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EDITORIAL

This comprises of five interesting articles. The first two by Lorreta Williams and Simon Maimela respectively add the problem of white racism from feminist and black theological perspectives. They trace the origins of white racism in both church and state and the devastating impact that it has had over the people of colour all over the world.

The other two articles by Peter Paris and Josiah Young introduce a new discussion in theological discourse, namely, Afrocentrism, which is a commitment to see life in the light of African heritage, and the struggles and hopes of people of African descent. While Paris' articles looks backward and highlights how this African perspective on life people of colour to survive in the hostile and degrading racial environment in North America, Young emphasizes its current significance for blacks who live in racial societies in which their being African is placed under erasure. Indirectly addressing the theme of Afrocentrism, article of Mofokeng which calls for the Africanisation of christology. I hope that our black readers will respond to the issues that have been raised by these highly perceptive articles.

RACISM AND SEXISM: REDRAWING THE CONCEPTUAL AND STRATEGIC MAPS

*Dr Loretta J Williams**

I. INTRODUCTION

In a world of race and gender privilege for some, and intentional underprivileged for others, the well-being of women of colour is multiply jeopardized. This paper recognizes power systems of oppression intertwined by judgments placed by those in power on gender, race, class, age, sexual orientation, legal statuses, origins, religious and cultural practices.[1] It focuses, however, on interlocking oppression by gender and race.

Thank you for the invitation to analyze both racism and sexism. Too often one is examined to the exclusion of the other. I look forward to talking together this week on how we can educate, and be educated, in ways which mobilize people, ourselves included, to end oppression, not just critique it. In the past decade or two, my philosophy of education has changed. When I taught at the State University of New York at Buffalo and the University of Missouri in the 1970s, I viewed the educator's role as presenting facts, information and tools, and the passing on of revered wisdom to those further back from me on the road. I now understand more clearly that an education that empowers - a liberative, transformative and multi-cultural education - means creating the space where people can step back to gain distance from that taken-for-granted assumptions.

I approach this assignment form a particular angle of vision. I am 1) an African American woman; 2) a sociologist; 3) one who is educationally-privileged; 4) and is actively involved in interfaith and ecumenical work including nine years spent as a "church bureaucrat": Director for Social Responsibility, US and Canada, of the Unitarian Universalist Association; 5) a person active in solidarity movements in support to self-determination efforts of indigenous people of the Americas, Southern Africa and elsewhere; 6) someone who lived through the years of the US civil rights/African led-

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1 I understand oppression to be that fundamental imbalance of power, and hierarchical form of exploitation, which sets up structures at the expense of certain populations which are 1) negative (against their wellbeing), 2) mal distributed, 3) enormous in their impact, 4) blocking the enhancement of life, 5) in typically non-catastrophic yet transgenerational forms.

freedom movement[2], and 6) someone who is convinced that we got some things wrong back then. Some things right, but, in hindsight, some "band-aids" were placed over a cancer which was not eradicated. The choices I have made in my vocation and career stem from a commitment to participate in the dismantling and eradication of the ideology, patterns and practices of domination that permeate western culture in particular, and global society in general. Having said that, I am mindful of the contradictions inherent in the fact that for this international gathering I write in English, an imperial language, and cite predominantly sources published in the United States.[3]

Sociologists teach that things look different depending on one's vantage point.[4] How persons respond to situations and phenomenon is shaped by our social location within culturally-based hierarchies of power and privilege. My telling you my angle of vision helps prepare both of us for genuine dialogue.[5] As a Third World womanist,[6] I will place the experience of women of colour, particularly Black women, at the center of my discussion. I speak from *within*, not *for*, this community.

A caveat: there is no monolithic Third World grouping of women. Racism and sexism are not universally experienced in the same way since systems of oppression (including also judgments on age, origin, class, sexual preference, not being able-bodied and the like) are intertwined. Those of us who are

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2 I prefer to use the term "freedom movement" rather than the conventional "civil rights movement" to better capture the Black-led eruption that shook the anti-democratic, white-supremacist foundations of the U.S. in the 1950s and 1960s. It did not remove fully the foundations as we hoped but it did shake them loose.

3 Noriko Okada, a Women's Theological Center alumna, says that there is "an old Asian proverb that says that English can be, and has been, a sword that attacks people and opens the way for the holder of the sword - English speakers". See Okada, Noriko, "What you Can Expect to Learn in Study/Action", *Women's Theological Center Newsletter*, Vol. 7 (4), December 1989, p. 3.

4 This concept is known in sociology as standpoint dependency. It follows that all theologies, as all "knowledge", is socially located, reflecting a context and a people's culture.

5 "[D]oing theology [Ed. note: people's understanding of their lives in relation to God/the divine] in a holistic way requires us to include not only our own experiences and stories but also a critical analysis of the effect this has had on our lives, so that we are prepared to understand the stories and the social, political, and historical analysis of those whose lives are quite different from ours.. The beginning of partnership in dialogue is 'digging in your own garden', so that you know what gifts you can bring to the global table talk with your sisters.." In Russell, Letty M., Kwok Pui-lan; Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz; Katie Geneva Cannon, Eds., *Inheriting Our Mothers' Gardens: Feminist Theology in Third World Perspectives*, Louisville: Westminster 1988, p. 15.

6 The term womanist was first coined by Alice Walker, African American writer, to describe audacious women battered by various oppressions yet "committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female... womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender". See Walker, Alice, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*, NY: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1983, p. ix. Womanists seek to end all forms of domination.

African, Asian Pacific, indigenous, Latina - women of colour - have different histories, yet daily struggle to overcome exploitation stemming from our inheritances from slavery, enforced migration, plantation and indentured labour, colonialism, attempted genocide, imperial conquest, state repression. Third World women historically have experienced the worst of the legacy of colonial domination, capitalist excesses, and post-colonial practices.[7] Three quarters of the world's women live in developing countries. More than half of the world's women in the wage labour force live in Asia. Those who work in electronics and other technical assembly positions are under-remunerated for work under unsafe conditions. Most women in Africa and Asia live in rural areas and participate in informal economies where their work is undervalued. Thus the honouring of Rigoberta Menchu with the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 was particularly satisfying. It recognizes and affirms the spirit of resistance among indigenous people, and counters the tendency globally to devalue women's work.[8] It is fitting that she is so appropriately honoured in this Quincentennial year, and on the eve of the United Nations designated year of 1993 as the Year of the Indigenous Peoples of the World.

In this paper, I will use the term *Third World* and *women of colour* interchangeably. The former term has come to connote the colonized, neocolonized, and decolonizing countries of Asia, Oceania, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean. It is used to highlight deliberatively the deformities in economic, political and social structures flowing from colonization. For many activists of colour, myself included the term *Third World* is short hand for self-determination. The latter term, *women of colour*, is used in the US to signify recognition of, and resistance to the many ways that power elites have sought to divide populations of colour.

II. THE NEED FOR A NEW PARADIGM

Churches have more often focused on race relations, rather than racial justice; relations between men and women, rather than gender justice. Prejudice has been defined as the main problem to be solved, and individual

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7 Third World countries have been intentionally underdeveloped so that they might play a service role in the global economy. As such they are vulnerable to the cycles and vagaries of international trade prices and capital flows. This is manifested in the profound international inequalities of land ownership, control over resources, access to income; and in the deprivation of such basic needs as nutrition, housing, safe water, energy, education. For an extended discussion of this point, see Sen, Gita and Caren Grown, *Development, Crises and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspectives*, NY: Monthly Review 1987.

8 Including the coordinated international lobbying effort in which many NGOs, people's movements, religious organizations and individuals participated successfully.

moral responses as the solution. Ethically, can we continue to speak in this fashion? Prejudice reduction without adequate focus upon structural change does little to dismantle as it is experienced by women and men of calor.

Religious leaders have too often ignored established power relationships and their legitimating myths. Privilege is not just about what one has; it also includes how one thinks and acts. The intellectual upper class exercises the liberty of being "armchair critics" at the expense of the majority of humankind.

A colour line directs domination/subordination in most multi-ethnic societies. We cannot shy away from examining the naked power realities that exist in our various societies. Whatever the measure - access to safe water, infant mortality rates, educational attainment levels - those with dark skin colour have more of the worst, and the least of the best.

Despite the ending of legal segregation in the US in the mid-twentieth century, for example, women of colour remain clustered, with some exceptions, at the lowest level of the labour force. In the US, for example, while Black women have moved away from majority placement in domestic service, their proportion in the low-paying service sector is close to 45% higher than that of white women.

The resiliency and adaptability of the colour line can be discerned throughout modern history. Case in point: North-South relations. Disproportionate power resides with the lighter-skinned North of the industrialized nations. Here, too, the most of the worst and the least of the best (health care, technological development, physical security and the like) accrue to the Third World countries.

Terms such as *the colour line* and *white supremacy* are accurate conceptualize a world of structural imbalances. Discrimination by race and gender is a subset of oppression, and is a social reality of the current global economy. All human relations are built upon, and around, relations of domination. Belgian priest and physicist Gerard Fourez writes: "Given the historical evolution of society, all human beings are caught up in a history in which certain people are oppressed and exploited. Injustices and oppression arise out of a society built on human choices and historical decisions".[9]

In confronting the politics of an unfair economic order, we can note the diminution of human rights. Established national orders and state institutions evidence gender injustice as a taken-for-granted. The genius of patriarchy has been to conceal its distortions so that most persons are socialized to believe that inequalities by gender are a natural condition of life.

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9 Fourez, Gerard, *Liberation Ethics*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press 1982, p. 100.

Patriarchy is a human construct: a system which maintains women's exploitation via the rule of men, disproportionately First World white or light elites, who control and exercise governmental and corporate power.[10] Domestic relations reflect this pattern. Patriarchy and capitalism are deeply entangled. As US activist Audre Lorde has written:

> Institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people. As members of such an economy, we have all been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate. But we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals. As a result, those differences have been misnamed and misused in the service of separation and confusion. Certainly there are very real differences between us of race, age, and sex. But it is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences, and to examine the distortions which result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behaviour and expectation.[11]

What keeps race and gender stereotypes in place? What re-education must we promote? Do we need a new paradigm about difference? Unknotting the tangled skein of racism, sexism and classism will not be easy.

III. THE COLOUR LINE

In 1904, sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois prophesied accurately the fundamental and continuing problem of the 20th century: the enduring and ever-adaptable colour line.[12] It is our loss that his sociological and moral analyses were undervalued by policy makers, and by the ecumenical community as a whole. Racism cannot be dismantled, he said, by using the categories of prejudice and individual conscience. The crux of the issue is power, not individual attitudes. Beyond ending discrimination, redistribution of power is required.

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10 For additional discussion of this point see the "Introduction" in Steady, Filomina Chima, *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*, Cambridge: Schenkman 1981. An excellent recent resource which documents the consequences of this: United Nations, *The World's Women. 1970-1990: Trends and Statistics*, NY 1991.

11 Lode, Audrey, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference", in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, Trumansburg: The Crossing Press, 1984, pp. 114-123.

12 Du Bois, W.E.B., *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1903. The theories of this African American sociologist were discounted because of racist attitudes in the academy.

Failing to focus clear attention and strategic planning on how this is institutionalized clouds our thinking, and our effectiveness in eliminating racial conflict.

> This colour line is no mere figure of speech. It is an institution that functions both as distributive rule and as a symbolic universe. That is why time and the normal functioning of institutions will never lead to a future beyond the colour line. Only social change deliberately pursued will do that.[13]

IV. EUROPEAN RACISM TODAY

Europe is experiencing the turmoil of overt and covert racism.[14] More virulent Pan-European racism is visible as upscale, right-wing movements in Europe play on ungrounded fears of being swamped by immigrants. Following World War II for three decades, European nations actively recruited people from the former colonies in Africa, from Eastern Europe, from the southern Mediterranean, to help rebuild Europe's manufacturing and service sector. Perestroika and the dismantling of the Berlin Wall fogged the vision of many who failed to anticipate the reversion to old patterns: the rise of anti-Semitism, skinhead firebombings, attacks on Gypsies, "ethnic cleansing". Even Switzerland, once known for its toleration, has legislated against the presence of too many immigrant workers following its problematizing of the descendants of the guest workers.

Within the last two decades, then, there has been a change in the definition of the problem: previously it was discrimination and exclusion in the way society operates; now it is the people who are racial or linguistic "minorities" themselves[15]

The European Right has made inroads into mainstream politics and culture. In Austria, the Freedom Party, led by Jorg Haider, an upscale, charismatic leader, and in France, the National Front, led by ideologue Jean-Marie Le Pen, incite fear despite the share of foreigners in their populations being the same as it was 20 years ago. What Europe wanted was the labour, not the labourer.

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13 Anderson, Alan B. & George W. Pickering, *Confronting the Colour Line: The Broken Promise of the Civil Rights Movement in Chicago*, Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press 1986.

14 See, for example, the January-March 1991 issue of *Race & Class* which takes as its theme "Europe: Variations on a theme of racism".

15 In the US, dominant elites began early in the 1960s to talk about people of colour as inherently *the* problem.

Aided by sensationalized statements and stories in the media, more persons are realizing that the Third World contains 75% of the world's population. That people of Asia are ½ of the world's population. That people of Africa, . That most people in the world are yellow, black, brown, poor, female, non-Christian, and non-English speaking. The white man's world is changing.

This reality frightens many persons profiting from power and control in a few elite hands. "We"/they" judgments abound. The steady consolidation of institutional racism is no accident of history, notes David Du Bois of Pacifica News Service, USA.[16] But it is more than a matter of personal attitudes. As collaboration between governments and corporations of the North tightens, and the existing international economic order hardens its position, the ideology of white supremacy surfaces to greater visibility as a means to disempower the South, and protect the status quo.

> Racism in the West is not just another variant in the kind of ethnic hatreds that have bedeviled the world for centuries. It is a deeply entrenched attitude among West Europeans and Americans that the white race and Western civilization have been destined by Providence to rule. At a time when both feel threatened, ...racism is gaining acceptance as a 'legitimate' defense.[17]

Among whites, that is, not women of colour.

We are concerned that inside international monetary agencies, imperialism has been resuscitated and garbed in the rhetoric of individual economic freedom. Themes and images of democracy are being used to delegitimate the visions and programs of those who would redistribute power more evenly among the peoples of the world. The demands of people of colour, of women, of unions are being tarnished and discounted as illegitimate.

Computer technology is being used to block people of colour from coming into Europe. Common market policies, rules and administrative apparatus have been set up, informed by racism, whereby information is exchanged on immigration, policing, security, drugs - the pathology of "the other" as the fungus of racism. As A. Sivanandam of the London Institute of Race Relations notes of the immigrants:

> [I]t is capital, multinational capita, that throws them up on Europe's shores in the first place... multinational corporations predicate the dic-

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16 Du Bois, David G., "Racism, U.S. Foreign Policy and the Rising Tide of Colour", *African Commentary*, May 1990.

17 Franz Schurmann, Pacifica News Service, 10/28/91.

tatorships that imperialism sets up for them. Trade no longer follows the flag, the flag follows trade. All sorts of trade: the trade in armaments which foments local wars, the trade in tourism which makes hotels out of fishermen's homes and peasants' huts...[18]

V. THE BEGINNINGS OF EMPIRE

Let us examine how laws and practices have been crafted on the basis of the colour line. Racism emerged in the 14th and 15th centuries. Oppression was a feature of many societies before this time, but what was insidious about Christopher Columbus was the commodification of the indigenous people who welcomed him. Europeans had been to the shores of the "New World" before. After Columbus, no longer were they persons to be traded with, but themselves were the product. Columbus wrote in his log:

> They...brought us parrots and balls of cotton and cane spears and many other things, which they exchanged for the glass beads and hawks' bells. They willingly traded everything they owned...they were well-built, with good bodies and handsome features...they do not bear arms, and do not know them, for I showed them a sword, they took it by the edge and cut themselves out of ignorance...they would make fine servants...with fifty men we could subjugate them and make them do whatever we want.[19]

500 years ago European expansionism initiated the extensive political transformation of the world. With the rise of the first global empires, peoples on many continents were pulled into intra-European conflicts. A new division of the world's labour began. In Europe, serfdom declined. In the Americas, slavery increased. Europe accumulated wealth and power previously unimaginable. Development for one group of people was destruction or underdevelopment, for another. The dividing line? The judgment as "heathen" by the European explorers and royalty of people who differed in colour and practices. White Europeans became the "norm" five hundred years ago, as ethnocentric judgments of other as alien, lesser than in appearance, ability, customs, were enforced. The model for today's continuing white supremacy was in place.

Colonial rule, whether 15th century, 19th or 20th operates "by setting up visible, rigid, and hierarchical distinctions between the colonizer and the col-

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18 Sivanandan, A., *Communities of Resistance: Writings on Black Struggles for Socialism*, London: Verso 1990, p. 159. Sivanandan is the moving force behind the Institute of Race Relations in London, and editor of the journal *Race and Class*.

19 Zinn, Howard, *A People's History of the United States*, New York: Harper & Row 1980, Chapter I.

onized. the physical and symbolic separation of the races was deemed necessary to maintain social distance and authority over subject peoples".[20] A bureaucratic and racialized masculinity resulted as colonial state powers differentiated for purposes of economic surplus extraction. The ideologies about maleness and femaleness which undergirded this process, remain despite nominal, "flag independence" of former colonies. One can see this in the sex tourism industry, and in the traditional connection of the military with prostitution.[21] It cannot be forgotten that the formative studies for the fledging disciplines of anthropology and sociology were of Third World women.[22] The Euro-centricity of this can be seen in the fact that it was the fertility rates of Third World women more often studied than anything else.[23]

The violation in 1492 of indigenous people of the Americas was by "Christ-bearing" exploiters who "shaped the futures of blacks and indigenous peoples for the next 500 years by generating an economic system and an ideological system to sustain it", says Jeane Sindab, formerly of the World Council of Churches. The violent "double thievery" from indigenous people in the Americas and in Africa "provided the economic and political power which established, maintained, and expanded the exploitative capitalist system which today continues to perpetuate racism and inequality".[24]

There is transformative potential in looking at formative ideologies that rationalize power imbalance and its reproduction.[25] Organizing around the Quincentenary in the US, Latin American and Europe has provided a window to view core realities of western culture, and the flaws in our practice of faith. The 1992/Kairos USA movement takes pride in helping blunt the pro-

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20 Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, "Cartographies of Struggle", in Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres, *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1991, p. 17.

