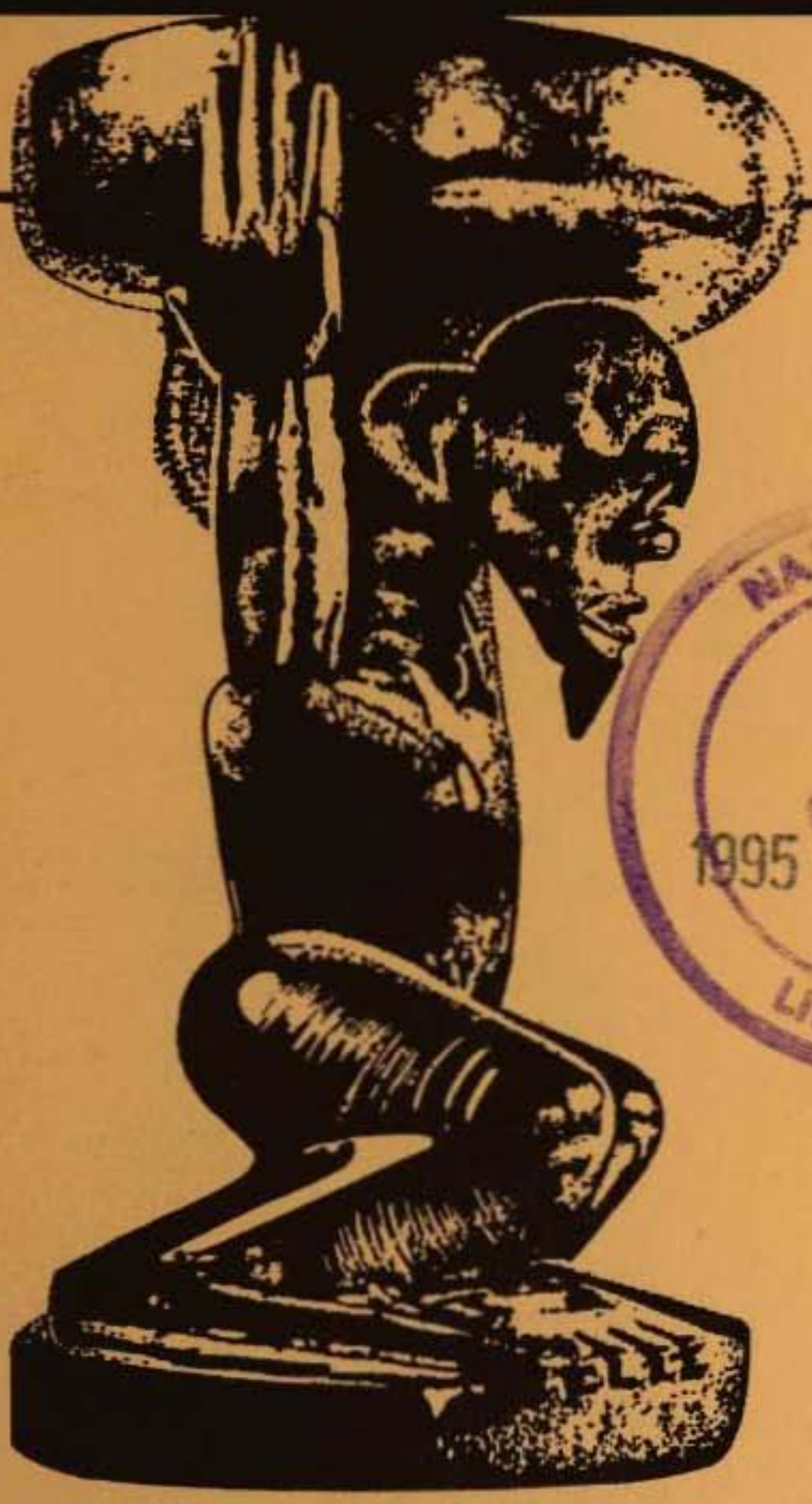
Journal of

BLACK THEOLOGY



in South Africa

ol. 8 No. 2

November 1994

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

PUBLISHED BIANNUALLY in May and November.

