the theoretical content. This represents a shortcoming for the book to those who are interested in understanding the theoretical basis of King's practice in the CRM.

From the ethical point of view, the book raises at least one key question because of the use of FBI sources in its research. Is it moral, and, therefore, permissible, to use for research purposes information obtained through immoral means such as wiretapping and general invasion of individual privacy? Surely the book could have been very much the same without this source. The author had access to a rich source of information from King's family and close associates. Some of them were privy to most of the information confirmed by the FBI files. Should a South African researcher, for instance, approach the security police for privileged information on individuals' private lives obtained illegally and immorally through eavesdropping, coercion, and often blackmail? This is a question one cannot resist in reading Garrow and one cannot avoid a feeling of complicity, after reading the book, in benefiting from information obtained in this manner.

***Dr Mokgethi Motlhabi***

### **The Humanistic Christology of Paul**

*Segundo, J L*

Vol III. Maryknoll: Orbis; and London: Sheed and Ward. 1986. 244 pp. \$14.95.

This book constitutes Volume III of a five-volume series which Segundo is publishing under the general theme: *Jesus of Nazareth Yesterday and Today*. Volume I entitled *Faith and Ideologies* and Volume 2 entitled *The Historical Jesus of the synoptics* have been reviewed in *Missionalia* 13:2 (August 1985), 15.2 (August 1987) respectively.

*The Humanist Christology of Paul* is a thought provoking exegetical and theological work in which Segundo explores in great detail key theological concepts of Paul's Christology such as sin and death, law and faith, Adam and Christ, Christ's victory over sin and death and the new life of the Christian flowing out of that victory. Segundo ably and perceptively shows the significance as well as the impact that these theological concepts have on human life today. In Segundo's view these theological themes provides us with an *anthropological key* by which the dynamics of political drama which is being played out in history and human society could better be understood and humanized in the light of the gospel.

The book comprises of nine chapters and an appendix. In chapters 1-2, Segundo, with deep insight, points out how sin is a power that enslaves all people through the political and religious mechanisms in society, deforming human beings and promoting injustice and dehumanizing relationships. Chapters 3-4 are devoted to the dialectic between law and faith, law stands for a dead-end road in our relation to God while Faith stands for human acceptance of God's gratuitous gift of grace. Abraham exemplifies this human acceptance of God's gratuitous gift and is thus declared just before God. Segundo defines faith "as a way of being human, as something that moves the human being from infantile timidity to maturity, from action based on petty calculation to action performed in a gratuitous and creative manner (p 69)". He concludes by noting that there should be no

contradiction between faith and works because “only faith makes possible a human way of working” (Ibid).

In chapters 5-8 Segundo discusses the victory that Christ has won over sin and death, a victory that aims at the radical transformation of human beings and their condition, thus ushering in the healing of broken humanity and justice in society. Thus the thrust of the gospel is towards the “humanization of the human being, with its struggle towards maturity and creativity” (p 119), as God and God’s collaborators work jointly to “build up God’s Kingdom”.

***Prof S A Maimela, Department of Systematic Theology, University of South Africa***

# Book Notes

## **Education in Mission/Mission in Education**

A critical comparative study of selected approaches

*by Dr Bongani Mazibuko*

Publisher: Verlag Peter Lang, Frankfurt, New York, Berne, October 1987, 400 pp

Price about R60

In this volume Dr Mazibuko advocates a comprehensive concept of ministry which believes that effective mission belongs to the whole people of God, not just to a chosen few within the Church. Therefore the concern in theological education is to enable all people, men and women, ordained and lay, to perform their varied ministries. Where 'cultural power' hinders this interplay, power has to be met by power. Therefore the 'cultural power' in oral culture has to be recognised, released and articulated. It has to be seen as different from but equal to the formal power of received educational structures.

Published under the series:

Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity

which has as general editors: Richard Friedli (Fribourg);

Walter Hollenweger (Birmingham) and Theo Sundermeier (Heidelberg)

## **Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa**

*by Dr Itumeleng Mosala*

Publisher: W Eerdmans, Grandrapids, Chicago (Fall/July, 1988.)

This study seeks to investigate the use of the Bible in black theology in South Africa. It begins by judging the extent to which black theology's use of the Bible represents a clear theoretical break with white western theology.

The use of concepts like "the Word of God", "the Universality of the Gospel", "the particularity of the Gospel", "oppression and oppressors" and "the God of the Oppressed" in black theology, reveals a captivity to the ideological assumptions of white theology. It is argued that this captivity accounts for the current political impotence of black theology as a cultural weapon of struggle, especially in relation to the black working class struggle for liberation. Thus while it has been effective in fashioning a vision of liberation and providing a trenchant critique of white theology, it lacks the theoretical wherewithal to appropriate the Bible in a genuinely liberative way. This weakness is illustrated with a critical appraisal of the biblical hermeneutics of especially two of the most outstanding and outspoken

black theological activists in South Africa, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Dr Allan Boesak.

The fundamental weakness of the biblical hermeneutics of black theology is attributed to the social class position and commitments of black theologians. Occupying and committed to a petit bourgeois position within the racist capitalist social formation of South Africa, they share the idealist theoretical framework dominant in this class.

Thus in order for black theology to become an effective weapon of struggle for the majority of the oppressed black people, it must be rooted in the working class history and culture of these people. Such a base in the experiences of the oppressed necessitates the use of a materialist method that analyses the concrete struggles of human beings in black history and culture to produce and reproduce their lives within definite historical and material conditions.

The book undertakes such an analysis of the black struggle and of the struggles of biblical communities. For this purpose a materialist analysis of the texts of Micah and Luke 1 and 2 is undertaken. This is followed by an outline of a black biblical hermeneutical appropriation of the texts. It is concluded that the category of "struggle" is a fundamental hermeneutical tool in a materialist biblical hermeneutics of liberation. Using this category one can read the Bible backwards, investigating the questions of which its texts are answers, the problems of which its discourses are solutions. The point of a biblical hermeneutics of liberation is to uncover the struggles of which the texts are a product, a record, a site and a weapon. For black theology, the questions and concepts needed to interrogate the biblical texts in this way must be sought in the experiences of the most oppressed and exploited in black history and culture. What form such an exercise may take is illustrated by a study of the book of Micah and Luke 1 and 2. Two significant findings follow. The class and ideological contradictions of black history and culture necessitate the emergency of a plurality of black theologies of liberation. Similar contradictions in the Bible necessitate a plurality of contradictory hermeneutical appropriations of the same texts.