21 For further discussion of this point, contact the Third World Movement Against Exploitation of Women, P.O. Box 1434, Manila 2800, the Philippines. The decision of the Philippine Senate not to extend the lease held by the US government on the Subic Bay military post is most welcomed. As the US Marines withdrew in November, however, evidence surfaced of chemicals and PCBs leaching into the soil and ground water at "entertainment industry" will no doubt be regrown in the contaminated area.

22 For an excellent discussion of this point see the "Introduction" in Steady, Filomina Chioma, *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*, Cambridge: Schenkman 1981.

23 At the close of the twentieth century, more researchers are focusing on the threat and reality of sexual violence for populations underdeveloped by colonialist hierarchies.

24 Sindab, Jeane, "Black, Indigenous People and the Churches: 1992", Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1990. This paper is one of several contained in the study/action packet of the National Council of Churches, USA, *Responding Faithfully to the Quincentenary*, $9., from the MCCC Prophetic Justice Unit, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115.

25 A working definition of ideology: a) a belief system, a way of looking at the world, b) which reflects a systematic distortion c) that is not conspicuous, d) thus allowing the ideas to serve a function of maintaining a status quo power arrangement.

posed, then cancelled, civic celebrations this October of the 500th anniversary of Columbus' landing. the faith-based movement understood that these were to be not so much remembrances of times past, but were a reaffirmation of conquest now and its hierarchies of power. People's movements, some faith-based, reshaped the debate about Christopher Columbus's role among the general publics in the Americas.[26]

VI. THE UNITED STATES CONTEXT

It cannot be said often enough that racial group designations are not generated automatically as part of the natural order of the universe. The are socially imposed categories of "otherness" that persons outside the set-apart group have decided are important to single out. Let met turn to my own country to illustrate these points. "[S[tressing freedom rather than proscriptions in our industrialized societies is part of an ideology that supports the dominant groups by concealing social domination".[27] Every human group has a creation myth, a tale explaining where its members came from and why they are special. White Americans are not exception. A "creation myth" operates beneath the surface of North American culture, and undergirds notions of American exceptionalism, of being "No. 1". The myth holds that Europe was crowded and old-fashioned, while there was much open space in the "New World" just waiting for development by strong men and their helpmates. Having fled, then, "Old World" tyranny, these hardy and virtuous pioneers overcame the savagery of the heathen Indians and tamed the wilderness. This myth obscures the brutal theft of the people and land as the United States emerged as a nation.[28] With but few exceptions, the conquest and exploitation of land, resources and people was accompanied and legitimized by the Christian Church.

In this "Christian nation", religion and real estate became entangled as a world-view developed permitting the expropriation of property and the denial of human rights to indigenous people.[29] It can be argued that judgments

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26 Dismantling the mythology of Columbus will be a long haul struggle in the US, but in chipping away at old myths, we gained regular reports in major media on differing perspectives, changes in museum displays and corporate advertisements, and the cancellation of large-scale civic celebrations.

27 Fourez, ibid, p. 8.

28 For further elaboration of this point, see Limerick, Patricia Nelson, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*, NY: Norton 1987.

29 The social construction of "race" consolidated people from over 300 sovereign societies as "Indians", so, too, Ibos, Fulanis, Ashantis and others came to be grouped as servant/slave "Negroes". This occurred simultaneously with the switch for whites from the

of inferiority and superiority flow from hierarchical Judeo-Christian religions. A recent book by US historian Forrest Wood notes "grievous wounds" inflicted by Christianity upon the United States.[30] Wood posits that Christianity is "fundamentally racist in its theology, organization and practice", and that the "fundamental component of the Christian's racism [is] his [or her] inherent inability to leave other people alone".[31] The "taproot of cultural myopia", Wood argues, is Christianity's unshakable premise that everyone should be a Christian, that his or her meaning system and spiritual practices are flawed. "There are contradictions in every religion", writes Wood, "but the missionary quality of Christianity magnifies the consequences of its contradictions".[32]

This argument can not be shunted aside as we deepen our examination of racism and moral exclusion.

VII. IDEOLOGIES OF WOMANHOOD

Patriarchy, too, is a human construct, and one that has been sustained by Christian rationalizations. The concept denotes a system which maintains women's exploitation and oppression via the rule of men exercising controlled power in government, corporation, religious and other institutions, and domestic relations. Capitalism and patriarchy are inextricably intertwined.

As capitalism developed, so, too, a cult of true (read: white) womanhood developed. The superior race was white. The superior gender was male. Women and men of colour were inferior. A gender and race hierarchy directly benefited those with power and money: the church hierarchy as well as the evolving mercantile class, both sponsors of explorers such as Christopher Columbus.

The bodies and souls of Indigenous women bore the burden of invasion and rape. Indigenous women, whether of the Americas or of Africa, were seen as different in kind: tempestuous, there for the sexual gratification of those "christianizing" the "New World". The children that resulted were deemed impure, defective. Today's multi-hued and multi-textured realities are old, yet new, realities.

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predominant identity of "Christian" to that of Europeanness. See Pieterse, Jan Nederveen, "Fictions of Europe", *Race and Class*, Vol. 32(3), January-March 1991.

30 Wood, Forrest G., *The Arrogance of Faith: Christianity and Race in America from the Colonial Era to the Twentieth Century*, New York: Knopf 1990.

31 Ibid, p. 22.

32 Ibid, p. 26. Muslims believe in one God but they do not have the same mission obligation to force others to believe.

During the August 1992 Latin American Council of Churches 500 Anos Assembly sessions, participants reflected on the churches' sanctioning of colonialism by weaving notions of proper structures into religious concepts. White women were used to stabilize the hierarchy. In contrast, Indian and Black women were defined outside that circle, depicted as passionate and tempestuous, the roots of evil. Vicenta Mamani Bernabe, an Aymaran woman from Bolivia, called for native women to be respected as they are:

> our clothes, our culture, our language, our dignity, our rights, our voices must be listened to and respected, because we are people just like the whites and mestizos.

VIII. WESTERN PRACTICES OF CHRISTIANITY

Can the church be a site of resistance to hegemonic race-gender domination?[33] All problems *cannot* be solved with sufficient good will. That is a domesticating intellectualism that distorts reality and perpetuates oppression. The edifice of capitalism as we know it, with its inequities, oppressions and exploitations, must be dismantled. Can our "walk" better match our "talk"?

Recall how the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. would expound on the Biblical story of the Good Samaritan. He would tell the Biblical story, then say:

> We are called to play the good Samaritan on life's roadside, but that will be only the initial act. One day the whole Jericho Road must be transformed so that men and women will not be beaten and robbed as they make their journey through life. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it understands that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.

In placing our highest priority in western Christianity on a personal relationship with God - in effect placing highest priority on the individual, not the individual-in-community - we hamper positive social change. Western Christianity supports the gravitational pull of individualism, away from all but the worshipping community. I suggest that too often a religious world view masks our view of the ways by which beggars are continuously being created. The false idol of capitalism permeates our churches legitimating inequitable

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33 Hegemony refers to a system in which politics operates largely through the incorporation of oppositional currents into the prevailing system of rule. Antonio Gramsci conceptualized bigeminy as the welding together of differing social forces into a bloc. Under hegemonic conditions, opposition is not repressed or silent. Rather, it is inserted, reinterpreted into expressions, media images, politicized slogans.

distribution of resources. The individualism within the culture of capitalism distorts our seeing reality.[34] Westernized Christians have over-focused on attitudes, individual irrational beliefs, rather than on the over-privilege/advantage of those with light skin colour and the oppression/disadvantage of those with darker hues.

A historic gathering of Indigenous, African American and African Caribbean church people convened by the World Council of Churches in 1990 issued a 7-page declaration which spoke of many things, including the travesty of:

> ... a system of loan repayment [which] deprives our communities of adequate health care, education, social services and locks our generations into desperate poverty, illiteracy, poor housing and ill health. In Brazil millions of children, most African-Americans, who have been forced by poverty into a life on the streets, are being murdered by sanctioned death squads. Indigenous people are being destroyed along with the forests, lands and waters of the Amazon...Racism is rampant in Brazil and all of Latin America.[35]

Further, much in Christianity undergirds traditional beliefs in a male prerogative to be personally served by women, within the home and without. Women are the glue which keeps the church intact. Yet we are too often seen as support persons, rather than leaders, lay for clergy.[36] Are the motifs and symbols of Christian theology that lend support to this, and to enduring pain, not resisting, oppression? Womanists and feminists in the church are dialoguing about disempowering symbols and metaphors. It is a "no holds barred" conversation. If all theologies are socially located, then Lutherans and others must be willing to deconstruct even the theology of the cross.

Professor Delores Williams, Union Theological Seminary, raises questions about negative messages within interpretations of the cross. A subordinate-dominance paradigm is inherent in western Christianity, she posits. If God the Father sanctioned His son's death on the cross, some reason, she says, then fathers have a right to control their children, even to the point of physi-

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34 This western tradition can be contrasted with a notation from a Chinese student in the U.S. who wrote in her journal: "The Chinese people believe that wisdom is pulled together by the people, thus we have the proverb: Three shoe menders are wiser than one scholar. In "Wurzel, Jaime, "Teaching Reflective Thinking: Cultural Constraints and Cross Cultural Responses", unpublished and undated manuscript.

35 "The Rio Proclamation: Indigenous, African-Americans and African-Caribbeans Unite Against Racism In the Americas and the Caribbean", September 29, 1990.

36 The Anglican Church of England decision in November favouring the ordination of women is a welcome sign of hope.

cal harm. If Jesus's "redemptive suffering" and death of the cross was to atone for the sins of human beings, suffering can be seen as having a positive function. Women, particularly those of colour, are to accept their burden.[37] Luz Beatriz Arellano speaks, too, of the pull towards martyrdom for women:

> Women find in Jesus the example of the freedom of giving one's life for others, and the example of a life placed at the service of others with utter gratuity.[38]

Dr Delores Williams questions the violence and cannibalism in the ritual of the eucharist:

> Believers eat the bread (symbolic of Jesus' broken body) and drink the wine (symbolic of the blood Jesus shed on the cross, supposedly for our sins). In addition to the cannibalist insinuations in this ritual, the accompanying ritual-word as it is spoken in many churches, puts great emphasis upon the sacrifice Jesus made in dying for human sin. The question that always comes to my mind is whether this emphasis upon dying-sacrifice has implications for women's oppression. Since many women are conditioned to sacrifice 'all' for their family's wellbeing, I wonder if the 'sacred sacrifice', achieved through brutalization of Jesus' body, can encourage battered women to stay in battering situations, thereby sacrificing themselves for some 'higher 'purpose' like family unity?[39]

Dr Peri Rasolondraibe, in contrast, argues that the *Way of the Cross* can be dynamically taught as a "sacrificial willingness to accept the cost of standing *with* and *for* the victims of injustice, and yet a firm resolution not to allow injustice to have the last word".[40] Yet we cannot discount the argument by Dr Williams and by womanists: it's time for women of colour to get down from the cross, and work together for change.

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37 Williams, Delores, "Humans Brutalizing Humans: Necessary Images in the Christian Religion", *The Women's Theological Center Newsletter*, Vol. 9, (1), March 1991, p. 1-2.

38 Arellano, Luz Beatriz, "Women's Experience of God in emerging Spirituality", in Fabella, Virginia and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, eds., *With Passion & Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*, Maryknoll: Orbis 1989.

39 Williams, ibid, p. 1-2.

40 Rasolondraibe, Peri, "A theology of Empowerment", *world Encounter*, No. 2, 1990, p. 21.

IX. NEW THEMES

Those who recognize the social effect of such imagery, says Prof Williams, must search of more healing images and traditions within the sacred text and beyond. She suggests the mustard seed symbolizing faith and the linking humans with the web of living things (Luke 13:18-19):

> Lifting up the mustard seed as a central image in the Christian religion has the social effect of raising our consciousness about the way societies see and relate to nature and the religious effect of providing hope for human destiny.[41]

Prof Williams notes, too, that the wilderness imagery offers a bridge to Judaism, Islam and others religions which also have important wilderness events and import in their theologies.[42]

> [i]f christians can think of their redemption as modeled not by Jesus on the cross but by Jesus refusing the temptations Satan offered him in the wilderness, more human volition is involved in redemption than the death on the cross indicates. That is, redemption becomes more realistic in light of the way we experience it, for we do have the power to resist or assent to sinful temptations, just as Jesus did in the wilderness.[43]

Women on various continents are reading the Bible newly, interpreting from the perspective of those marginalized by an inequitable distribution of power. Professor Kwok Puilan, Chinese University of Hong Kong, notes that:

> The images and metaphors we use to talk about God are necessarily culturally conditioned, and biblical ones are no exceptions... Our religious imagination cannot be based on the Bible alone, which often excludes women's experience. I cannot believe that truth is only revealed in a book written almost two thousand years ago, and that the Chinese have no way to participate in its inception... Coming from the southern part of China, where rice is a main food, I have often found the biblical images of bread-making and yeast-rising as alienating... The Chinese,

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41 Ibid, p. 3.

42 See also Taylor, Mark Kline, *Remembering Esperanza: A Cultural-Political Theology for North American Praxis*, Maryknoll: Orbis 1990 which proposes "a christology in which Christ names a socio-historical dynamic of reconciliatory emancipation... primacy is given to emancipation from patterns of domination, while insisting that christic emancipation also entails reconciliatory postures that seek out, study, and celebrate difference and plurality". (p. 21)

43 Williams, Ibid, p. 3.

who live in an agricultural setting instead of a pastoral environment, have imaged the divine as compassionate, non-intrusive, immanent in and continuous with nature.[44]

One's particular social location determines how one hears even the Exodus story, central to many liberation theologies as a story of God taking the side of oppressed people. A Native American writer reminds us it is also the story of appropriation of land from those already settled. It is a story of the subordination of the Canaanites:

> I read the Exodus story with Canaanite eyes. And, it is the Canaanite side of the story that has been overlooked by those seeking to articulate theologies of liberation. Especially ignored are those parts of the story that describe Yahweh's command to mercilessly annihilate the indigenous population..[45]

Mercy Amba Oduyoye speaks of herself as an African Christian woman who was brought up in the mother-centred culture of the Akan. As she moved in westernized academic circles, some challenged her world-view as inferior. With deep insight, Mercy Oduyoye writes:

> Patriarchy, it was said, was a superior structure... My Akan blood proved an effective insulation against patriarchal domination and gave me energy to be myself... I cannot speak for other African women.. [yet] I am convinced that there is a growing number of African women who refuse to bow the knee to the Baal lord called patriarchy and that there shall always be. I, therefore, refuse to gloss over the oppressive aspects of African culture.

She acknowledges that she continues to "struggle with what holds women to religion when male-manipulated religion consigns women to a situation of submission and alienation".[46]

Religion can be a source of power for women, or it can be a force of subordination. Arellano presents an insightful analysis of Nicaraguan women coming to recognize, during the revolution for change in their country, new possibilities for common struggle in reconceptualizations of God and Jesus. Women, "essentially bearers and sustainers of life", discovered that the god

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44 Pui-lan, Kwok, "Mothers and Daughters, Writers and Fighters", in Russell et al, ibid, p. 30.

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46 Oduyoye, Mercy Amba, "Christian Feminism and African Culture: The 'Hearth' of the Matter", in Ellis, Marc H. & Otto Maduro, Eds., *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutierrez*. Maryknoll: Orbis 1989, p. 442-446.

they had been taught about was of a different sort. God, as the God of life, "journeys with us through history". She speaks of the "rediscovery of God as mother, not just as father, not just as protector, but as one who is immensely concerned for the poor and for the least, for those who have been left unattended".[47]

At this summer's Latin American Council of Churches 500 Anos Assembly, the word of God was affirmed as a sustaining force, the "bread" of both education and consolation. But the institutional church and its practice of Christianity was faulted. "We are made to sing the hymns of the conquerors in church", said one delegate, "while still experiencing the whips on our backs". Following workshop deliberations and plenary discussions, the participants declared that the church which has perpetuated the ideal of women's inferiority must now take the lead in debunking and dismantling all that flows from that distortion.[48]

We have seen that women are tracked, and often locked in track, to be care givers by the sexual division of labour within the church. Dr Musimbi Kanyoro, Lutheran World Federation Secretary for Women in Church and Society, notes:

> [d]iscrimination promotes the uneconomic use of women's talents... Despite the willingness of many women to identify with the church, others are distancing themselves, and even leaving, either silently or protesting.[49]

To undo patriarchy and the colour line, we must be about justice-actions. We are called to be agents of transformation, empowering ourselves, each other and our communities with the help of the Spirit.

X. INTEGRATION AND ASSIMILATION

I return to lessons I am learning in the US from the experiences of those whose motto was "to save the soul of America". Through inadvertence on the one hand, and shrewd organization of the hard right in the US on the other, that motto faded into the background. There is much nostalgia about the achievements of the African American-led freedom movement. Only now are more social scientists examining the roll-back of the freedom movement. Ideas began to surface articulating a conservative ideological framework.

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47 Arellano, ibid.
48 Personal notes.
49 Kanyoro, Musimbi, "women in the Communion", *World Encounter*, Number 2, 1990, p. 14.

Words like "quota" and "reverse discrimination" were coined.[50] By the end of the 1960s, forward movement was being blunted by the racialized reaction to integration of people of colour. How flat and truncated now seem the textbook presentations of the stories about the "civil rights movement" in the 1960s and 1970s! I can speak most clearly of the flaws within American society, and attest to the fact that white Americans have been historically "weak-willed in insuring racial justice. The terms used for discussing racial issues shape our perception and response to these issues".[51] Difference came to equal deficiency as resistance to power-sharing mounted.

The ground was set for this in part by the acclaim heaped upon a book titled *An American Dilemma*[52] which influenced decades of thinking in the U.S. and beyond. A Swedish economist, Dr. Gunnar Nyrdal saw the possibility of racial equality in the United States. A strategy exposing the internal inconsistencies inside white America would inevitably lead to change, he argued. Elements in the American creed could be leverage points: essential dignity of the individual, the fundamental equality of all people, the inalienable rights to freedom, justice, fair opportunity. Myrdal's optimism about the American dilemma - the gap between ideals and praxis - infused strategies and public policies inside and outside of church structures. The premise: educate the minds and hearts of white America and change will come. For but a brief moment in time, it seemed to work.

Now we see more clearly. Complicating matters for women of colour in the Americas today is their concentration in urban centres as the primary mode of production switches away from industrialism. In the US, a large percentage of families are headed by a single mother. Further complications result from the fact that integrated public schools post the 1950s have not resulted in quality education for children of colour. The integration typically implemented was a one-way process whereby African American children were viewed as culturally inferior ("culturally deprived") and needy of an infusion of white values and perspectives.