SUBSCRIPTIONS:	**INDIVIDUALS**	**INSTITUTIONS**
SOUTHERN AFRICA:	R18,00	R25,00
OTHER AFRICAN COUNTRIES:	R25,00	R30,00
REST OF THE WORLD:		
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ISSN 1015-2296

JOURNAL OF BLACK THEOLOGY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Volume 8 (Number 2) 1994

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EDITORIAL

This issue of our Journal, appears a few months after the first multiracial elections in South Africa. You will immediately ask what relevance that event held for theology and for this journal in particular. The answer is not so difficult. Theology, especially Black Theology, was deeply involved at its own level, in the long and arduous task of the delegitimization of the apartheid state as well as in attacking its theological underpinnings. You will recall the condemnation of the theology of apartheid as a heresy by the World Council of Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and other Christian bodies. On the other hand, it was Black theology, more than any other theology, which raised the issue of the agency of Black people in the struggle against racism in a situation where black people were relegated to objects. This theology told Black victims of white theology that they were made in God's image and have to be co-creators with the God who creates out of nothing. The victory over the apartheid state is evidence of the effectiveness of their agency.

When the new democratic moment arrived, black people were ready to be responsible political agents of a political destiny for South Africa. They voted and the rubicon was crossed.

Now the stage has been set for black people in general and black christians in particular to determine the agenda for society and theology for the next few remaining years before the close of the twentieth century. Some of the issues are beginning to loom very large on the theological horizon are included in this volume. Some are new and others not. What really makes the difference is the new context this side of the rubicon. We hope that you will enjoy reading them and respond.

THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF BLACK THEOLOGY

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INTRODUCTION

Black Theology is largely understood to be a phenomenon of the 1960s that emerged through the rise of Black Power and Black Consciousness in the face of trenchant white racism. In South Africa its origins are usually traced to the activities of the University Christian Movement and general black disenchantment with the ideology of 'multiracialism'. Scholars in South Africa are, however, unanimous that the 'roots' of Black Theology stretch further back to the nineteenth century when black revolt in missionary-controlled churches found expression in the creation of new indigenous fellowships.[1] The purpose of this essay is to offer a critical appraisal of this view but also to 'flesh out' the origins of the African indigenous church movement insofar as it reflected a black theological undertaking. My focus will be primarily on the Ethiopians whom I shall show to be the forerunners of the more recent enterprise called Black Theology. To do this I shall assume that the paradoxical struggle of Tiyo Soga and other 'progressive elites', who, though black and Christian, lacked a 'revolutionary edge' to their ideological commitment. The black experience in the United States presents striking parallels and it was there that the term 'Black Theology' was first used. My at-

1 While it is fashionable to assert the link between Black Theology and the Ethiopian origins of the African indigenous church movement in South Africa, no substantive attempt has been made to date to establish the grounds of such a claim. See for example, John W. de Gruchy's 'The Church Struggle in South Africa' (London: SPCK 1979) p156 and Allan A. Boesak's 'Black Theology Black Power' (London: Mowbrays 1976) pp38-40. The exception to the above would of course be the most comprehensive study on Ethiopianism which is published in German. See Erhard Kamphausen, Aufaenge der Kirchlichen Unabhaengigkeitsbeweging in Suedafrika. Geschichte und Teologie der Aethiopischen Beweging 1872-1910, (Frankfurt: Peter Lang 1976).

tempt will therefore also be to show the influence of black American struggles for emancipation on the development of Ethiopianism in South Africa. This should not surprise even the casual observer since North American black theologian James Cone finds the 'roots' of his thinking in the experiences of the 'pre-Civil War black church, which recognised that racism and Christianity were opposites'.[2] Ultimately the black struggle for political liberation in this country and the historical quest for an indigenous expression of the Christian faith bear an intrinsic relation to each other and may never be severed.

When Black Theology had become 'the new talking point - like a jackal in the foul-run' in the early 1970s, G.C. Oosthuizen observed that 'for nearly a century one has had black theology in South Africa - unwritten but alive in the dances and songs of the people and actively practiced by them. It is Christianity on the march.'[3] How true and yet Oosthuizen's observation was not shared by most white Christians who failed to understand Black Theology's *raison d' être* and criticised its political import. Many simply refused to see it as a painful reflection of the failure of White Christianity in South Africa to adequately challenge the black Christian context. Blacks were cautioned by white theologians about reducing the gospel to socio-political liberation, that 'polarization' would occur between black and white, and also, of 'seriously underestimating the reality of the power of sin in human life.'[4] In their avid search to construct this new theology, Black theologians sought to reinterpret their history for it was acknowledged that they had 'a history of struggle against white oppression, a history of dependence upon God as their Creator, Provider and Redeemer. Black church history in particular cannot be ignored if Black Theology is to speak to the condition of black people.'[5] Blacks felt justified in using the term 'black' as it spoke of 'the whole history of domination, oppression, privation, disenfranchisement and