In the US, integration has been falsely elevated as superior to the choice inherent in pluralism. Assimilation is part of that social legitimation which attempts to shift allegiances. It places racial integration as *the* goal rather than a means to power sharing. U.S. sociologist, Bell Hooks notes that

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50 For an excellent discussion of this phenomenon, see Michael Obi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1980s*, NY: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1986.

51 West, Cornel, "Learning to Talk of Race", *New York Times Magazine*, August 2, 1992.

52 Nyrdal, Gunnar, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, NY: Harper & Row 1944.

"[r]esisting the pressure to assimilate is a part of our struggle to end white supremacy".

Women, too, must wrestle with assimilation pressures. Systems which are corrupt and racist need to be changed, not adapted to. Women's knowledge, and that of men of colour, is not so simply additive to, or a subset of, that which has been up till now the "mainstream". As philosopher Elizabeth Minnich writes:

> 'Mainstreaming' implies that there is one main stream and what we want is to join it, that we are a tributary at best, and that our goal is to achieve the 'normally' of becoming invisible in the big river. 'transformation', on the other hand, puts the emphasis not on joining what is but on changing it... Equity requires more than access to unchanged structures.[53]

The feminist community in the US has been challenged correctly for being middle class assimilationist in nature. Universal sisterhood is not the norm, and those whose first language may not be English, and those who are of dark skin colour, have been treated as "other". Some small progress is being made, but it demands that white women become "sufficiently, explicitly angry" or they will repeat the pattern of the past of breaking temporary alliances with activist women of colour.

Anti-colonial struggles were about more than inclusion. The substitution of *integration* for *social transformation* has been too successful in the US, Great Britain and elsewhere. Talk of integration and equal opportunity deflected us away from building different structures. The shift of emphasis from transforming society to transforming individuals one by one had devastating consequences. Those in dominant society not wanting a change in the status quo, moved even more swiftly in the second half of the 20th century to shape the contours of culture so that progress towards equality in participation would be halted. And thus women of colour remain at risk: disproportionately poor and vulnerable.

While sounding noble and wise, the concept of equal opportunity is grounded in a dangerous presumption. It is based on the concept of racial disadvantage, not on that of institutionalized racism and dominating oppression. Further, equality is not something conferred by white people. White western elites have controlled and inculcated values and institutions that create and sustain the norms of an elite culture. Are they, too, to have the

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53 Minnich, Elizabeth Kamarack, *Transforming Knowledge*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press 1990, pp. 13, 22.

power and control over the conferral of equality, of common human personhood, over people of colour? I think not.

XI. INTEGRATIONIST APPROACH TO CAPITALISM

DAWN (development Alternatives with Women for a New Era), a network of activists, researchers and policymakers, has been most outspoken in questioning the integrationist approach to First World capitalism.[54] The privatization and commercialization trend of international money lenders reduces women's access to resources, and is resulting in growing impoverishment, insufficient distribution of food, horrendous debt repayment burdens, environmental degradation, disproportionate military expenditures, more domestic repression, and more foreign aggression.

The United Nations declared Decade for the Advancement of Women, 1975-1985, focused on non-inclusion issues in the process of growth and development. Attention was paid to increasing women's share in resources, whether land, education or employment relative to men. At the same time, however, the socioeconomic status of the majority of Third World women was worsening: relative and absolute health, decline in educational status, etc. The insufficient funded small-scale and fragmented projects have rarely had long term sustainability.[55]

Another global gathering of women will take place in 1995 in Beijing. It will be important; but will it be sufficient? Sisterhood is not a new discovery in major parts of the globe. It is a westernized and middle class phenomenon stemming from the mid-20th century North American and European suburbanization process. For women of Asia, the Middle East, the Caribbean, for example, their roles have been embedded in gender-segregated societies. Typically, the majority of ordinary women have exercised the greatest degree of structures participation socially, economically and politically within the parallel structures of gender segregated communities. This is not to say, however, that women's organizations are the democratic in nature. As parallel institutions, they often reflect the fundamental patriarchy of the west. Women have consistently been interdependent; however the relationships have been characterized by domination and by exploitation here too. As mentioned earlier, gains for one population - European immigrant women as capitalism began - were made at the expense of women of native nations who lost land and control over their bodies. European immigrant women gained

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54 Sen & Grown, ibid.

55 The United Nations announced in November than 50% of all appointments will be women. While gaining parity is an important step, it is not the sole step needed.

healthier food, longer living children, and the like from this accumulation of capital.[56]

XII. SIGNS OF HOPE

Religious communities can develop, support, advocate, embody social policies which change the distribution of power and goods. Some women seminarians do not aspire to privatized, status-quo supporting roles in ministry, and they are being supported by a small number of progressive faculty members. The increase in women seminarians is dramatic in the US, yet the number of women faculty is slow to increase. There is, however, a growing body of feminist literature in religious studies.

Some women do not find enrichment and empowerment in the traditional seminary learning process. A group of women theological educators came together in the late 1970s, and their concerns and visions crystallized in the Women's Theological Center, Boston, Massachusetts, with which I am affiliated. The impetus for its founding ten years ago was the 1976 declaration from Rome that since Christ "was and remains a man" the priesthood must also be male. Women faculty at Yale Divinity School and Washington Theological Union began to plan alternative models of theological education for women. The proposals gained shape and substance, and the Women's Theological Center came into being in Boston, Massachusetts, USA, as a center addressing women's issues of faith and social justice in community. Its central tenet: the belief that concepts and theories must be tested in the concrete struggles for justice.[57]

The Women's Theological Centre (WTC) offers an alternative year-long graduate Study/Action Program where women develop and explore a feminist/womanist ethic and praxis transforming oppressive religious and social structures. Students coming from varying faith traditions and racial and national backgrounds are encouraged to do their own theological reflection, not just collect the revered, esoteric wisdom typically of the Eurocentric past. Among the elements in the conscious move away from a patriarchal model of Church and ministry:

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56 For a thorough discussion of the social history of different modes of productive activity for US women, see Amott, Teresa L. and Julie A. Matthei, *Race, Gender & Work: A Multicultural Economic History of Women in the United States*, Boston: South End Press 1991.

57 "WTC is committed to search for a pedagogy that integrates a) content and process, b) intellect and emotion, c) theory and practice". Kwok, Pui Lan, "Women and Theological Education: Changes in the Past Decade and News Questions", *Women's Theological Center Newsletter*, 1987.

1) a collaborate teaching and learning method; students and faculty are co-learners
2) social analysis from a feminist/womanist perspective
3) a social ministry emphasis
4) a field-based praxis experience integral to studies and reflection
5) a cross-national participant body

Questions of spirituality, social analysis, community accountability and social praxis are rooted in the life experiences of the participants, and in the contradictions experienced as students interact with women in battered women's shelters, prisons and the like.

> Through work with women in field sites, our images of God, humanity, and community are reshaped and our understanding of faith is renewed in the context of justice-action. Through both our diversity and our field-based work, many of the fundamental tenets of feminist theory are shaken from their middle-class moorings and given new meaning. For example, we see the feminist concepts of mutuality and bodily integrity in a new light in the contexts in which we work, and we must grapple with questions that do not confront us in more isolated academic settings. What is the meaning of mutuality between a graduate student in theology and the woman who is homeless, suffering from the disorienting effects of street life, hunger or mental illness?[58]

WTC is but one small-scale sign of hope. Another: the Women's Commission of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians which speaks of passionate compassion as the necessary ingredient of faith-filled justice-actions.[59] Yet another: the Asia-Pacific gathering of hundreds in Thailand of the People's Plan for the 21st Century. This is the second gathering of a broadening coalition of organizations and activists committed to "make their voices heard to the rest of the world to break the monopoly of world affairs held by the self-proclaimed custodians of the 'New World Order'".[60]

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58 Richardson, Nancy, "Feminist Theology/Feminist Pedagogy: an Experimental Program of the Women's Theological Center", *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, p. 120.

59 See Fabella and Oduyoye, ibid.

60 PP21 Thailand promotional material, 1992. contact address: PP21 Organizing Committee, 2304 Paholyothin Road, Chatuchak, Bangkok 10900, Thailand.

XIII. NEW MESSAGES

Such gatherings, including this convened by the Lutheran World Federation, are vitally important. We of the pulpit and podiums cannot sit back behind the polite smokescreen of good intentions, comforting those who adamantly project their innocence. We must unmask contemporary obfuscations that say to be concerned about gender and racial injustice is to be a "special interest" group.

Mine is an erosion theory of change. We must chip away, and chip away again, at structures that enforce domination for some and subordination for others. Sitting with each other, being friendly with each other, liking each other even - band-aids over a cancer unless we work together for an equitable sharing of power.

The church offers a unique potential through its communication channels to and among the needy and the affluent, leaders and the led, the public sector and the private. Those accepting the ministerial or professorial vocation are indeed "wordsmiths", framing reality with language. It is language that evokes most of the political realities that people recall, not the experience first hand itself. We can cut through mystifications, dismantling myths that are sexist, racist, classist, nationalist in content.[61]

Racism and sexism are troublesome *kudzu* vines which must be cut back daily. This is a weed that grows in the southern part of the United States. It persistently creeps and climbs - across roadways, up telephone poles, engulfing all in its path. I believe more people can come to understand, and then convey overarching messages about the dual kudzu vines:[62]

(a) the past need not be the future; (b) difference can be enriching; (c) we have a responsibility to dismantle domination; (d) in the Christian traditions of seeing the stranger as blessing, we have an opportunity to develop a new international order of just relations; (e) there is a real basis for unity between peoples courageous steadfast in the face of adversity.

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61 One example: Professor Patricia Williams, University of Wisconsin, USA, refuses to speak of the "emancipation" of slaves in the US after the Civil War. She uses "unowned" or "disowned": "they were thrust out of the market and into a nowhere land that was not quite the mainstream labour market, and very much outside the marketplace of rights. They were placed beyond the bounds of valuation, in much the same way that the homeless are or that nomads and gypsies are, or tribal people who refuse to ascribe to the notion of private space..." In Williams, Patricia, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 21.

62 Writer Alice Alker first publicly used this metaphor in speaking of racism as like a kudzu vine; it needs to be daily cut back.c

Transformative solutions are possible. They move beyond assimilationist, additive "solutions", to transform power imbalances. If we unmask myths and claim possibilities, we can break encrusted habits of thought.

XIV. THEREFORE, WE MUST ...

1. speak the truth, not sugar-coating reality by speaking of racism and sexism as random acts of perverse or ignorant individuals. Racism is a system of advantage that benefits those with white or light skin colour. It is not an abstraction nor is it a problem only for people of colour who bear the greatest burden. As people of faith, we must educate ourselves and others about the other side of racism: white/light privilege.[63]
2. become more comfortable with the dynamic of tension as a given, and a positive, creative force. "As one reads of women's lives in the Church", write Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye "the evidence begins to emerge that 'women become dangerous/ when we question 'the powerful and masculine models of the internal structures of the church', and as such our presence has been construed as source of tension".[64] Be aware of this dynamic, and resist such labelling.
3. recognize plural realities.[65] We must transform our conceptual categories so that they represent the wholeness of human experience, not the false universalism based on a particular European male experience.
4. acknowledge that justice is a quality of relationship not an abstract concept. We must travel "paths as yet untrodden through perils unknown".[66] The power of the Spirit is the power for changing our communities and world.
5. resist oppression in all its forms by actively joining with organizations and movements supporting change. We must form and/or join commu-

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63 Dr. Peggy McIntosh, a white professor at Wellesley College, USA, has written: "Whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative and average, and also ideal... My schooling gave met no training in seeing myself as an oppressor". there is an invisible knapsack that all white European descent people carry around, she says, that both facilitates daily passage and confers and confirms dominance. In the knapsack are the compass, passport, money, clothing, etc. that allows special passage. "Whiteness protected me from many kinds of hostility, distress, and violence, which I was subtly trained to visit in turn upon people of colour", she writes. "Individual acts can palliate, but cannot end" the deeply entrenched problems of racism and white privilege. See McIntosh, Peggy, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack", *Peace and Freedom*, July/August 1989.

64 Fabella and Ad, ibid, p. xiii.

65 Latina feminists, for example, speak of a mestiza consciousness which recognizes multiple, often contradictory, perspectives which must be negotiated.

66 *Lutheran Book of Worship*.

nities of resistance which work against all that would create marginalized populations.

6. recast our strategies and solutions so they are more than "bandaids" - necessary but not sufficient. This includes acknowledging the gap between legislative provisions and defacto conditions.
7. protest the Structural Adjustment Programs imposed on countries by international monetary agencies which doom marginalized nations to impoverishment of those of darker hue.
8. work for fair standards of health care and safe housing access for all peoples.
9. support the self-determination struggles of indigenous people in Asia and the Pacific, and on all the continents. sponsor concrete actions in 1993, the UN declared Year of Indigenous People.
10. accompany those who are marginalized in working for system change. This would include supporting sanctions and other strategies in the continuing struggles of the African National Congress for a non-racial, democratic and united South Africa of equal citizens.
11. advocate for inclusion of women in development planning and implementation.
12. teach that sexism and racism are an affront to the principles of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Condemn male violence against women as a violation of basic human rights. Condemn hate violence, as in the practice of "ethnic cleansing" evident in Bosnia and Herzegovia but also reflected in Angola and other parts of the globe.
13. support the full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the Nairobi Forward Strategies.
14. urge full denominational and institutional representation and participation in the regional gatherings preparatory to the Beijing 1995 United Nations International Women's Forum.
15. increase financial and political support for the Programme to Combat Racism of the World Council of Churches, insisting that grants be given to organizations struggling for self-determination.[67]

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67 In establishing PCR in 1969, the Central Committee of the WCC called the churches "to move beyond charity, grants and traditional programming to relevant and sacrificial action leading to new relationships of dignity and justice among all and to become agents for the radical reconstruction of society (PCR brochure, circa 1980s)". Twenty plus years later, giving to the PCR evidences lack of adequate response by some member communions within the World Council of Churches.

16. face, and counter persuasively, the equivocations, as well as the genuine lack of ease of some parishioners, with the dignity and full equality of all women within, and without, our midst.
17. examine procedures, politicized processes, decision-making styles and group dynamics for inequitable mono-cultural and gender-dominated styles and practices. Honest dialogue must be encouraged and heeded.
18. share leadership roles within the communion, "accepting the gifts and special calling of each member and nurturing each... Women in the communion cry for justice".[68]
19. guard against "power shifts: away from traditional power centres when women of colour are placed in positions formerly occupied by mainstream males. The authority of the position must be maintained.
20. promote diversity in the use of language, music, art and movement in our worship services.
21. be open to inclusion of the people's voice and stories of resistance and faith in our liturgies and general praxis. Theology must not be restricted to professional theologians, and, in fact, cannot be if we ever are to decolonize Christianity.
22. urge denominational and ecumenical funding for women's empowerment projects which build just communities.
23. advocate for denominational funding for research and training on dismantling the structures of racism and sexism.
24. advocate and develop both feminist/womanist foci and pedagogies in our institutions which place mutuality at its core. Assimilation debilitates us all. We will gain from the way womanists do theology.
25. And, most of all, remain enraged about injustice. African American writer and activist Audre Lorde says that "[e]very woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against..oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being. Focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change..[A]nger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision and our future is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification...Anger is an appropriate reaction to racist attitudes, as is fury when the actions arising from those attitudes do not change".[69]

As a North American, for example, I must acknowledge, and attempt to combat, the burdens placed on the people of so-=called developing countries by North American political and economic power and practice. I must con-

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68 Kanyoro, ibid, p. 15.
69 Lorde, Audre, *sister Outsider*, p. 125, 129.

sistently and persistently work within the interfaith community in the US to ensure that the churches do not legitimate American "exceptionalism". The truimphalism that was so woven into Bush/Reagan policies is deeply rooted in the colonial past and present of the US brand of Christianity.[70] My actions are a integral part of "walking the talk" of a faith for social transformation.

I walk forward with a smile, dancing with joined arms and efforts - as a scholar and activist, it is not treasonous to laugh!

XV. CLOSING WORDS

In conclusion, then, I call for movement back and forth between movements of women and of women and men of colour, cross-fertilizing ideas, strategies and goals as we co-construct a just world society.

We are called to new non-imperialist beginnings. To deeper insights about a socially radical Jesus, to new cooperations, to emerging theologies. As we are told in II Timothy 1:7, "God did not give us a Spirit of cowardice, but one of strength, of love, and good judgment". Let us go forth to reconstruct our theologies - and our praxis. I close with the words of US poet June Jordan:

> In addition to the traditional concept of true commitment that means you are willing to die for what you think is right, make equal space for the womanly concept of commitment that means you are willing to live for what you believe.

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70 I am encouraged by the election recently of Governor Bill Clinton, but do not delude myself that governmental practices will be massively changed.

BLACK THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO RACISM AS A THEOLOGICAL PROBLEM

*Dr Simon S Maimela**

[A public lecture delivered at Union Theological Seminary, New York, where he taught for the Fall Semester as Henry Luce Visiting Professor of World Christianity, November 10, 1992]

I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

In this paper, we shall focus our attention on the response of Black theology to white racial domination which has become a theological problem for the church. Before we embark on that task, allow me the liberty of making few preliminary remarks about what black theology.

Black theology can be defined as a conscious and systematic theological reflection on black experience which is characterized by oppression and suffering in white racist societies in North America and South Africa. In other words, Black theology, an aspect of a world-wide theological movement known as liberation theology, owes its origin to the unique experience of the people of colour, especially of African descent, in white dominated societies where the people's blackness was taken and rationalized by white people as giving them enough reason to subject black people to the life of domination, exploitation, oppression and humiliation. Hence, in both North America and South Africa, there has been and there exists a conscious or unconscious belief in the superiority of all white people, a superiority which entitles them to a position of political and economic power, dominance and privilege in relation to black people, who were regarded as inherently inferior and doomed to servitude. Black theology born out of the situation of black oppression and dehumanization is therefore directed against major social evils that the dominant white groups are perpetrating against blackhumanity. Black theology is characterized by its conscious decision to take a stand for black humanity over against white domination and oppression. This consciously accepted partisanship means that black theology attempts to be a critical re-

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flection on the historical praxis in which the powerful white Christians dominate and oppress the powerless black Christians, on one hand. On the other, black theology represents an articulated form of black resistance to white power structure, hoping thereby to inspire and arm the oppressed blacks in their struggle for the liberating transformation of unjust racist social structures in which they live.

II. THE ROOTS OF RACISM IN THE WESTERN CHURCH.

The diversity of human race and their different cultural manifestations in themselves have not always been and need not be understood as problematic in the church when they are accepted as gifts that the Creator has endowed humans beings for their mutual enrichment. This was certainly true in the early church which was an ethnic and social admixture of different races that reflected the pluralism of the Hellenistic world. This healthy coexistence of different races in the church of Christ in which "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female" (Gal. 3:28), because they are one in Jesus Christ, did not last for long for many reasons. Among others, one need to mention but two important ones. First, the church underwent a major transformation during the Constantinian era, when it reflected a change from being a scarcely tolerated and often persecuted minority missionary movement into an established, official institution with the power to determine life within its members as well as in society. Once the Emperor became a Christian, he began to assert his power on behalf of the church when the he opened the entire society for christianization (Driver 1986:29). In gratitude to Constantine, the church and its religious authorities were taken over and coopted by the ruling class which expected them to construct a theology whose purpose was to advance and legitimate the cause and interests of the Roman empire (Maimela 1987:134).

Secondly, the collapse of the churches in North Africa and Asia Minor under the assault of Islam transformed the church into "the church of the so-called "white nations, of the Christian Occident and Orient" (Gollwitzer 1979: 154) with dire consequences for the people of colour all over the world. With deep insights, Gollwitzer (1979:154) points out that this transformation of the church from its ethnic pluralism into a western, "white" church offered:

> .... the white people, endowed with the mobility and activity characteristic of the temperate zones and especially of that peculiar continent of Europe, an unheard of self-confidence which first "proved itself in the struggle against Islam and in the crusades, but then reached out over

> the entire globe in the age of great discoveries 'empowering' the Europeans to regard all non-christian people as destined by God for domination and exploitation. So the coasts of Africa and India were plundered by the Portuguese. The Pope divided up the New World between the Spanish and the Portuguese. The Aztec and Inca peoples were destroyed in a manifold Auschwitz.

The upshot of what is being claimed here is that racial problems have their roots in the Constantinian takeover of the church and its subsequent christianization of the white nations which, during the modern European colonial period, resulted in a theological self-understanding of the western world that equated Christianity with western culture. Concomitant with this was the belief that those who belonged to western Christianity were superior to non-christians who happened to be the people of colour (Gollwitzer 1979: 155). Once religious privilege of belonging to the church of Jesus Christ who is Saviour and Lord of the universe had been transformed into the political, economic and social privilege of God's chosen people who happened to be white, it was a matter of time before social structures were created through which the so-called "white people" would enforce their presumed racial supremacy and thereby subject the people of colour to "white" plunder, domination, exploitation and oppression. (1) It was during the European colonization of Africa, Asia and Latin America that a colonial theology was developed to give religious sanction for slavery and socio-political and economic bondage to which people of colour have been subjected to in racist societies over many centuries up to the present (Gollwitzer 1979: 156-167).

However, in order to avoid discussing the problematic nature of racism in generalities, I want now to focus attention on the South African racial situation of which I speak as a product and victim, to illustrate how the Constantinian model of a triumphal church and triumphal colonial state have worked hand in glove to create the racism from which we are still struggling to liberate ourselves from. The problem of racial division was exacerbated by the fact that a "pinky"[1] colonial tribe which wields all the political and economic power appropriated for itself the symbol of Israel in a sense that people of pink colour in South Africa were specially chosen by God for a mission in the world. Therefore, the whole group of "white" people *qua* people came to regard themselves as God's chosen race or anointed, called upon to gov-

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1 I have deliberately chosen to use the word "white" synonymously with the word "pinky" in this article. This is intended to challenge the conventional belief that the so-called "whites" are people without colour, whereas the rest of humanity is assumed to be "the people of colour". I am suggesting that "whites" too are a people of colour, a "pink" colour which must be named.

ern and spread western civilization and Christianity even at the cost of fanatical persecutions of those who are regarded as unworthy human beings, the so-called the heathens who happened to be the people of black colour.

Because the Apartheid system of "white" [read: pink] racial domination has its origin during the British rule in the seventeenth century and was merely perfected by the Afrikaners in 1948, it is important that we discuss the phases of its development.

In the first phase, it were the British imperialists who undergirded their colonial activities by understanding the British people as the elect of God, who felt called upon to a mission history of bringing freedom to humanity. This mission was expressed in political and messianic terms whose best representative, Cecil Rhodes, declared that 'only one race,' his own, 'was destined to help on God's work and fulfil His purpose in the world ... and to bring nearer the reign of justice, liberty and peace' because they as English people *qua* people approached God's ideal type (cited by van Jaarsveld 1964: 3-4).

Put simply, the British imperialism was underpinned by the belief that they were a "new" Israel chosen to fulfil a divine mission, and more importantly that their election was determined by their racial, cultural superiority over those they were destined to rule. Concomitant with this was that the British people had a certain rightness to be elected to dominate the world, to spread the British civilization even at the cost of intolerable persecution of the so-called "heathens" who must be made British at all costs or die at the hands of the anointed ones and with the approval this domesticated British "God" (Maimela 1987: 8f, 30, 38). Commenting on the marriage between the throne and alter which enabled such a small island to rule over 500 million people during the height of its power, de Gruchy points out that there existed an inseparable relationship between God, the Church and the British Empire. As a consequence, de Gruchy (1977: 45), goes on to say: "Few, whether Anglicans or Non-conformists, apparently found anything incongruous about the Union Jack coexisting alongside the Cross and Altar, even when tattered and blood-spattered from encounters with the natives ... in the service of God and Queen."

Of course, de Gruchy's perceptive observations refer to the brutal British rule that managed to bring both the Boers and Blacks in South Africa to their knees by repressive forces, believing that the expansion of British imperialism and exploitation of the so-called inferior races were serving divine providential purposes of bringing the gospel and civilization to the 'pagans' and uncivilized Boers. In consequence, the God the British churches talked about was nothing but a fine and loyal 'English' God who regarded the

Crown and the British people as 'his' anointed or chosen race called upon to govern and spread British civilization.

In second stage, the Afrikaners too coopted the Dutch Reformed churches to provide them with spiritual resources to meet the threat of British imperialism on one hand, and the black majority who through intermarriage would dilute their white group identity. In the process an Afrikaner nationalism emerged and the Church, wishing to have unquestioning loyalty and authority over the lives of its followers, was just too willing to wed itself to this Afrikaner nationalism. Just as the British had done before, the theology that was propounded by the Dutch Reformed church gave the Afrikaners a theological sense of being a chosen people with a mission, namely, to create a new "white" [read: pink] nation in dark Africa as a beacon of Christian civilization. The Afrikaner leaders became men and women of calling to fulfil God's will, and this was true from Piet Retief in the nineteenth century in his struggle against the British 'Pharaohs' to Dr. Hendrik Verwoerd, the architect of Apartheid policy in the twentieth century in his struggle to prevent black majority from engulfing his "volk" (van Jaarsveld 1977: 17). Believing that part of their mission was to preserve the chosen white race in its pure form, and therefore that it is against the divine will to be cast into a melting-pot through interracial marriage, a leading Afrikaner, Dr. Mansvelt, in 1892 reminded the white race that:

> .... after their having opened the way for the spread of the Gospel and civilization, I do not believe that Providence has destined (the Afrikaner) to disappear from history without trace and to give it to others (cited in van Jaarsveld 1977:22).

It is against the background of the Afrikaners' understanding of their divine calling that Apartheid was formulated and carried out. Theology was used to underpin this ideology when it was argued that God has sharply divided human races and the Afrikaner's calling was to help this goal of permanent separation of races attainable, thereby prevent the admixture of races which would destroy 'western civilization' and the 'God-given' identity of the so-called "white" race. Rationalizing their subjugation and oppression of black people, the Afrikaners argued that they have been placed in Africa by God and commanded:

> ... to act as the guardian, master and spiritual leader to the black man. To do that the white man has to have at his command the authority needed to uplift, christianize and evangelize the black man; the purpose is that the black man who is still a child from the point of view of civi-

> lization, shall grow and develop in due course in his own area, with his own language according to his nature and traditions (van Jaarsveld 1977:25).

Carrying out the policies of Apartheid which were believed to be in accordance with God's will the Afrikaners could, for a long time, not understand why the entire world faulted them for what they were doing in service of God. Here again, as in the British imperialism, we are confronted with a triumphal nationalism of the "pinkies" and triumphal "white" church - both of which have tried to create God in their own image, a God who is a loyal white-bearded Monarch who is giving 'divine' tasks and missions only to "white" people while at the same this God is not bothered about the enormous suffering that the racial policy of Apartheid has subjected black people.

Put somewhat differently, the racial divisions that South Africans have suffered over the years are a product of European cultural and religious triumphalism that has given rise to and feeds on the theology of glory, a theology which has to do with the "success motif" of Western Christendom which has forgotten its origin in the crucified Christ, by allowing Christianity to be transformed into a religion of the successful, and the mighty who exercise power to determine life both in church and society. This theology of glory has encouraged South African "pinkies" to develop an attitude of priding themselves as worthier persons than the so-called people of colour [read: blacks] by virtue of belonging to Western civilization and by being the elect of God to promote Christianity. Thus, unable to pass judgment on "pinky" humanity which has become proud and triumphant because of their alleged superiority of their cultural and educational achievements, the theology of glory has allowed itself to be used as an alibi for the justification of the concrete and unjust suffering of the people of black colour in a world dominated by the so-called "whites" [read: "non-coloured"] solely because of their black colour.

III. RACISM AS A THEOLOGICAL PROBLEM

The racism of the "pinkies" has become a theological problem for the people of colour simply because racism is not merely a racial prejudice or negative attitude towards a person whose colour differs from one's own. Nor is racism merely a vague feeling of racial superiority in relation to other people. Rather racism is a social, political, economic and cultural system of domination which white people employ to exclude the people of colour on basis of race for the purpose of subjugating them. It creates beliefs and myths about the cultural and biological superiority of the dominant racial group in order

to justify the unequal distribution of resources between the dominant and the dominated groups (Boesak 1983: 3). It exalts a particular biological characteristic to a universal principle determining what it means to be human. In other words, racial prejudices and stereotypes were developed in South Africa to rationalize the depersonalization and domination of black people; these stereotypes portrayed blacks as inherently inferior. This racial domination and the negation of blacks have their roots in the early history between Africans and colonialist in South Africa, when the former could not compete on equal terms militarily, economically and scientifically. The Apartheid policy was thus a culmination of a long process of development. The black experience in white dominated South Africa has been aptly described by Boesak(1976:26) when he writes:

> Blackness is a reality that embraces the totality of black existence. To paraphrase a central message of "The message of the People of South Africa: People's blackness dooms them to live the life of second-class citizens. It determines who their friends may be, whom they can marry, what work they can do and that the work they eventually do is considered inferior to that of white people. Their blackness determines that if they do the same jobs as white people they get paid less. It not only determines what education they can get; it often means that they will get no education at all.... It determines where they can medical treatment, if they are fortunate enough to live in an area where they will not die of malnutrition and neglect before they reach the age of five. It determines their whole life, very single day.... To be black in South Africa means to be classified a "non-white": a non-person, less than white and therefore less than human.

Boesak (1977:57) goes on to say that black experience should be understood as a by-product of white power structure, and notes that:

> The "white power structure", far from being a just term, represents a reality Blacks encounter every day. It represent the economic, political, cultural, religious, and psychological forces which confine the realities of Black existence. Concretely, for Black South Africans the white power structure is manifested in apartheid ... . The White power structure represents full control of Whites over the instruments of power and over the major resources of the country. It represents an unending spiral of violence inherent in the system of apartheid. It is this structure which ensures that the future of Black children is as uncertain as the present is for their parents.

Put somewhat differently, in racist societies the colour of one's skin and race become salvation principles, determining whether a person is declared justified or unjustified to enjoy certain economic, political and cultural rights and privileges. Because colour and race are salvation principles, it is not enough to be baptized after confessing Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Rather a person is expected to posses yet another attribute, which in the nature of the case, must be reserved only for a select few. Hence, Apartheid was designed and practice in such as way that the people of colour would be continually reminded that they are unworthy persons, regardless of whether or not they are Christians, simply because they do not possess that extra attribute, namely: white skin. The consequence of elevating the genetic and factors of race into the criterion of determining between the worthy and unworthy, and between the superior and inferior human beings has been devastating for the people of colour who were made to feel inadequate. Condemning the negative effects of the Apartheid system on the blacks, Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1983:46-47), with deep insight, writes:

> Apartheid is intrinsically and irredeemably evil. For my part, its most vicious, indeed its most blasphemous aspect, is not the great suffering it causes its victims, but that it can make a child of God doubt that he is a child of God. For that alone, it deserves to be condemned as a heresy. Real peace and security will come to our beloved land only when Apartheid has been dismantled.

At the same time, Apartheid system taught "whites" [read: pinkies], regardless of whether or not they are Christians, that they deserve a particular life-style and enormous political and economic privileges which are due to them by some natural right: that is, by virtue of their right colour.

In the light of this "white" racial domination and dehumanization of the people of black colour in South Africa, one would have expected the church and its theologians to be prophetic in its denunciation of the racial prejudices, injustice and oppression perpetrated by the people of pink colour. Regrettably, however, theology in South Africa has largely been done by middle class theologians of pink colour and some privileged black priests who are comfortably situated in the society. The result has been the development of a colonial theology which, consciously or unconsciously taken a preferential option for the powerful in order to serve the socioeconomic and political interests of white dominant society. This colonial theology could justifiably be characterized as the enemy of the oppressed black people. For the distinguishing feature of this colonial theology lies in the fact that it taught and continues to teach an authoritarian God, who, as the Supreme

Ruler of the universe, establishes racial classes in very society. Thus this God insists that there will always be the rich "pink" people and poor black people in the society, because this colonial and capitalist God accepts poverty as part of the divine will for the underdogs, most particularly for the people of black colour. To ensure that this situation of unequal distribution of material resources remains unchanged, the colonial theology of the pink people taught and continues to teach that God has established law and order in every society in favour of "white" folks, and demands obedience to the authority of both the church and state (Araya 1987:27-29; Nelson-Pallmeyer 1986:19; Kairos Document 1985:3-7). This attempted theological justification of the glaring unequal distribution of socioeconomic and political rights and privileges between different classes in "white" [read: pink] dominated societies has led as astute politician, Napoleon, to remark rather perceptively about the ideological function of religion, when he writes:

> As far as I am concerned, I do not see in religion the mystery of the incarnation but the mystery of social order: it links the idea of inequality to heaven which prevents the rich person from being murdered by the poor. How can there be order in the state without religion? Society cannot exist without inequality of fortunes and the inequality of fortunes could not subsist without religion. Whenever a half-starved person is near another who is glutted, it is impossible to reconcile the difference if there is not an authority to say to him: "God wills it so, it is necessary that there be rich and poor in the world, but afterwards in eternity there will be a different distribution." (Cited in Carter 1981:37).

IV. BLACK THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO "WHITE" RACISM

It is against this painful background of racial oppression and dehumanization of the black personhood as well as attempts by colonial theologians to justify the domination and privileges of the "whites" [pinkies] that black theology was born, as a theological protest against "white" inhumanity to black people. It is a theology which aims at reflecting on the black experience under "white" domination and exploitation in the light of the gospel. As blacks began to re-read the Bible in the their social experience in the so-called Christian country that they discovered that there is a fundamental contradiction between what the Bible proclaims and the message that their so-called "white" masters taught them. Thus beginning with their concrete experiences oppression and suffering in a white dominated society where the Christian faith is being used as an oppressive instrument of legitimizing the socioeco-

nomic and political interests of the "pinkies", black Christians could not help but become suspicious not only about the situation of injustice and oppression under which they suffered but also become suspicious about colonial theologies which unashamedly gave tacit support to the privileged status of people "pink" colour in relation to the people of colour. Commenting on the co-optation of theology by "white" dominant classes to give religious sanction to the socio-political and economic bondage to which the people of colour are subject, James Cone (1970:22; also see Allan Boesak 1976:30-36, 107-116), with deep insight, observes:

> white theology has not been involved in the struggle for black liberation. It has been basically a theology of the white oppressors, giving religious sanction to the genocide of Indians and the enslavement of black people. From the very beginning to the present day American white theological thought has been "patriotic," either by defining the theological task independently from black suffering (the liberal northern approach) or be defining Christianity as compatible with racism (the conservative southern approach). In both cases theology becomes the servant of the state, and that can only mean death to black people.

It is this hermeneutics of suspicion, namely, that in all human societies "anything and everything involving ideas, including theology, is intimately bound up with the existing social situation in at least unconscious way" (Segundo 1976:8) , that has helped black Christians to begin the task of unmasking the reality of oppression and the ideological mechanism that underpin and morally justify the social forces that foster and perpetuate the domination of black people. According to Segundo (1976:28), one of those mechanism is the ideology which claims to be colour-blind and yet allows white Christians to construct the entire social edifice in which the causes of the oppressed people's suffering is not even mentioned or discussed.

It is against this black experience of being oppressed by "pink" Christians that black Christians began to relate their own experiences of dehumanization to the biblical message of the God of love proclaimed in the Scriptures, asking questions such as: Why did God create me black? Why does God allow the "pinkies" who call themselves Christians to oppress black people, whom God also loves, simply because of their colour? What does God say, and what is God willing to do about this situation of oppression? As they wrestled with these existential questions, it dawned on the believing blacks that the reality of the politics of domination by the "pinkies" they see and experience in their lives differed from what they found in the Bible. For in the Bible God is not revealed as a category to be manipulated for the mainte-

nance of the privileged status quo of white domination. Rather God is portrayed there as the liberator God who wages a battle against injustice and human misery in order to establish justice and freedom for the oppressed (Cone 1975:4-5, 8-11, 122-124; Also see Araya 1987:27; Boesak 1976: 16-25, Maimela 1987:665-73, 92-97, 106-108, 116-120; Mofokeng 1983: 24-108, 160-185,238-263; Mofokeng 1987:5-16).

Black theologians find it significant that the God of the Exodus is portrayed as the God of mercy, who condescended from his or her throne of justice not to any human situation but to the deep dungeon of slavery in which the oppressed slaves were suffering in order to bring them out and create a new people (Ex 3:7)). The same God continued to express the divine concern for the underdogs by calling and sending the Hebrew prophets to denounce injustice and exploitation perpetrated by the powerful against the powerless widows and orphans. God's advocacy for the powerless and oppressed was brought to new heights in the coming of Jesus in and through who God chose to be born by poor parents, to live as a poor and oppressed human being, who suffered and was crucified as the rejected outcast in order to give the oppressed poor and the downtrodden new life and hope. According to black theologians, the incarnation is the event which clearly demonstrates that the biblical God is the God who takes the sides of the oppressed and the defenceless, the outcasts, the excluded and the despised. Archbishop Tutu puts in eloquently in this way:

> In the process of saving the world, of establishing His Kingdom, God, our God demonstrated that He was no neutral God, but a thoroughly biased God who was for ever taking the side of the oppressed, of the weak, of the exploited, of the hungry and homeless, of the refugees, of the scum of society... So my dear friends we celebrate, worship and adore God, the biased God, He who is not neutral, the God who always takes sides (cited in Maimela 1986:46).