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2 James H. Cone, Black Theology and Black Liberation, *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa*, Ed. Basil Moore (Atlanta: John Knox 1974) p48

3 G.C. Oosthuizen, Black Theology in Historical Perspective, The South African Journal of African Affairs, 3:1 (1973) p77

4 See the discussion in my 'Christian Resistance to Apartheid' (Johannesburg: Skotaville 1989) pp74-77.

5 Elliot K.M. Mgojo, Prolegomenon to the Study of Black Theology, *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, Dec 1977, p30

discrimination by the Whites.'[6] Black theologians of the modern era have thus had no difficulty in establishing the historical connections between their theology and the black struggle against colonialism of the previous century. The question naturally arises why 'Black Theology' in its peculiar construct arose about a hundred years after its roots were first manifested? Black Theology's own answer is :

> 'It is a recent discovery on the part of the black man to realize that he is entitled to interpret the Bible in the light of his own experience and presumptions. For the first time the Bible has become an open book in the sense of being a liberating actor by enabling the black man to think creatively about his spiritual existence.'[7]

One should perhaps add the renaissance in black thinking via Black Consciousness with which Black Theology formed an ideologically 'strategic alliance' to explain its 'resurgence' in the latter 1960s. But to trace the historical roots of Black Theology one has first to turn to its foremost pioneer and the liberation struggle he ignited.

1 ELEMENTS OF THE 'AMATILE' PROGRAMME

Nehemiah Tile, generally acknowledged to be the founder of the first black church free from white missionary control, was mostly active in Tembuland where political turmoil was the order of the day since the Great Trek of 1834. In addition to numerous Frontier Wars in which Tembus actively participated in challenging colonial oppression, there was the Shakan crisis (Mfecane) resulting in many clashes and migrations which in turn gave rise to deep divisions and considerable tensions in Tembu society. The cattle killing episode (1856-7) cost the lives of thousands and as economic devastation took its toll on those who survived, desperate migration and the search for new options increased. Tembuland was constantly under threat of annexation to the Cape Colony. One attempt had failed in 1880 and it was not until

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6 T. Simon Gqubule, What is Black Theology, *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, Sept 1974, p19

7 Manas Buthelezi, The Christian Presence in Today's South Africa, *Journal of Theology for South Africa*, Sept 1976, p8

1885 that legislation to this effect was passed. In 1873, Ngangelizwe, who was Paramount Chief of the Tembus, was deceived into permitting a representative of the Cape Colonial government in his territory. This agent subsequently negotiated with Tembu sub-chiefs to recognize the new authority at Ngangelizwe's expense. Ngangelizwe was soon facing 'the dissolution of the inner structure of the Tembu tribe of which the unity and exclusivity was symbolised by the person of the paramount.'[8] It is against this background, albeit cursory, that the Amatile problem with white rule must be gauged.

Tile had been a pioneer evangelist for the Wesleyan Methodist Church who was commended for his 'incessant and self-denying labours'.[9] He successfully completed a theological course at Healdtown and was advanced in his probation towards becoming an ordained minister. But on his move to Xora in 1882, he is reported to have come into 'open conflict' with his superintendent minister, Revd Theophilus Chubb, who complained about being kept in the dark regarding Tile's political activities. Tile was involved at this time in a broad movement of black political emancipation from white colonial rule and was thus instrumental in drawing up a series of petitions calling for a reduction of magistrates in Tembuland. These magistrates operated under a chief magistrate in the one territory to the extreme discomfort of Ngangelizwe who was experiencing an erosion of his power. Having various magistracies encouraged 'separatism' within the Tembu chiefdom and such cause for concern was understandable. The petitions implied a rejection of white minority rule and a desire for the distant and informal government of Queen Victoria.[10] But this request must be seen as a strategic political manoeuvre for Tile's ultimate objective was the supremacy of the 'natives' in the land of their birth. Ngangelizwe enlisted Tile as his chief spokesperson as his old councillors knew little about organising the Tembu people against colonial rule and restoring their chief to his former glory. The secretary for native

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8 Hennie L. Pretorius, Nehemiah Tile - A 19th Century Pioneer of the Development of African Christian Theology. Paper read at Religious Studies Forum, University of Transkei, 4-5 March 1988, p32

9 For further details on Tile's personal life and background, see my 'Black Methodists and White Supremacy in South Africa' (Durban: Institute for Black Research, University of Natal 1991) pp54-56.