Agreeing with Archbishop Tutu, black theologians call every theologian to become candid and to put his or her cards on the table, and to declare on which side of the liberation struggle he or she stands, thereby declaring whose socioeconomic and political interests his or her theology is serving. It is for this reason that they challenge the Church to take a preferential option for the poor and oppressed in their struggle for liberation. In support of their challenge, they point out that this divine preferential option for the poor and the oppressed is central to the biblical message, running through the pages of both the Old and New Testaments (see Psalms. 118:7, 107:4-6, 113:7, 140:12

146:7-9; Prov. 14:31, 22:22-23; Is. 25:4, Mt 5:3ff; Lk 1:53, 4:18-19, 6:17, 20-22).

The challenge that black theology poses to the church, namely, that it should take a preferential option for the oppressed and poor black masses, thereby becoming the advocate and defender of the powerless, has invoked a great hostility from both the conservative and liberal white theologians. They argue that the church cannot take a preferential option for the oppressed because this would mean that God is now portrayed as against the rich and dominant Christians. Bound by the ideology of justification by faith through grace, white theologians resist any meaningful discussion of God in relation to the problems of racial oppression and suffering of the black people. In their view such a discussion would necessarily lead to the problem of work righteousness, namely that black oppression and poverty would be sacralized and turned into virtues on the basis of which the oppressed back masses could demand special favour from God. Against this view, "white" theologians who, more often than not, have taken preferential options for the "pinkies" are quick to add that all people, be they pink or black or yellow, are saved by God's grace and not by good works, and therefore questions of wealth and poverty, of "white" [pink] oppressors and oppressed blacks, are of little importance to theological discourse.

What is often missed by the critics of black theology is that what is at stake is not whether or not the oppressed are sinners or should favoured by God. Rather black theology of liberation tries to witness to the transcendental and universal love of God, the love which unconditionally accepts the unacceptable, the rejected and humiliated black humanity (Rm 5:6-8). This divine love demonstrates its historical efficacy by seeking the dominated and marginalized people, especially the people of colour in racist societies, simply because they are oppressed and defenceless before the cruel reality of historical structures of injustice that threaten to destroy the life of millions of dehumanized black people.

In order to overcome this threat, black theology argues that it is necessary to portray God as one who assumes the role of an advocate for the cause of the oppressed people regardless of the moral and personal dispositions the downtrodden people. Rather God chooses to be their advocate simply because the oppressed people need God's defence. Therefore, what is at stake here is not the poor's merit, virtue, or moral worthiness on account of which the oppressed black masses might solicit God's acceptance. It is the justice of God's kingdom which demands that the oppressed people must have life in all its fullness. And for that to happen God, out of love and mercy, assumes the role of being the advocate, by making the cause of the defenceless and

oppressed people God's own cause. Regarding this divine advocacy for the poor, one of the foremost theologian of the twentieth century who cannot be accused of one-sided partisanship for the poor, Karl Barth, has this to say about God's preferential option for the poor and the underdogs:

> God always takes His stand unconditionally and passionately on this side and on this side alone: against the lofty and on behalf of the lowly; against those who already enjoy right and privilege and on behalf of those who are denied it and deprived of it (cited in Ayara 1987:44).

To appreciate the significance of what is being suggested here, it is important to note that wealth and poverty, which are consequences of unequal distribution of resources, are directly related to that fundamental sin of a breach of fellowship between humans and God (Gn 3.). After this tragic rapture the book of Genesis tells us how the consequences of sin began to be incarnated between and among human beings, manifesting themselves through destructive social relationships (Gn 4.). In order to confront and overcome this sinful social condition, God steps in as the God of the oppressed and defenceless people. In other words, God's advocacy for the poor and the downtrodden should be understood as a precondition for the liberation of both "pink" oppressors and oppressed blacks. Therefore, God assumes the role of an advocate of the underdogs in order to become the liberator of the dominant "pinkies who must also be liberated from their wealth, power and oppressive tendencies which hold them in bondage, thus preventing them from becoming partners with the oppressed blacks in their struggle against social consequences of sin in order to build up, together and alongside God, a just society in accordance with the values of the kingdom of God.

In taking the cause of the oppressed black people, God thus declares that the divine self is no longer prepared to put up with the social situations in which black people are oppressed and humiliated simply because they are black (Maimela 1986:44-50, Maimela 1987:96-97, 106-108, 115-120). Consequently, black theologians argue that, just God liberated the people of Israel not only from spiritual sins and guilt but also from oppressive socioeconomic and political deprivation in Egypt, God will again liberate the oppressed black people not only from their personal sins and guilt but also from historical structures of evil, exploitation and oppression which have been perpetrated by white power structures.

Thus drawing their inspiration from a biblical theological vision which portrays God as the liberator of the oppressed and powerless slaves, black theology attempts to provide the struggling black masses with an alternative

theological models (visions) with which to both resist the extreme demands of white racial oppression and work for the liberation of all people. In so doing, encouraged and empowers the oppressed people, especially the black people, in South Africa to become the subjects of their own liberation, and creators of just and humane social structures so that freedom, justice and human rights might become the common property of the majority of the human family.

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THE SPIRITUALITY OF AFRICAN PEOPLES

*Dr Peter J Paris**

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President Clark, Dean Smith, Senator Oliver, friends of the James Robinson Johnson Chair in Black Canadian Studies: First of all I should like to express my deep appreciation for the honour you have given me in inviting me to deliver this letter in honour of the James Robinson Chair in Black Canadian Studies. More importantly, I thank you, on behalf of all black Canadians for the wisdom both you and your government have shown in giving academic recognition to the experiences of African peoples who arrived on these shores more than two centuries ago seeking freedom and empowerment from centuries of enslavement and degradation.

I have chosen to speak on the subject, "The Spirituality of African Peoples" for the following reasons (a) because the life and destiny of black Canadians is tied up with that of African peoples everywhere; (b) that we as black Canadians cannot know our own history or arrive at an understanding of our own identity in isolation from African peoples everywhere; (c) that the categories of black Canadian self-understanding must emerge out of the African experience on the continent and in the diaspora; (d) that the history of black Canadians has been integrally tied to that of Africa, the Caribbean and the United States.

In this lecture I will argue that African people here and elsewhere are united by their common spiritual strivings. That is to say, they relate all dimensions of human life and especially their strivings for freedom and empowerment to some transhistorical source of power and meaning.

Thus, African peoples have never believed in an anthropocentric universe. Rather, they have always assumed that humanity is surrounded by a realm of spirits in which the Supreme God is thought to preside over a pantheon of sub-divinities and ancestral spirits. Alienated and capricious spirits are also thought to reside in that supernatural realm. More often than not, witches

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and sorcerers have located the source of their special powers in one or other of these alienated spirits. The widespread traditional African belief that the Supreme God is creator and Preserver of all reality may well be the single most important commonality that exist among the vast diversity of African peoples. There is general agreement among African scholars that this monotheistic belief was not the sole preserve of Christians. Rather, Africans have long claimed that all reality originates from God and is destined to return to God. Thus, Africans have always believed that nothing in the universe is ever finally lost. For the many diverse peoples both on the continent and in the diaspora, long threatened and oppressed by ubiquitous forces of destruction, this common belief in God's protective providence has been their primary source of meaning and strength. Consequently, African peoples are unexcelled in their reverence for an devotion to all spiritual phenomena which they readily incorporate into their thought and practice. Thus, no adequate research into African cultural life can be undertaken by ignoring the spirituality of the people.

It is interesting, however, that many African languages do not have a word for religion in spite of the fact that they view the whole of life as sacred. As a matter of fact, Africans cannot conceive of human life apart from its relationship to invisible spirits. That is to say, they believe that neither humanity nor nature is alone in the universe but surrounded by and dependent upon the superior power of eternal spirits. Thus, for them, the realms of nature, humanity and spirit comprise a cosmological whole and, hence, it is unthinkable for Africans to think of humanity apart from its connectedness with that larger world perspective.

Further, the African understanding of humanity is reflective of human experience as a whole and, consequently, it unites thought and experience, reason and emotion, person and community, present and past, nature, history and spirit. Similarly, African spirits and divinities are related to the whole of nature and history. Thus, spiritually pertains to the whole of life and more specifically, it is the principle by which the human spirit is related to its primary source of meaning and power. In the African world-view, all life is thought to be created, recreated, preserved and affirmed by the Supreme God. Hence, the chief function of humans is to create, recreate, preserve and affirm life in communion with God and all of God's spiritual associates which include not only sub-divinities and ancestral spirits, but all leaders, institutions and movements serving the well-being of their peoples.

Even a casual observer of African cultures quickly discerns that the continent is host to a vast diversity of cultures. Each traditional culture has its own cosmology and cultic practices. That is to say, each culture has its own spiri-

tuality. In addition, these various cosmologies have incorporated two guest religions into their pantheons namely, Islam and christianity.

Contrary to the thought of many, Christianity did not replace traditional African religions but, rather, traditional African religions absorbed christianity into themselves thus transforming both. Clearly, no continent in the world comprises a higher degree of multi-culturalism than Africa. Over a thousand distinctly different linguistic groups plus a larger number of dialects prove this claim.

Yet all of that rich cultural diversity has been constantly threatened by the countervailing spirituality of European domination evidenced in three and one-half centuries of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. It is conservatively estimated that approximately twenty-five million Africans were stolen from their homeland and packed like sardines into the bellies of slave ships to suffer the hell of the so-called middle passage. In the oppressive cauldron of bondage, a slave culture gradually emerged that united much of the African tribal diversity. But the unity was not realized apart from great sacrifice which included the loss of tribal identity and familial belonging; the loss of freedom and dignity. The lamentations and longings of African souls were expressed in word, song, music, dance and story. The spirituality of the people appeared in each of those genres. Each creative activity expressed in some way their communion with God and God's realm of spirits: the primary source of their power to endure, resist and transcend the evil forces they experienced. Clearly, the only thing that these oppressed people had to rely upon for strength and meaning was the spiritual resources that they had brought with them from their homeland: unseen mythical treasures deeply concealed in their consciousness and firmly written in their hearts. It was natural for these suffering people to call upon their ancestral spirits and their gods for relief. Accordingly, their priests and medicine men, conjurers, witches and sorcerers used their powers against their captors, but alas, to little effective avail even though many slave-owners often felt greatly threatened by the strange activities of conjurors, witches and sorcerers. Yet, the failure of the latter to overthrow the system of slavery by traditional methods alone, gave most of the Africans cause to view their captors as incarnations of evil forces with invincible powers.

As a matter of fact, traditional African societies believed that all misfortune was caused by human wrong-doing which caused an upset in the cosmological balance which, in turn, caused the resulting misfortune. This circular process implied the need for the restoration of the equilibrium which, in traditional African society, effective resolution required the careful attention of professional priests and diviners.

The earliest and most celebrated account of the process of enslavement is the autobiography of Olaudah Equiano, also known as Gustavus Vassa, son of an Ibo tribal ruler born in 1745. When his kidnappers first handed him over to the white slave traders he thought that he was being transferred into the hands of spirits. This terrified him more than anything else. He wrote accordingly:

> The first object that saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave ship, which was then riding at anchor, and waiting for its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, that was soon converted into terror, which I am yet at a loss to describe, ... I was now persuaded that I had got into a world of bad spirits, and that they were going to kill me. Their complexions too, differing so much from ours, was very different from any I had ever heard, united to confirm me in this belief. [1]

No outsider could possibly imagine the intensity of Equiano's fear. It had to have been most terrifying for an eleven year African boy to have been snatched from the security of his familial and tribal community where faithful devotion to the ancestral spirits was a constant source of protection against evil forces. Believing that he was in the presence of evil spirits must have been a dreadful experience. Hence, we are not surprised to read, "I no longer doubted of my fate; and, quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted.[2]

Assuming that his captors were evil spirits, it was natural for Equiano to ponder his fate and to conclude that he would surely be sacrificed and eaten by these strange beings."... I did not know what to think of these white people, though I very much feared they intended to kill and eat me."[3] His account of a storm at sea is similarly revealing:

> One night we lost a man overboard; and the cries and noise were so great and confused, in stopping the ship,that I, who did not know what was the matter, began, as usual, to be very much afraid, and to think they were going to make an offering with me, and perform some magic, in which I still believed that they dealt. As the waves were very high, I thought the Ruler of the seas was angry, and I expected to be offered

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1 "The Life of Olaudah Equiano," in Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Classic Slave Narrative*, (New York, New American Library, 1987) pp. 32-33.
2 *Ibid*., p. 33.
3 *Ibid*., p. 41.

up to appease him. This filled my mind with agony, and I could not any more, that night, close my eyes again to rest.[4]

Although modified and regulated in many ways, Equiano's intense fear of his white captors and his suffering at their hands, is paradigmatic of the African experience everywhere. For many long centuries, African peoples on the continent and in the diaspora experienced European peoples as their paramount enemy. Three and on-half centuries of slavery, followed by another century of colonialism demonstrates that fact. And the contemporary condition of African peoples everywhere on the continent, in the Caribbean, Latin America, Western Europe, United States and Canada is characterized by the conditions of neocolonialism, a synonym for economic dependency, political instability and systemic racism. In a world-wide market place of opportunity African peoples still lack the necessary conditions for adequate access to the means for a viable human life. In every country disproportionate numbers of African peoples suffer every kind of deprivation and impoverishment.

During the periods of slavery and colonialism Africans discovered that none of their traditional forms of resistance were effective instruments against the technological superiority of European weaponry which was the principal cause of their subjugation. Yet they held on to the only thing that Europeans could not fully invade and conquer, namely, the internal life of the human spirit. From within those concealed spaces there eventually emerged the fruits of their spiritual genius. These represent the spiritual strivings of their souls. In many opaque ways, usually embedded in the ordinariness of daily life, Africans shared with one another their deepest values and longings. Such sharing gradually issued in the development of a common ethos; a community; a shared life of meaning and power grounded in a supernatural source of power and meaning.

Under the conditions of slavery, the spirituality of African peoples expressed itself through the drudgery of daily work. Work songs, bodily rhythms, functional crafts, anecdotal stories, humour, mimicry, parody and code gestures of meaning finally reached their fullest reality in the creative concealment and development of slave religion which was an amalgam of Christian and African elements.

Under the conditions of colonialism, the spirituality of African peoples expressed itself through the many and various resistance activities of independent churches, charismatic prophets, mission schools, African newspapers

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4 *Ibid*., pp. 41-42

and cultural societies all of which, in one way or another, advocated some element of Pan-African independence from western hegemonic control.

Under the conditions of freedom in the so-called new world, freed slaves engaged in various forms of public resistance to slavery, segregation and discrimination. In the United States, these activities were usually centred in churches that were independently owned and controlled by blacks. Invariably these churches were the chief training ground for prophetic leadership of this sort. Further, the churches interpreted the prophetic leadership of their so-called "race-leaders" as blessed by God and, hence in alliance with God. This grounding in eternal power implied that the prophetic cause could not be defeated. This courageous type of leadership evidenced a new form of African spirituality militantly demanding an end to all forms of racism and colonialism. One exemplar par excellence of this type of spiritual leadership was Martin Luther King, Jr.

Wherever there were black churches or organizations, however, not fully owned and controlled by blacks, whether in the Caribbean, the united States, or Canada, strong prophetic leadership rarely developed. For example, whenever the governance of Black churches was under the jurisdiction of white denominational judicatories, or whenever black churches were dependent on white denominations for financial support, they were prevented from exercising their own independent judgments on social justice issues. Since freedom is the sine qua non of prophetic leadership, that is, public social criticism, the latter can only arise from within a spiritual context of freedom and independence. Thus black dependent churches, then and now, are not likely to rise beyond the function of being custodians of the sacred traditions. As such they are able to preserve the past, carry on the routinized functions of ministry and give their people various types of moral and therapeutic assistance. In short, they help their people to adapt to their conditions and to seek improvement in their situations through various forms of assimilationism. Because they are dependent and have no organized space of societal freedom, they are not likely to become agents of social change. Should they become independent, however, they might unite their pastoral functions with those of the prophetic reformers. Invariably, however, under the conditions of systemic racism, whenever dependent black churches seek independence they are generally blamed by their benevolent patrons as covert racists in reverse.

Interestingly, one of the first goals that the late Dr William P Oliver set for his ministry when he arrived at Cornwallis Street Baptist Church in 1937 was that of making the church independent of the Home Mission Board of the United Baptist Convention. At that time all the black baptist churches in

Nova Scotia had a long history of economic dependency on the predominantly white denomination. Dr Oliver was eventually successful in leading the church into financial self-sufficiency. The realization of that goal had a profound reciprocal effect on the spirituality of the people. The joyful experience of having become a self-determining church gave them a strong sense of pride and dignity in themselves and their own achievements. One of Dr Oliver's lasting legacies in Nova Scotia was his advocacy of economic independence throughout the African United Baptist Association. This activity allied him and others with all black independence movements in Africa and throughout the African diaspora. This philosophy of freedom laid the groundwork for all self-determining activities of Blacks in Canada and of these, the most prominent examples are: the Black United Front of Nova scotia, the Black Cultural Society of Nova Scotia, Black newspapers in various cities in Canada, various black cultural and professional associations.

It is also a fact that unlike Africa and many of the Caribbean islands, African Americans and African Canadians will never constitute sovereign nations but will remain racial and ethnic minority cultures within larger cultural contexts. This reality has been the cause of much spiritual strife and moral ambiguity among Blacks in this hemisphere caused by the evil of racism.

In his 1903 essay, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" W.E.B. DuBois articulated his famous theory of *double consciousness.* Here he argues that African Americans (and I might add, African Canadians) are bi-cultural, embodying African and American cultures that wage a constant strife within each person:

> One ever feels his twoness - an American, a Negro; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keep it from being torn asunder.... The history of the American negro is the history of this strife, - this longing to gain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows ... [5]

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5 W.E.B. DuBois, "The Souls of Black Folk" in *Three Negro classics*, (New York: Aveon Books, 1965), 214-215.

With the possible exception of the most isolated farmer on the African continent, African peoples everywhere are at least bi-cultural and countless numbers are multi-cultural. Additionally, African peoples in this hemisphere are bi-racial or multi-racial and this adds the additional element of complexity about which DuBois wrote. Thus slavery and colonialism have not only produced bi-cultural and multi-cultural peoples of African descent but also bi-racial and multi-racial peoples. Thus, African culture and African blood are mixed with Euro-American and Euro-culture and African blood are mixed with Euro-American and Euro-Canadian culture and blood to form a peculiar amalgam. Hence, all peoples of African descent in this hemisphere are aware of this dual or multiple consciousness about which DuBois spoke. In fact, African spirituality everywhere, but especially here, has been shaped by these bi-cultural and multi-cultural elements and their music, songs, dance, religion, literature, art and all other cultural expressions bear the marks of that struggle to syncretize disparate cultural elements into new patterns of meaning and coherence. Thus, African peoples may yet give to the world its most enduring forms of artistic expression because their creative urges and imaginative rationality emerge from a complex experiential reservoir of strife and suffering. Yet through it all they have always sought to give theological meaning to their human condition. And they have done this in numerous ways.

Ethiopianism has been one effective means of integrating the spirituality of African Christians in the diaspora. The African search for positive references to the submerged African tradition within the biblical text, led to the discovery of a text that has been a keystone for all African Christian nationalism, namely, Psalm 68:31, "Princess shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God." This text became the justifying source for the so-called "Ethiopian Movement" that swept the African continent in the 1880's. Its principal aims were resistance to colonialism and advocacy for the separation of African churches from European missionary control. Several Christian prophets in this movement were imprisoned and executed by the British. Prophet John Chilembwe of Malawi, was executed in 1915 and Prophet Simon Kimbangu (founder of the church of Jesus Christ of the Prophet Simon Kimbangu) was imprisoned from 1921 until his death in 1951 in the former Belgium Congo. All such independence movements in Africa and in the diaspora claimed some measure of inspiration from Psalm 68:31. The Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York City was organized by a group of Ethiopian traders who had resisted the segregated seating patterns of the white Baptist Church in New York.

Ethiopia's almost unique status of having been one of two African countries never to have fallen under the yoke of European colonial rule added immense significance to her sacred nature among African peoples everywhere. Further, the import of Ethiopianism was completed by the symbol of its throne: the resplendent majesty of her imperial Emperor, who traced his descent back through Queen Cleopatra to the Queen of Basheba, wife of King Solomon. Further, the Emperor was the defender of the faith and the head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church which tradition claimed has been founded by St Thomas the Apostle. When his majesty Haile Selassie visited New York City in the 1930's he visited Abyssinian Baptist Church and presented the church with a gift of a six foot silver cross which is firmly embedded in the pulpit area of the present edifice. In Trinidad, Jamaica and other parts of the Caribbean, the Rastafarian Movement claimed the emperor Haile Selassie as the Living God and its devotees his followers, the Ras Tafari. In addition the movement claims that salvation comes only to those who are repatriated to Africa and live under the sovereignty of Africans. These claim continuity in philosophy and theology with the Marcus Garvey's "Black to Africa Movement" of the 1920's which also spread throughout the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean with the blessing of Bishop Alexander McGuire and his newly founded African Orthodox Church, a branch of which still survives in Sydney, Nova Scotia. (Happily, we have in the audience tonight Mayann Francis - Employment Equity Officer for Dalhousie University, the daughter of Father Francis who pastored the African Orthodox Church in Sydney for forty-one years). The founding of the Liberian settlement of repatriated American slaves in 1820 as well as the colonization of sierra Leone by returned slaves from Nova Scotia in 1792 contained many nationalist elements reflecting the spirituality of their peoples. Similarly, most black nationalist and pan-Africanise movements exhibit similar traits. Inspired by the independence of Ghana in 1957 under the charismatic leadership of Kame Nkrumah, black consciousness movements in the United States emerged and soon spread to Canada and linked up with similar movements in South Africa in the late sixties and early seventies. All exhibited the common goal of freedom and empowerment. The former is almost complete in our day but, alas, empty of substance. Empowerment seems still to be a far-off dream.

Another event that we must not overlook in our discussion of African spirituality is the process by which the term "African" was endowed with positive meaning by late 18th and early 19th century freed slaves. As indicated above, Africans in the diaspora were forced to construct a new identity. Even though most of them had absorbed the prevailing pejorative attitudes

towards Africa as being "uncivilized", "idolatrous", "savage-like", "cannibalistic" they, nevertheless, reinterpreted the term "Africa" for themselves and gave it transcendent meaning by elevating it to the symbolic order of sacred discourse. The results may well constitute one of their creative achievements.

The symbolization of Africa by the African diaspora enabled them to take possession of their own reality and, in so doing, they succeeded in thwarting what Charles Long calls their oppressor's "linguistic conquest."[6]

Clearly, symbols have no literal definitions since they transcend their liberal forms. That is to say, symbols point to realms of meaning beyond themselves. Accordingly, the symbol "Africa" referred to the newly-formed spiritual unity of disparate tribal groups made possible by the dreadful conditions of slavery. Charles Long describes its sacred value thusly:

> So even if they had no conscious memory of Africa, the image of Africa played an enormous part in the religion of the blacks. The image of Africa, as image related to historical beginnings, has been one of the primordial religious images of great significance. It constitutes the religious revalorization of the land ... In this connection, one can trace almost every nationalistic movement among the blacks and find Africa to be the dominating and guiding image. Even among religious groups not strongly nationalistic, the image of Africa or Ethiopia still has relevance. This is present in such diverse figures as Richard Allen, who organized the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the late eighteenth century, through Martin Delaney in the late nineteenth century, and then again in Marcus Garvey's "Back to Africa Movement" of the immediate post-World War I period, and finally in the taking up of this issue again among black leaders of the present time.[7]

Thus, the basic struggle against the dehumanization process of slavery occurred in the spiritual consciousness of the African slaves. In the midst of their suffering they forged new structures of spiritual meaning, social identity, cultural expression and oral value. Their creative consciousness was typified in their loyalty and devotion to "Africa" as a transcendent symbol of meaning and power. This achievement marked a veritable watershed in their moral struggle against racial oppression: a struggle fuelled by the human impulse to preserve and enhance their humanity. The symbol "Africa" represented the continuity of a people with their past, the specific content of which was rapidly disappearing from their consciousness. The symbol implied free-

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6 Charles H Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols and Images sin the Interpretation of Religion*, (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1986), p. 106.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 176.

dom, empowerment and, above all, human *community*: the paramount moral and religious value among African peoples. As a prefix, the symbol designated transformative and foundational meaning: for instance, African Methodism; African Baptist, *et cetera*. symbolized a people's audacious effort to give positive meaning to a negative term and thereby take pride in their place of origin.

In every generation blacks have struggled to preserve their dignity in similar symbolic ways. The linguistic revolution of the 1960's purged "blackness" of its negative connotations and made it a symbol of pride and dignity, and in the 1990's, we are once again laying claim to our African identity and being empowered by it. A revival of the African liberation colours of black, green and red remind us of the homeland from which we are descended. Black refers to the people; green to the luscious African forests; red for the spilled blood of Africans for freedom. In recent years, the colour gold has been added to those emblems signifying the natural wealth that was stolen from Africa including her peoples, taken as property. In opposition to that status they struggled to preserve their humanity through various forms of activity.

Thus, spirituality of African peoples is united in their common, yet diverse endeavours to discern and construct value in their situation and to relate it to its transcendent depth, the source of all meaning and power. As a consequence, African peoples express their spirituality, that is, their quest for authentic freedom and dignity, meaning and power, in all the many and varied creative modes of artistic thought, religious practice and socio-political transformation. Further, and most importantly, all of these activities express a shared spirituality as seekers for independence and freedom and empowerment - the basic elements of genuine community.

AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN THEOLOGIAN'S LOOK AT AFROCENTRISM DESPITE THE GLARE OF THE BLUEST EYE

*Dr Josiah Young**

On the surface Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, apart from one memorable line I will emphasize, has little to do with Afrocentrism - the commitment to see life in the light of the African heritage and the Continent's current struggles and hopes. Saddled with self-hate - notwithstanding something healthy and wholesome about the two woman-child protagonists, Claudia and Frieda MacTeer - Morrison's characters *destroy* one of their own, Pecola Breedlove. In the picture Morrison paints Pecola personifies black alienation. Her skin is too dark, her hair too nappy, and her family too poor and unlettered *and* dysfunctional. Her father rapes her, a desecration that intensifies her desire for blue eyes. She thinks people will love her if her eyes are blue. This venue is *American* - so much so it would be better to place African under erasure. Given the alienated characters' preoccupation with the drawbacks of nappy hair, their idolization of white film stars, their coveting of light skin and straight hair, the novel is really about coloredness. (Coloredness casts no aspersion on the so-called Colored people of South Africa - many of whom prefer to be called Black. Neither does it refer to a Blydenesque disdain for "race mixing." It refers to a form of alienation I will discuss in more detail later.) It is, however, precisely this tragic condition that makes *The Bluest Eye* pertinent to the problem of Afrocentrism.

What one means by Afrocentrism varies. Certain Afrocentrists, the "Nile Valley" contingent, reclaim and reappropriate the rich legacies of the black Egyptians. Others, such as myself, prefer a less ancient Africa. Here heritage entails the reclaiming and reappropriation of Niger-Congo ancestors, whose integrity, mores, and creativity are - "one three centuries removed" (Cullen) - still with us in memory and in song. By way of those modes one knows that the old Africans were not heathens in need of Western civilization.

With regard to the Continent's current struggles and hopes, Afrocentrism in this essay is principally, but not solely, informed by the work of African artists, such as Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe, and particularly by African

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theologians such as Barthélemy Adoukonou and Jean-Marc Éla. These writers and theologians inform one of just what it means to be an African today.

The Bluest Eye is an interlocutor for such Afrocentric concerns because it causes one to ponder *why* Africa is so far away, and its distance an antitoxin for a people so Westernized as to languish as the colored people their oppressor's have made them.

Looming above its pages is the juggernaut shadow of white hegemony. This is so abnormal that an Afrocentric theologian might well see whiteness as an invasive element analogous to incest. I do not infer the vulgar incest depicted in the novel, that final, deadly rape of Pecola by her alienated, though decadently free, father. I refer to the tyrant incest that, divested of its sexual connotations, is implied in the novel's final pages:

> *There is no gift for the beloved. The lover alone possesses his gift of love. The loved one is shorn, neutralized, frozen in the glare of the lover's inward eye* (Morrison 1970, 160).

The *thing* about white supremacy is that it, in narcissistic love, gratifies itself ("the inward eye") at its victim's expense.

This forbidden love thrives on a deviant closeness, and nothing healthy issues from it. Its disease, in part, is that the violated ones see themselves as kin to those who fleece, nullify, and paralyze. The sin of misguided eros has been projected onto blacks, who, estranged from their otherness, see the exploitative relationships as good for them. This love leads to "social impoverishment, the loss of differentiation which would block the development of [humankind]" (May 1969, 115).

Take for instance Morrison's Elihue Micah Whitcomb, an emasculated spiritualist, and - a pedophile, whom the community has dubbed "Soaphead Church." His complicity in Pecola's final delusion is explained by the coloredness he covets as his "pedigree."

> *He had been reared in a family proud of its academic achievements and its mixed blood - in fact, they believed the former was based on the latter. A Sir Whitcomb, some decaying British nobleman, who chose to disintegrate under a sun more easeful than England's, had introduced the white strain into the family in the early 1800s. Being a gentleman by order of the King, he had done the civilized thing for his mulatto bastard - provided it with three hundred pounds sterling, to the great satisfaction of the bastard's mother, who felt that fortune had smiled on her. The bastard too was grateful, and regarded as his life's goal the hoarding of this white strain. He bestowed his favors on a fifteen-year-old girl of similar parentage. She like a good victorian parody, learned from her husband all that*

> *was worth learning* - to separate herself in body, mind, and spirit from all that suggested Africa [added]; *to cultivate the habits, taste, preferences that her absent father-in-law and foolish mother-in-law would have approved* (*Ibid.*, 132).

It is not that Soaphead is a product of miscegenation which makes him colored, but his idolatry of Sir Whitcomb's Civilization and phenotype - an idolatry that renders him well-suited to "minister" to Pecola.

When, after her father's assault, Pecola comes to Soaphead asking to be cured from her pathetic blackness, *he* understands. In God's name he deceives her into believing she has what she desires. The bluest eyes. Quite satisfied with his Pecola performance, he taunts his god. "You forgot, Lord." Soaphead says: "You forgot how and when to be God." "That's why I changed the little girl's eyes for her, and I didn't touch her; not a finger did I lay on her. But I gave her those blue eyes she wanted. Not for pleasure, and not for money. I did what you did not, could not, would not do: I looked at that ugly little black girl, and I loved her. I played you. And it was a very good show!" "I ... have caused a miracle. I gave her the blue eyes. I gave her the blue, blue, two blue eyes. *Cobalt* blue [added]" (*Ibid.*, 143).

He loved her. But what is this thing called love? Surely not a gift from One whose love is free of "racial" stipulation. Truth be told, Soaphead is giftless, for his "*God*" beyond god is no true Thou, but an apotheosized I (the bluest one). Soaphead gives Pecola only what had been given him, the disdain of the Thou - the African other, the enigma of an "un-Negro tongue (Hughes)." Like those whose mores he covets, Soaphead can not see that ". . . the Thou of the other . . . *is* [added] the divine Thou. . . . [that] the way to the other . . . is also the way to the divine Thou, a way of recognition or rejection" (Bonhoeffer 1963, 37). If one rejects innocent blackness, for all the vulgar reasons associated with a reigning and unjust aesthetic, one rejects God as well. This is because such rejection is deeply *sinful.* Dissimulated by the power of denial, this unholy rejection is integral to what Morrison calls the "*Thing*" (it makes black children ugly and white ones beautiful).

Afrocentrism, through which blacks discover an otherness we have been taught to disdain, helps us overcome this demented rejection of God and self because it exorcises the cobalt blue eye, and, with it, the pathetic coloredness all too common in the United States today. So by coloredness I mean a spiritual deformity, I mean precisely the outcome of this quasi-incestuous relationship that renders blacks vitiated versions of the Master Race. With our otherness annulled in a fatally suffocating relationship, we, to borrow a line from V.Y. Mudimbe, become "the key, which in its abnormal differences, specifies the identity of the Same" (Mudimbe 1988, 12). The colored person

is thus "the inversed figure of the Same": a *colored*, and therefore aberrant, white person (*Ibid.*, 180). Let me discuss aspects of such coloredness in some detail.

Certain elements of black, so-called underclass, life - while entailing remarkably the memory of Africa in rhythm, syntax, and conscious identification with the Continent through Afrocentric accoutrements - are profane, misogynist, prone to glorify black males' tragic criminalization, and hostile to higher learning. To be African-American in this context is to be crude. This crudeness makes its way into aspects of rap music that, though in large measure very *African*-American and prophetic, is too often nihilistic and feeds the syndrome of the bluest eye. In its glare African-*Americanness* is but a beastly heathenism, for black skin is inimical to civilization. The African root of black identity is the fact of origin only.

Reified roots and "African," however, are not the same thing: - African pertains to the dignity of the African legacy in the New World *and* to the critical assimilation of what Africans like Achebe and Éla are thinking. New World blacks unaware of what those Africans have to say about Africa are not *African*-American.

Neither are those middle class blacks who pursue the American dream above all others and exacerbate in *their* inward eye the alienating syndrome of *The Bluest Eye*. Eager to dissolve the hyphen between African and American, they are unconcerned with Africa. Despite the sad revelations of Derrick Bell's *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, they covet their American identity. (They would no doubt be astounded should Bell's space traders arrive and remind them of precisely *why* they are not fully satisfied with the America they would cut off from Africa.) And they bring to mind yet another of Morrison's characters, the upwardly mobile Geraldine.

She represents a peculiar American folk, who, like Soaphead, are paragons of alienation. They revel in doing "the white man's work with refinement: home economics to prepare his food; teacher education to instruct black children in obedience; music to sooth the weary master and entertain his blunted soul" (Morrison, 68). No blues. No swinging; nothing that comes close to the joyous abandon one finds among the "Holy Rollers." *No Afro* dancing. Anything that smacks of the ethnicity whites disapprove of is a problem for them. So Geraldine plays down her full lips; and women of her ilk "worry, worry, worry about the edges of their hair" (*Ibid.*). It is Geraldine indeed who brings out the coloredness of the black middle class with pathetic poignancy. She explains to her son the distinction between colored people and niggers. The distinction is shamefully superficial: Hair must be cropped close "to avoid any suggestion of wool." And lotion must be applied reli-

giously to remove any hint of ashiness. Geraldine has been miseducated. She believes the "line between colored and nigger [is] not always clear; subtle and telltale signs [threaten] to erode it, and the watch [has] to be constant" (*Ibid.*, 71).

Like many of the whites they emulate, middleclass blacks like Geraldine have but a shallow understanding of injustice. Never mind that Geraldine's "niggers" are being victimized. Proper folk like Geraldine see only what their inward eye lets them see in regard to the Pecolas of the world: "Grass wouldn't grow where they lived. Flowers died. Shades fell down. Tin cans and tires blossomed where they lived. They lived on cold black-eyed peas and soda pop. Like flies they hovered; like flies they settled" *(Ibid.*, 75).

Perhaps the most troubling ramifications of coloredness are found in the black church. Not the Sanctified Church that, despite its shortcomings, becomes, "in an old remembered way" (Cullen) and in the height of worship, "an unchained demanding other" (Morrison). I mean the bourgeois black church content with the worship bequeathed to them by whites. Content with a blue-eyed Jesus, who does not have to be depicted in icon to be really present, such churches eschew shouting (the remembered behavior of the slaves with salt water ways). Like Morrison's Geraldine, bourgeois black church folk "know how to behave."

That this is so was brought home forcibly to me some years ago during the feting of a highly renowned black theologian. After a day of erudite presentations in his honor, the assembly retreated to a church for worship. I was struck by the European tenor of the service - the magisterial organ, the triumphant hymns (I recall not one spiritual or gospel song) the European clerical attire. No drums; no jazz: nothing part of a code that breaks the back of the Western captivity to the staid, so-called civilized response to "the" Word. Only the preacher, a product of the Sanctified Church, conjured a bit of spontaneity from the congregation, thereby giving welcome respite from what seemed to be an annoying contradiction: *African*-Americans theologians and church folk worshipping in ways little different from whites.