10 C.C. Saunders, Tile and the Tembu Church: Politics and Independency on the Cape Eastern Frontier in the late Nineteenth Century, *Journal of African Studies*, 9:4, 1970, p557

affairs, Mr De Wet, complained about 'that man Tile' speaking at a meeting be attended in Umtata:

> 'He did not speak the words of the Tembu people ... Now friend Ngangelizwe, listen to me, have nothing to do with Tile, he will do harm to your people.'[11]

Tile was on another occasion illegally arrested on a charge of inciting certain chiefs to resist lawful authority and the payment of hut taxes which Tembus believed were being used by the magistrates for their personal use. The system of taxation had the effect of reducing the powers of the chiefs as well and hence the Tembu protests.

The Tembu political campaign was orchestrated through the press when Tile in no uncertain terms requested , 'we want to rule our own country' and 'we want the unity of the Tembu tribes', and so for this reason, 'we do not want our land to be in farms.'[12]

Tile was equally excited about the possibility of Tembuland being 'filled up with education and Christianity' so that 'civilization and justice' would prevail. It is possibly true, as the *Cape Mercury* reported, that Tembus believed if they 'were firm and united, Government would abandon the territory, as it had done Basutoland, and then there would be no more hut tax .... no more fines and penalties to pay, nor licenses to the Government, as these would all become the property of the Chief.'[13] In setting forth the aspirations of his people and in championing their cause, Tile was proving to be an embarrassment to his ecclesiastical superiors who preferred to see him confined to 'evangelistic work'. The Wesleyan Church finally decided that Tile should be removed from his constituency into the Cape Colony itself, a move which Tile resisted and over which he subsequently offered his resignation. Barely a year later Mr De Wet, in trying 'to prevent that agitator (Tile) from carrying out his designs', was similarly considering expelling Tile from Tembuland.[14] It is not unlikely that the state collaborated with the church on this occasion

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11 Under Secretary of Native Affairs to Chief Magistrate Tembuland, 25 April 1885 (CMT)1/9. See also De Wet's letter to Ngangelizwe 28 November 1884, Cape Archives.

12 Cape Argus, 23 June 1884

13 16 March 1893, under the heading 'Tembuland Troublers'

14 SNA to CMT, 30 September 1884, CMT 1/8

in attempting to curtail Tile's political influence. For the initial charge against Tile by the church was that he refused to divulge state secrets.

It cannot be doubted that Tile had become impatient with European control and domination in the Wesleyan Church. The white missionaries had accused Tile of stirring up a feeling of hostility against the magistrates, of addressing a public meeting on the sabbath, and of donating an ox at Dalinyebo's circumcision, who was then heir to the Tembu chieftaincy. One wonders how it was justified that a minister be disciplined by the church for challenging the authority of an illegal government or for faithfully adhering to a noble cultural practice. Still Tile was portrayed as the villain who was supposed to have become so 'angered by the disgrace thus attaching to him'[15] that he set out to form his own church over which he aspired to the dignity of Bishop or Pope'.[16] In truth a consultation with Ngangelizwe and his chief councillors was held after Tile split with the Wesleyans and it then decided that a National Church be established in Tembuland with Tile as head. According to Skota, the 'whole Tembu tribe was soon summoned and informed' about this new development and it was not long before a church building was erected at Mqekeweni, the Royal Kraal.[17] The Tembus were anxious to adapt the kernel of the Christian gospel to their cultural heritage as is apparent from a prayer which Tile composed. It was set to a simple chant which by command of the chief was sung in all the new Tembu churches. Entitled 'Umtandazo waba-Tembu' (Prayer of the Tembus), it begins with a request to God to bless 'our king' (ukumkani wetu), 'his Child' (nomtwanawake), and the 'Tembu tribe' (isizwe saba-Tembu). The prayer also contains a petition for prosperity (intlalo entle), which Lea notes, was 'not under (pantsi), as is the usual expression among Natives when speaking of the ruling power, but "together with Queen Victoria" (kunye neNkosazana U-Vitoriya) -a term which suggests more of equality than subjection.'[18] The prayer closed with a three-fold request for God to save Ngangelizwe, his child and the Tembu tribe:.