I can hardly claim that coloredness was the essential thing at that church gathering. But to sing the oppressors' song in their key at such an auspicious occasion was hard to take. How hopelessly Westernized we seemed, and - how far removed from Africa. Despite the lectures, the worship service weighed on me as reminiscent of De Gobineau's dictum held dear by *The Bluest Eye*'s Whitcombs: "...all civilizations derive from the white race, that none can exist without its help, and that a society is great and brilliant only so far as it preserves the blood of the noble group that created it" (Morrison 1970, 133).

Are we African-Americans if content with a hand-me-down culture all too evident during our most auspicious events? Do we, acculturated products of a violent association, not place ourselves in a deep freeze when Africanness is so truncated as to be banned from high culture? Why are we so willing to be African-*American* and not *African*-American? What is the virtue of the former?

To be African-*American* surely means that we have had to overcome a blistering whiteness. We have had to overcome tremendous odds through strength of character and the power of our cultures. Our insight into the claim that "God is no respecter of persons"; our music, spawned from the sacred and summoning still the power of resistance; our folk poetry captured in works such as Sterling Brown's "Old Lem" - these are all noble. But at the root of all these things - to quote a line from the impressive rap group Digable Planets's song "Where I'm From" - "it's Africa at work" that accounts for our distinction. "One three centuries removed" notwithstanding, the African heritage is strong enough to thaw the embrace of a Civilization that would suspend us it its image.

The power of this African heritage at work notwithstanding, Afrocentric theologians need the counsel and the example of Africans to purge coloredness from our American existence. Works such as Soyinka' *Myth Literature and the African World* and his *ìsarà*, as well as Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* and his *Hopes and Impediments* complement *The Bluest Eye* because they aid our resistance to the unsafe "love" of free whites, who covet the coloredness that flatters *them*.

In the works of the Nigerians I have mentioned - and I am not giving priority to *a* region as the hallmark of Afrocentrism - one is taught masterfully how Westernization is mitigated by respect for the "living" reality of the ancestors' alterity. Their living legacy hardly eclipses the problem of alienation within the Continent itself, for one encounters in African literature the problem of the agglutinized èlite, who account significantly for high infant mortality and the starvation of the peasants. But not even these problems introduce the cul-de-sac of debilitating coloredness. No pervasive acceptance of alien surnames. No *esprit du corps* sated with the stigma of New World slavery's deprivations. No inward glare that neutralizes, shears, and freezes.

This lack of coloredness is also characteristic of African theologians, who forestall whiteness and its demonic internalization by blacks. They too know the real Africa beset by the curse of the nation-state (Davidson); and one is made aware of the connection between suffering and hope. In Africa today, suffering, an unimpeachable element in Christian God-talk, is the product of neocolonialism; while hope is the glimmer of promise stemming from both

the precolonial past and faith in a liberated future. In Éla's words, which I translate as follows, an Africa "delivered from exploitation and slavery would still await liberation, which must occur on the eighth day." The promise of that day "invites us to revive a hope that is active in order to register in history's actuality the signs of the world to come" (Éla 1983, 83). African theology's movement from *pierre d'attente/adaptation* - idioms related to the chimera of *négritude* - to its current focus on liberation has freed Christianity from its narrow, if imperious, Western interpretations (Young 1993).

A liberated Christianity allows one to explore Africanness in terms of the juxtaposition of the black Christ and the *theologia crucis*. The two came together for me in a new way as I watched a very bad, meaning "B," movie entitled *Exorcist III*.

During one scene a black Christ is depicted. But the figure on the crucifix is really colored. He is a Sambo Jesus: big bogus red lips, bulging Uncle Tom eyes. The movie's intent was to portray the devil's work; and what better way than by way of the jiggerboo Jesus? How better to defame the typically aryan Jesus than to subject him to burnt cork? Yet, because of the influence African theologians have had on me, the scene brought to light the illusion of both the jiggerboo and the aryan Jesus. The jiggerboo Jesus is always hidden in the "normal" one. In embracing Africanness as defined by *Africans,* ones sees that coloredness is but a projection of the bluest eye. (There are no jiggerboos in Africa - only in white America. There may be alienated Africans; but no jiggerboos.) In caricaturing Jesus in a way deemed to be blasphemous, the movie brought to light the sin of the giftless lover, a lover whose deity is but the apotheosis of the will to self-gratification and self-glorification.

My Afrocentric orientation notwithstanding, the bogus black Christ led me to reconsider Luther's claim that Christ had become a brazen serpent: "... When I feel the remorse and sting of conscience for sin, I behold that brazen serpent Christ hanging upon the Cross." While there is an allusion here to Numbers 21: 8-9, the serpent Christ, like the jiggerboo one, brings to light the immensity of the sin of projection. The sin of the "darky" caricature and the sin of the one "who is made sin for us" coincide because both yield the scapegoat, who is only ostensibly deformed. The genuine deformity rests deep within the scapegoater. The trouble with Luther, however, is that he is often made an abettor of the bluest eye. He is not seen as a medium through whom God speaks to the *world* in Jesus' name. Rather, he is seen as a Protestant Titan, who perpetuates Eurocentrism (which in its theological mode always involves the hegemony of the Germans). Afrocentrism is necessary if such sensibilities are not to profane African-Americans.

More and more, then, the work of African theologians help African-Americans resist coloredness. More and more, African-Americans must have Afrocentric vision, without assuming that we can *return* to Africa. We are "stuck" in America; there is for us - as African theologian Barthélemy Adoukonou poignantly observes - no possibility of capturing what Africa was to *our* ancestors, no return to the "maternal bosom of indifferentiation and security," no unfettered existence under the benevolent regard of Africa. "The hour of deracination has sounded. *Il n'y a pas de retour possible*" (Adoukonou 1981, 55). But we CAN Identify with the Continent tenaciously. Learning African languages, focusing variously on specific nations, bringing the work of African theologians to the center of our own work, we can be Afrocentric. What better way to banish coloredness from our hearts and minds? What better way to neutralize the glare of the inward eye?

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THE FUTURE IMAGE OF SOUTH AFRICAN BLACK THEOLOGY

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Two historical realities explain the nature and style of South African Black Theology. Firstly, the theology of the black church in South Africa is and has always been a theological reflection on the resistance praxis of the black community from the very moment of christianization of African people in our country. It is a passionate effort of black christians who entered the christian church as defeated and dispossessed people. That nature of Black Theology was determined by the fact that the christian faith to which black people were later converted, arrived in South Africa as a bedfellow of the violent process of colonisation. In many cases, it even served as an equal partner in that process whose responsibility was an ideological softening of African resistance.[1] Black christians try today, as they had always done in the past, long before they were christianized, to understand their predicament and fashion their responses to their condition, in the light of the lofty promises of the God of the oppressed, as a God of love and justice.[2] Since the colonial process that determine their existance still persists, their resistance will also continue until it is ended.[3] Consequently, the short and long

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1 See Magubane, B.M. 1979: The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa. New York, Monthly Review Press, p.55ff. on the role of education and religion in the colonial process.**

2 See G.M. Setiloane's *The Image of God among the Sotho-Tswana* (Rotterdam, A.A.Bakema 1976.) In this book the author argues very passionately but also persuasively for the fact that the Sotho-Tswana has a religious life and practice that was in no way inferior to the Christian faith and that that religion addressed all fassets of the life of the people. See also Mbiti, J.S. 1970: *Concepts of God in Africa.* London, S.P.C.K.

3 Some of our liberation movements, e.g. the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (P.A.C) and the Azanian Peoples Organisation (AZAPO) warned since their inception that there is no way in which the South African conflict can be resolved without the colonial question of land dispossession is resolved. Now, many groups of African people who lost their land are coming forward and saying that no election of a constituent assembly can take place before their land is returned to them. many others are not even waiting for the regime and the negotiating parties to adres their demands. They are returning to those tracks of land and taking them back.

term future of their theology will be determined by the nature of this resistance praxis and its impact on black christians and their lives at different moments of its evolvement.

Secondly, the future development of Black Theology will not be divorced from the present nature of that theology as a reflection on a praxis of liberation. Instead, it will be linked in a determinative way, with its present nature as a theology of struggle that reflects on the objective conditions that affect the lives of black people as well as on their subjective responses as a christian black people. Since all projections on the future of our country indicate that there isn't going to be a sudden and immediate radical change in the material conditions that govern the lives of black people in South Africa. In other words, since liberation will not come soon, then it goes without saying that the struggle for recovery of our land, equitable distribution of economic and political power as well as social equality will continue and neccessitate the polemical, critical and projective (prophetical) functions of Black Theology to be continued for a long time. In that response, Black theology will be continuing what it is presently doing and also learning from its successes and weaknesses.

If what we stated above will become reality, it is incumbent on us as students of S.A.Black Theology who wish to search for its future image, to follow the evolvement of theological reflection among our people in order to understand the different types of religious and theological responses that emerged among black people in South Africa to which a future Black Theology will be linked and from which it will be learning.

To understand the different types of theology that emerged among the oppressed people of our land in the last 300 years of the most vicious colonial oppression known to humankind, we have to understand the concrete situation and particular events that produced theological questions that occupied the minds of organic theologians of the oppressed during each of the above historical phases. For that purpose, we shall present a very brief summary of that situation in order for us to be able to deal meaningfully with future possible directions for that theology.

Lebamang Sebidi in 'The unquestionable Right to be Free' presents a helpful periodization of the history of the encounter of African people with the messangers of the Bible with which we partially agree and wish to posit as a co-determinant of their various responses.[4] Sebidi delimits three phases of colonial history namely: the tribal era (early colonial era), the early industrial era (later colonial era) and the present apartheid era.[5]

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4 See Mosala I. and Thlagale B. (eds.) 1986: *The Unquestionable Right to be Free.*
5 *Ibid.* p.80.

During the tribal era (early colonial era) i.e. when all Africans still lived on tribal land and in tribal formations, all resistance to colonisation and the colonial religion, namely Western christianity, whether military as it often was, cultural or religious, was conducted on the basis of African Traditional Religion. The tribal priests and doctors were always involved in cultic preparation of the regiments before the latter embarked on a campaign to defend their land. Some rituals were also performed after the return of the fighting forces. Culturally, the elders of the tribes stepped up the tribal school activities (mountain school) where young people were initiated into adulthood in opposition to the church that was also conducting catechism classes whereby young people were initiated into christian adulthood and western culture. Traditional African religion was also attacked by western christianity in an attempt to displace it from its unchallenged hegemonic position. The prophets and priests of that religion were expected to mediate between the ancestors and their humiliated and suffering children, and say what needed to be done for national harmony and equilibrium ni nature to be restored. It was also their task to explain the mysteries of nature as well as inform the spirituality of the living.

That religious resistance could not last long because it was soon deprived of its material basis of existance when Africans lost their land, cattle, sheep and goats. This wealth constituted their means of subsistance, self propagation and religiousity. They needed their cattle and sheep for sacrifices and their trees, shrubs and mountains for shrines and temples and these were no longer in their control. In many cases, they had to suffer the humiliation of asking for permission from white racists who dispossessed them, when they wished to go to the graves of their ancestors.[6] When that happened, the way was open for conversion or religious co-optation of many Africans into white christianity or transitional form of christianity (African Independent Christianity) that took place during the second phase of colonial conquest which we shall now discuss.

The second era (around the 19th century) was ushered in by the dispossession of the mineral wealth of our land, (the so-called discoveries of diamond

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6 Africans always return to the place where their people are buried from time to time to commune with those who have departed as well as take their children and those who were not present at the funeral. They also go there whenever there are problems in life to seek the help of the departed. In many cases the African medicine men and women prescribe some ceremonies that include going to talk to the departed in order to restore harmony when they feel that it has been disturbed by the life conduct of the living relatives. When this has to be done and the land is in white hands, Africans , in most cases have to endure great indignities at the hands of the white owner of the land and of the graves of their people who will sometimes say that they should take their bones away and not bother him or loosen the fence around his farm.

and gold), their commercial production and the subsequent urbanization of the rural populations and the breakdown of the tribal and clan cohesion.[7] The imposition of taxation on Africans that could only be paid with money in addition to the loss of land and other means of production to which we have already referred, forced African men at first and women later to abandone their traditioanl social formations and emigrate to the urban areas where they painfully sold labour to the new money economy that was developing around the mining and related industries. In these circumstances, African labourers who had left their tribal and family networks behind only arrived to become victims of residential racism in the urban setting. Separate ghettos and shack villages were costructed far away from white industrial and residential areas, which were also their work places. Far away from their religious and cultural village settings, they were compelled to create new social networks that went beyond language and clan as means of survival as human beings. As people who were forced out of their cultural and religious milieu, they were driven by the urge for spiritual survival and constant search for sanity in an insane racist society, to create a new religious universe. This search did not, however, take place in an atmosphere of peace and tranquility. The white christian missionaries who ironically shared in racist practices of the white colonial population also continued to strive towards the conversion of these newly urbanized Africans to the christian faith as they defined it and as it was practised by the people who had disinherited them.

In this period the response of our people took two different though related forms. Many Africans joined the colonial church in which they remained junior members who were to remain in white tutelage in all institutional matters until very recently. They found themselves in an invidious position wherein they were expected to accept the theology of love for the neighbour who dispossessed them at the barrel of the gun. They were also compelled to accept a theology that teaches that the land belongs to God (as defined by their conquerors) after their land was conquered by the messangers of that very God. Many others formed independent African churches in which they were the masters and mistresses of their own religious destiny in a period of transition from the rural tribal context to the modern industrial society. In this act of religious selfdetermination they continued to endure many forms

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7 See Cochrane J.1987: *Servants of Power - The Role of the English speaking Churches in South Africa 1903-1930.* Johannesburg, Ravan Press. One of the reasons why the tribal cohesion was destroyed through recruitment for the urban industries, was, in addition to acquiring labour for the emerging industries, to break the military capacities of the tribal formations.

of harassment and discrimination by the white state until the present era.[8] In spite of that discrimination, they continued to develop a theology that synthesyzed the teachings from our African spirituality as well as those derived from the theology of their conquerers to inform their religion of survival.

These two different forms of christianity (black colonial christianity and Independent christianity) were related by the social conditions of their adherents. They shared a common social space. Their adherents lived precariously as oppressed and exploited labourers in the black townships on the margins of the many white cities in our country. They suffered the same racist humiliation and exclusion from the material wealth which they extracted from their land through blood, sweat and tears. They are subjected to the same inferior education and lack of health facilities. When the violence of the white racist state is unleashed upon black people, it makes no difference whether you share the Nicean Creed and the Chalcedonian Confession with white christians or not. No group is exempted. When it is time to celebrate the graciousness of God and the small signs of the breaking in of a new dawn in their struggle against their common oppression, they hold hands and pray together in a common spirituality. They dance and clap hands to the rythm of the same African melodies and drum together. The formal parting of ways comes only when the time for Nicea, Chalcedon and many other imposed confessions arrives, forcing them to be orthodox in a denominational way.

This situation in which many black people, especially the lower middle classes that emerged, remained captive to an imposed theology and spirituality of the colonial churches, was terminated by the tragic events of Sharpeville when the hatred that white christians harboured against fellow black christians boiled over and resulted in the brutal killing of 69 unarmed Africans who were protesting the dehumanising practice of carrying the passbook as a badge of black inferiority. That brutal killing of our innocent black people marked the turning point, not only of black protest politics but also of black theological collusion. When the African pastor from one of the white liberal churches, whose task it was to bring the 'good news' from Scripture at the funeral of the victims of Sharpeville, read from the book of Job and said that God had given and God had taken, he was told to leave the funeral and go home. He was told: if you do not know who took, go and ask

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8 The African Independent Churches always had great difficulties acquiring sites where they could build their churches. There are cases where they were under security police surveilance because they were always suspect in the eyes of the regime. The fact that they were free from white tutelage and monitoring has always added to that. In some cases there were attempts to destroy them by killing their members on the part of the army and the police of the racist state. The Bullhoek massacre is a classic example. (See Edgar, R. 1988) for a recent historical presentation of the issue.

the white police who killed these people. That refusal by black lay christians who stood at the cutting edge of the struggle for justice for a long time, to accept that the death of black people was consistent with the will of the God of love and justice, closed the door behind an overt theological enslavement to the theology of those who kept our people in psychological and physical captivity. It also ushered in a new period in the struggle for theological creativity, and self determination among many black theologians who were committed to a radical discipleship in service of the black church and black people in general. In the search for theological authenticity which ensued, the above mentioned two black traditions that had hitherto been alienated from each other, began the long and difficult process of reconciliation and mutual enrichment.[9]

It was, however, not until the emergence of the Black Consciousness movement and the radical critique of colonial christianity articulated by Steve Bantu Biko in the late 1960's that the black theological movement was brought to the crossroads. Biko criticised white culture, white historiography, white capitalism, white education and white theology for alienating black people from themselves, their land, their culture, religion and history thereby depriving them of the authentically African resources that they needed in their struggle for freedom and recovery of their ancestral land.[10] He was particularly harsh, and justifiably so, with his critique of the white christian theology for giving universalist answers to universal questions that were not posed by black people thereby alienating them from God and the particularity of their suffering.[11] That all-embracing critique that covered the entire white civilization brought the black church and its theology to the crossroads as I indicated above. In fact many young christians asked whether it was not time for the winds of decolonization that were sweeping through Africa to be accompanied by the hurricane of dechristianization of Africa. As a matter of fact, many of them subsequently took the logical step of bringing the contradiction of espousing the religion of our oppressors to an end. They de-

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9 It is a well known fact that some black pastors were at the forefront of the protest movements in the 1960's. What remains to be done is a research into the influence of the killings of 1960 on their theological thought as articulated in their sermons. No black person taught at a seminary during that time. Seminary teaching, even in cases where black clergy were trained were the preserve of whites. Consequently, the only outlet for their theological thought were their sermons. It is for that reason that we think that the need exists for the sermons of pastors like Mahabane, Mokitimi, E. Tema, L.R.L.Ntoane, E.S. Buti, Makhene and many others who were prominent leaders of our people should be studied.

10 See Moore, B.(ed.)1973: *Black Theology - The South African Voice*. London, Hurst and Co. p.45 on "Black theology and the quest for true humanity".

11 *Ibid*. 47ff.

nounced the christian faith tore up the bible and returned to the faith of our forefathers and mothers while others espoused Marxism because of the belief that that ideology did not contain the same contradictions that are inherent to christianity. For those who remained loyal to the christian faith, it could not be business as usual. Black christians had to acknowledge and face the challenges that were posed by the glaring limitations of western theology and do some thing about that. For them, a theological gauntlet was cast for a theology that would make a difference in the resolve of black people in their struggle for justice and freedom. They had to make a radical break with the theology that had discredited and shamed itself at Sharpeville and other places and occasions. They were prompted to listen to the cry of the oppressed and pick up new questions and search for new answers. They had to summon their creativity and create a new theology that was destined to perform a crucial function of delegitimation of white theology that had blessed the guns and the soldiers of the racist state and the industrial machines of capitalism. It was also their challenge to engage in a critical legitimation of the struggle for liberation to which thousands of our people had committed their lives and show how the God who has always taken sides against evil relates to the decision of our people to take up arms and bear the cross in search of justice and freedom.[12]

In our situation of a radical denial of the humanity of our people which had resulted in the alienation to which we referred on the one hand, and the ruthless capitalist exploitation to which our people are subjected, on the other hand, two challenges which ended up as two directions in Black Theology, suggested themselves. Theologians grappled with the question: What does it mean to be made in the image of God within Black Theology generally and Black Christology in particular. They also had to deal with the alienating effects of industrial capitalism that resulted in the emergence of a highly politicised labour movement that uses Marxism as a tool of understanding this economic system as well as formulating their future social order.[13]

In answering the first question, most black theologians who are culturally African used African culture, African history, African religion as sources together with the Scriptures in search of the all embracing answer that would result in a healthy and well grounded human being who would be co-creator

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12 See M. Buthelezi's article entitled 'Violence and the Cross in South Africa' in the *Journal for Theology in Southern Africa*.(Dec. 1979 p.53ff.

13 Mosala I.J. and Thlagale B. took the lead in the 1980's. See also Hopkins, D.1989: *Black Theology - U.S.A.and South Africa - Politics, Culture and Liberation.* Maryknoll, Orbis Books. on this issue.

with God in relation to nature and historical circumstances. In other words, our blackness, more often used by the oppressor as an instrument of alienation in order to secure our clamour for Eurocentricity, was defined not only in terms of our colour and the negativity of our circumstances but also in terms of the best of our African realities in order to gain the self-confidence and self-love that results from acceptance of the self, the black African self as a gift of God. A conscious process of retrieval of African culture that was gradually being pushed to the margins of the consciousness of black people and social life by the dominant Euro-capitalist culture, ensued. It offered us the characteristic communality of African existance and the centrality of solidarity.[14] We also retrieved our African history especially those unforgettable moments of resistance to colonial attack. The names of the monarchs of the different tribes who were at the forefront of that resistance were lifted up as heroes and symbols that could inflate the depressed ego of the oppressed as a matter of necessity. Even African religions drew the attention of theologians who were brought up to look at them with scorn and contempt as a sign of backwardness.

It will help much to understand that this process of retrieval was not an easy exercise which black theologians could undertake in freedom and without disturbance. That natural task of retrieval was regarded as an act of political subversion by the ideologues and theologians of the apartheid state and consequently attracted harassment and repression at the hands of the white church and the racist state. By the way, it served the purposes of the regime to have our minds and hearts controlled by the white theologians who benefitted from our oppression.[15] You will recall the historic statement that Bantu Biko made on this issue of mental and psychological enslavement. He said: "The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed"[16]. On the other hand, the regime had initiated the homeland programme that was intended to redefine and thereby falsify the aspirations of the oppressed. A process of retrieval of African culture, history, land and religion was also initiated and encouraged by the regime in its purposes of winning black support for that programme. In other words, when we decided

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14 During the early years of the Black Consciousness Movement, you could easily identify the adherents of that philosophy by their dashikis, hairstyles, the beard they grew, but most significantly, by their reverting to their African names and dropping of European names which were said to be christian names.

15 It is significant that the first book on Black Theology in South Africa was written by an arch enemy of that theology, Dr Karl Boshoff who was professor at the University of Pretoria. He went to the U.S.A. to study African American Black Theology in order to come and wage a war against South african Black Theology before it even gained any prominence, knipping it in the bud as it were.

16 *Op. cit.* p.21.

to leave the Eurocentric terrain that was the domain of the white church and opted for our own African terrain that had been viewed with contempt, the religious and other ideological agents of the white racist regime pursued us and contested us even in our African terrain. They regarded our act of asserting our God given right to become independent acting subjects in history as a dangerous act of disobedience to the God-ordained white paternalism over the children of Ham. Black theologians realized very soon that claiming our Africanness as our response to our understanding of what it means to be made in the image of God was going to be an act of struggle that calls for courage and faith in the presence of God among the oppressed.

This intervention by the regime forced those theologians who were committed to a search for humanity within the Afro-centric sphere to avoid a wholesale appropriation of African resources and instead search for a critical norm that would facilitate the process of appropriation. In that search the utilitarian principle became the dominant norm. We always asked in what way a particular cultural, historical and religious heritage advances the struggle against settler-colonial and religious oppression. This is the reason why some black theologians adopted a marxist analytical and appropriative tool that resulted in the choice of the heritage of the most oppressed among the oppressed as the most appropriate also because it has enabled the poorest and the most oppressed to survive the vicious attack on their humanity.[17] Many others followed Amilcar Cabral's elevation of the culture of liberation as the appropriate culture that has to inform a theology of the oppressed.

In response to the capitalist basis of our suffering and the resultant emergence of a very strong and self-conscious trade union movement, Mosala criticised Black theology of failing to reach the toiling industrial masses of black people. He said that "It cannot be contested that although Black theology has developed and is well and live, it has not yet, as a weapon of theory, become the property of the struggling black masses. To this extent," he went on, "it is a theory that has not yet become a material force because it has not gripped the masses. It has served its purpose well as a weapon of criticism against white theology and the white society. That activity, however, does not replace criticism of the weapon itself."[18] In criticising Black Theology's polemical and projective limitations, Mosala reduced the problem to enslavement to the weapons of the enemies of black humanity as well as articulating a liberated society in liberal terms. He said: 'Black theologians must

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17 See Dwight Hopkins' *Black theology - U.S.A and South Africa*. (Maryknoll, Orbis Books. 1989.

18 See Mosala I. and Thlagale's *The Unquestionable Right to be Free*. Johannesburg, Skotaville, p.176.

make clear the nature of the society they struggle for. It is inadequate,' he continued, 'to get by their projective responsibility by uncritically adopting the abstract values of western liberal democracy, like justice, peace, reconciliation and so on.' When he addressed conceptual limitations of Black Theology, he went on and said'... if Black theologians are not to fall prey to the oppressive aspects of the dominant capitalist cultural discourses, they need autonomous critical apparatusses. ... because they have been captive to the hermeneutical and exegetical as sumptions of White theoology.'[19] These are very strong words, in whatever way one looks at them. In his own response to this critique Itumeleng Mosala opted for a sociological reading of scripture and used it to unmask the oppressive segments of the scriptural texts some of which had long been rejected by the oppressed who have been using intuition and an African perception of God and humanity in textual selection and reading. I personally agree with him and support him in this project because it brings in many ways the text closer to Black working class and peasantry.

The most difficult challenge is that of giving liberating content to theological concepts like justice, love and reconciliation in a way that would present a clear and comprehensive picture of the society that will image the kingdom of God in Azania. What makes it more difficult is the differing class interests of the black theologians that are beginning to surface and colour their view of a just and humane society. Some among them have accepted the liberal democratic ideal while others reject it in favour of a socialist one that will be informed by African humanitarianism as the nearest approximation to the kingdom of God in our circumstances. Among the many differences that are there,there is agreement on one thing namely, that the land has to be returned to the disinherited African people as the first step of reconciliation with themselves and with white fellow christians in Azania.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR S.A. BLACK THEOLOGY

The most pertinent question that we have to deal with concerns future directions for South African Black theology. Will S.A. Black Theology develop further towards Africa or in the direction that has been proposed by Itumeleng Mosala? These are not very easy questions to answer. Whatever answer we propose has to take the following reality into account. As we have said above, S.A. Black Theology is a critical reflection on a historical project to which the black christian community has committed itself. It is theology

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19 *Ibid* p.141.

the struggle against forces and institutions that dehumanize people and deprive them of the means to live with dignity and solidarity. Black theology also needs to provide norms and values that are neccessary in the construction of a society that will be able to sustain and promote human equality and solidarity. This goal which has to be realized in a predominantly capitalist atmosphere that is inherently hostile to the above African values and norms, will always be measured in terms of what we shall perceive to be the imperatives of the kingdom of God. It will continue to occupy the centre stage as the major object of critical theological reflection in the near as well as the distant future. As far as this aspect is concerned, Mosala will continue to be a relevant voice in all efforts to avoid the co-optive power of liberal theological discources, which will continue to plague black people's attempts at being black and christian in a western christian atmosphere.

Our point of entry into the above historical project that is not uniqe to our situation, but is instead linked to other similar ones in the world, has to be our identity that will determine what kind of acting subjects we will be. It will have to be based on the growing realization among large segments of the black population that, in spite of all attempts on the part of white people to alienate us from ourselves and from Africa and focus our eyes on Europe as the source of our being and our destiny, as well as all attempts to deform our African consciousness in order for us to be a pepertually deformed people, we are an African people. We are the natural beneficiaries and custodians of the first and oldest civilization ever known to humankind.[20] We are part of the Pan African theological community in the world and share a common past and a common destiny with that community. That has been the basis of the Pan-African dialogue that has been going on among African people on the continent and the diaspora for more than 20 years.[21] Looking back at how

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20 Many African historians and anthropologists have done a tremendous job to disprove white Egyptologists obsession with their thesis that the Nile River civilisation was not an African civilisation. The most powerful, convincing and consistent work is that done by Cheik Anta Diop. See his *The African Origins of civilization - Myth or Reality*. (Chicago, Lawrence Hill, 1974), *Pre-colonial Africa* (Chicago, Lawrence Hill) and *Civilization or Barbarism*.(Chicago,Lawrence Hill).

21 Since 1978 when the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) organised the first consultation for Third World theologians in Dar es Salaam, Black theologians in the U.S.A. have been involved in an ongoing dialogue with Africans on the continent. This dialogue has widened to include African people in the entire diaspora (the Americas, Carribeans, Britain, Europe, Asia, Australia and New Zealand. The most recent Pan African conference was held in Johannesburg on the 16th-21st August 1993. Many books have appeared on this dialogue, the most recent of which are the following: Young 111, U.J. 1986: *Black and African Theologies - Siblings or Distant Cousins.* Maryknoll, Orbis Books; Hopkins,D.N. 1989: *Black Theology - U.S.A. and South Africa - Politics, Culture and Liberation.* Maryknoll, Orbis Books.; Felder, C.H. 1989: *Troubling*

we in South Africa went about retrieving and appropriating our African heritage, I think that we were still determined by the historiographical results of our oppressors. This is evident in our exclusively regional reading of African history, which is what our oppressors determined. We were Southern Africans who entered the Pan African dialogue as 'foreigners' coming from that limited and limiting perspective. Consequently, we cut ourselves off from the wealth of the heritage that we share with other Africans outside of our region. Hence we continue to fail, despite all our best efforts, to explain why we do things as we do, sing as we do, speak as we do, walk rythmically as we do, respond to the drum as we do, and view the world and God's creation our own way that is not found among other races in the world. I think that our search for what it means to be made in the image of God, a question that searches for a self assured and self loving acting subject on the stage of history, will not be complete until we hold hands with our ancestors on the banks of the river Nile and appropriate that civilization as ours as well as reaffirm the best of that African civilization in the quest for a universal theology that liberates humankind and glorifies God of the oppressed. My reading of the present developments in occupied Azania (South Africa) confirm this projection. It seems to me that with every small crack of the chains of oppression, black people become more and more self-confident and affirm their African identity more and more. This consciousness manifests itself in our spirituality as it does in our reading of the bible in search of how to express our solidarity with those who suffer more than others in the black community.[22]

If the above mentioned African consciousness continues to in from the self understanding and life of black South Africans as a christian people in a foreign capitalist society, then their christian faith and theology will undoubtedly exibit strong African cultural characteristics some of which are the following.

The communalist perception of humanity with a strong sense of solidarity that is inherent to African culture will greatly influence, not only African ec-

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Politics, Culture and Liberation. Maryknoll, Orbis Books.; Felder, C.H. 1989: *Troubling Biblical Waters - Race, Class and Family.* Maryknoll, Orbis Books; Felder,C.H. 1991 (ed.): *Stony the Road we Trod - African American Biblical Interpretation.* Minneapolis, Fortress Press. In South Africa one book appeared namely Maimela, S.S.(ed.)1989: *We are One Voice.* Johannesburg, Skotaville, and many articles in the *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa.*

22 It is an open secret that the African Independent Churches are experiencing a phenomenal growth in the 1980 and 1990s. In the historic churches i.e. churches of colonial origin, Africans are becoming more and more daring in their freedom to express their Africanness in their worship. The more the white regime looses political control over black people, the more white custodians and guardians of western orthodoxy loose control over African christians in their churches.

best be understood as a communal God who is communal, not only in God's dealings with creation, but also from the life of God. God who creates, maintains and purifies the human community should be understood as a God who knows community and lives communally from the very beginning and in the depth of God's life. In other words, human community that is so illusive for many societies in the world today, should be rooted and founded deep inside the life of God. That concept of God will be in harmony with the very high African sense of community that stretches into the world of the ancestors who are in community with God. It is such an image of God that will strengthen African christianity and will come as a contribution to the image of God that emerges from other cultures and life experiences.

That communal concept of God will also have an influence in Christology. If Christology has to be rooted in the life of God, as many theologians say, and functions as God's own condescension to give life and save humanity, it will have to exibit the communalist characteristics from the beginning to the end. Not only the origin of christology should be perceived and presented as a communal reality. The incarnation itself should be seen and presented as such. The life and praxis of Jesus as a theological praxis will have to be perceived as a communal theological praxis of a communal God who is communal also in God's history of salvation among us. Concretely, the praxis of Jesus itself is clearly a communal praxis in which the disciples have a role in the messainic story. The community of disciples provide fellowship to Jesus and to each other. They lived with Jesus, ate with him, shared his sorrow and concern, shared his happiness and frustrations. They were together with him and lived fully with him in the deepest intimacy that friends and comrades can live together. If christology is based on the reading of the praxis of Jesus, and we accept that the life and praxis of the disciples constitute one life and praxis with that of Jesus, then the life and praxis of the disciples should not be excluded from the theological reading of the life and praxis of Jesus. It should be this communal praxis of the Jesus community that produces a communal theological reading. In other words, the communal praxis of the Jesus community should also be the basis and verification history of the involvement of God in the story of salvation.(vestigia trinitatis)

It is especially at the point of crucifixion and the death of Jesus that the African worldview has a very great pastoral impact. The African belief in a community that goes beyond the limits of time, a community that includes the ancestors and those who are still to be born, has a powerful impact on perception of Jesus' death as it does on the passing away of all their loved ones. The loved ones who pass away are not perceived as having died. They

are alive in death. They pass away into the community of those who went before them and are now ahead of them, hence the well known passage rites. The practice of giving those who are being buried, messages to pass on to the ancestors as well as different kinds of provisions that they will need on the way, is also based on that perception. This is also what happened with one of the men who was crucified with Jesus. He too gave him a message to take along. If the communal God was present and involved in the suffering and death of Jesus, suffering with Him and with the Jesus' community, when Jesus' died, he was taken up into the community of God that had been present during the time of extreme suffering.

This view does not in any way exclude the individuality of Jesus, the Son, as it does not exclude the individuality of African people. It also does not deny the loss that is suffered and regretted by those who remain behind. Death is not accepted with resignation and expectation that it will inevitably strike again. The 'why God' question that opens up attempts to understand analytically, that dying and its meaning, is always asked as a communal question. The excrutiating pain of that loss is also acknowledged, experienced and absorbed by the community that comes very close to the particular family that is suffering the absence of the loved one. Hence the intensification of concrete and spiritual solidarity with those who are in mourning during that time. There is very profound understanding of what it means when a 'tree that performs multiple functions falls'. The community comes 'with bandages to tend the wound and handkerchiefs to dry the tears of those who are crying' when it closes ranks around that family and preach and pray at the home of the departed. Measures are always taken to prevent the recurrence of death because there is a belief among Africans that if nothing is done, death may dwell in the community.

This means that there is a dialectical approach to the issue of suffering and death, a 'NO' and a 'YES', a QUESTION and an ANSWER that are kept in tension in an event in which the communal God is involved, interrogated and listened to. God's will is sought and accepted by the community.

It is this African perception and spirituality that informs christian reflection on the suffering and death of Jesus.

If that is acknowledged, then we will have a communal christology that will sustain African christianity. It is such a christology that will provide the mental and spiritual resources that will be needed by the South African black community in its long struggle that is wrought with suffering and death, for a

society that approximates the kingdom of God that is the content of our hope.

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BOOK REVIEWS

SNAIL, Mgwebi Lavin: 1992. *The antecedents and the emergence of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa - its ideology and Organisation.* Bayreuth: Reka Druck. 385pp.

Because the above doctoral thesis was submitted to a German university's (Bayreuth) department of history, the South African academia, especially theologians, might take long to know about it - if at all. It is, however, a very important study for both the subjects of history and (Black) Theology.

In the first chapter, Snail discusses the Dutch Reformed Church, what he calls "Boer-Calvinism" and Afrikaner nationalism as an important backdrop against which the phenomenon of Black Consciousness should be understood. The second chapter looks at "aspects of language" in South Africa. The rise of African nationalism and Black Consiousness in the Carribbean, United States and South Africa are the subjects of the third chapter. In the fourth chapter "African" and "Indian" resistance to oppression from the Bambatha uprising of 1906 is discussed. Resistance in the 40s is discussed in chapter 5. The formation of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the African National Congress' (ANC) Freedom Charter are discussed in chapter six. The seventh and last chapter is devoted to the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement in the late sixties.

This study covers a wide historical period (aproximately pre-1652 to the 1970s). This broadness is both a strength and a weakness. It is a strength insofar as it looks beyond the late fifties, sixties and seventies for the origins of Black Consciousness in South Africa. The suggestion that early Dutch Reformed Calvinism and Afrikaner Nationalism (for example) are "antecedents" of the Black Consciousness Movement is very creative. However this broadness is a weakness insofar as it is an ambitious attempt to re-interpret the entire South African against the search-light of Black Consciousness. As a result some chapters tend to lack depth. The second chapter is a case in point. If this broadness leads to lack of depth, it does not cause Snail to sit on the fence. He sticks his neck out on many crucial issues in South African protest politics - especially in chapter seven.

I recommend this study very highly for all committed theologians. South African Black theologians and historians cannot afford to ignore this valuable contribution by a very capable colleague in the history faculty.

Tinyiko Sam Maluleke Dept. Missiology, Univ. of South Africa, Pretoria.

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