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15 Cape Mercury, 16 March 1893

16 CMT to USNA, 17 December 1890, N.A. 115, 143

17 The African Yearly Register, Ed. T.D. Mweli Skota (Johannesburg: R.L. Esson & Co. 1930) p96

18 Allen Lea, The Native Separatist Church Movement in South Africa (Cape Town: Juta and Co. 1926) p25

Sindisa Tixo O-Ngangelizwe
Sindisa Tixo nomtwana wake
Sindisa Tixo isizwe saba-Tembu

In this context it is vital to fully appreciate the 'black' theological framework of Tile's endeavours. The resident magistrate in Willowvale, Tembuland, Martin William Liefeldt, was writing to his superior in Umtata in 1902 about there being for years a 'propaganda' among Blacks claiming 'Africa for the African' and 'supremacy for the Native'.[19] Black independent ministers were found to be 'preaching a doctrine that the native as owner of Africa should throw off the European yoke and claim his own'. Their political objective was 'the supremacy of the Black Race.'[20] These statements were made in connection with origins of the 'sect' known as the 'Amatile'. Liefeldt enclosed sworn statements, one from Veldtman Bikitsha, a Fingo headman and Wesleyan circuit steward at Butterworth, to the effect that Tile's secession 'had for its object a political move to free the Native from European control, and for the ultimate supremacy of the Coloured races throughout South Africa.'[21] Bikitsha claimed that his information was obtained from Tile himself who had tried to influence him to join the Amatile movement. Another statement indicated that Tile's successor, Jonas Goduka, preached 'emancipation from all control by the White man' while other ministers told their adherents that 'European ministers severely taxed their Native congregations to fill their own pockets while the object of the Tile Church was to benefit the poor of their own community.'[22]

In light of the above steps seem to have been taken to permit only Black ministers to conduct services in Tembuland.[23] The government refused to recognise marriages conducted by 'Amatile' ministers and after Tile's death in 1891, the Tembu Church suffered many setbacks. The remnant which renamed under the leadership of a certain Anthony at the turn of the century continued to press home the argument that 'so long as we remain under the

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19 N.A.498/96, 20 February 1902
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 CMT to USNA, 17 December 1890, N.A. 115,143

supervision of European Ministers we cannot aspire to become a nation.'[24] The Tembu Church emphasised the unity of black people in the face of a God who had blessed the Tembu people with equal rights and privileges. Tile may have passed on and his church's influence checked by the government but his vision of black empowerment, black solidarity to counteract white repression, his conception of common blackness and ultimately, black liberation of all the oppressed peoples of South Africa, was to form a major ideological component of the 'Ethiopian' programme that was being orchestrated by Black Christians in the Transvaal. His use of a Christian framework to undertake a project of emancipation from white control, both in ecclesiastical and political terms, constituted a new strategy that was 'revolutionary' for its time. The Amatile did not immediately regard themselves as great interpreters of the holy writ; this was hardly possible when the rudimentary skills of reading and writing were only just being imparted. But those like Tile who did enjoy a degree of educational advancement were not slow to realize the discrepancy between the word and deed of the gospel the missionaries extolled. The increase in the number of 'native' conversions was paralleled by the confiscation of lands owned by the Tembus and if Wesleyan Christianity was unable to 'stand with the oppressed', another fellowship (church) with a more relevant theology (black) would. The Amatile were rejected by their kith and kin in their own day but their legacy was to become a most powerful vehicle for the liberation of all black South Africans about a hundred years later.

2 ELEMENTS OF THE 'ETHIOPIAN' PROGRAMME

The influence of the Amatile was not confined to Tembuland alone for as the gold and mining industry flourished in the Transvaal, black labourers from all parts of the country flocked to the Witwatersrand only to experience extinction of their culture and character in squalid working conditions. It was not unnatural for these people to take their 'religious baggage' along to their new destination for how else were they to find 'a place to feel at home' in derelict 'native reserves'. The doctrine that 'the native as rightful owner of Africa should fling off all control by the White Man, and himself govern his

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24 N.A.498/96, 20 February 1902

own affairs'[25] would persist even with Ngangelizwe's son, Baalam, who was a Amatile preacher in Pretoria. Mangena Mokone, another Wesleyan minister based in Pretoria, described as a 'superior preacher, very useful and acceptable', was growing increasingly agitated by discriminatory practices against black ministers in the Wesleyan Methodist Church.[26] Like Tile he shared a particular concern for the educational life of Black people and was instrumental in the Kilnerton school being built for Blacks which he served as teacher and principal. In 1892 Mokone became convinced that changes to correct the racially discriminating policies in the church would not be forthcoming and was thus forced to resign. He announced his intention to begin an 'independent' mission and school among Blacks only to discover that his grievances against the Wesleyan Church were shared by other indignant colleagues. Together with about fifty adherents Mokone started the Ethiopian Church on 20 November 1892 in an old tin shack. Psalm 68:31 ('Ethiopian shall soon stretch out her hand unto God') was found to be of particular significance as they interpreted this text to refer to all the African races. This was the first time it seemed that Ethiopia was used to refer to all of Black Africa. Mokone had in mind the pan-African dream of sending forth missionaries to evangelise the African continent and his vision was enthusiastically shared by many. His preachers urged him to forge a unity with the Tembu Church in the Transkei and it was not long before a Tembu preacher, a Mr P Kuze, came upcountry to assist Mokone. Membership in the Ethiopian Church increased dramatically as white missionary churches complained about their 'sheep' being stolen.

It was almost by accident that Mokone learned of the existence of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church which had also come into being against a background of racial segregation.[27] Spurred on by his curiosity Mokone wrote to Bishop Henry Turner of the AME Church, informing him of the Ethiopian Church which he emphasized was 'entirely managed by us Blacks'. In the exchanges that followed, a Tembu named John Tule wrote to the AME Church newsletter '*The Voice of Missions*' complaining that white

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25 Ibid.

26 See Mokones list of grievances or 'Founder's declaration of independence' in my 'Black Methodists and White Supremacy in South Africa' pp70-72.

27 See J.R. Coan's 'Expansion of Missions of the AME Church in South Africa 1896-1908 (Connecticut: Hartford Seminary Foundation 1961) p94-103.

missionaries were becoming government agents in sowing seeds of division within the black community. Turner saw Tule's letter to be 'a heavy indictment against the white missionaries in South Africa' and felt ready to 'come and deliver them (Ethiopians) from the chains of sin, and the treachery of our brothers in White who pretend to be very holy till they get to be government agents'.[28] It needed, however the more charismatic and dominant personality of another Wesleyan minister, James Dwane, to plead the Ethiopian cause in the United States before the Ethiopian Church amalgamated as the new fourteenth district of the AME Church in South Africa. Dwane was a highly respected and a 'competent' Wesleyan who went to England to raise funds for a black college of education believing as he did that higher education was critical for African development. On his return he was plagued by his white superiors with a series of questions and innuendoes as to his trustworthiness and subsequently resigned to join the Ethiopians. One source has suggested that Dwane had offered to resign as early as 1884 after unsuccessfully protesting against 'what he considered to be class (discriminatory) legislation in the Church based on the colour line' but changed his mind.[29] If this were the case, it probably meant Dwane was influenced by Tile's decision to resign some months earlier (whom he seems to have personally known from their stay as student ministers in Healdtown).[30] In the United States Dwane excelled himself in drawing vast crowds and working them up into a state of enthusiastic generosity while assuring them that 'the Africans would never allow the White man to ride roughshod over their country' and 'would say to the European nations, Hands Off!'[31] Like Mokone, Dwane was keen to spread missions to the west of Africa and even planned on collecting funds to send to King Menelik of Abyssinia (Ethiopia).

It was to be Dwane's appointment as general superintendent and vicar bishop that proved to be a major source of controversy within the Ethiopian Church and an 'unfortunate cause of subsequent difficulties' in the movement. Bishop Turner visited South Africa in 1898 and apart from ordaining

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28 The Voice of Missions, March 1896. Quoted in J.M. Chirenje 'Ethiopianism and Afro-Americans in Southern Africa 1883-1916.' (Los Angeles: Louisiana State University 1987) p54

29 See J.M. Chirenje, p20

30 C.C. Saunders, p554

31 E. Roux, Time longer than Rope (London: Gollanz 1948) p81

several ministers to the nearly constituted district of the AME Church, formally appointed Dwane to the office of Vicar Bishop. This step only served to remind Dwane of an inferior status which he detested. Mokone was ill at ease about the leadership issue and almost himself resigned but his deep respect for Turner, his own integrity, and his determination to prove that Black people could work together forced him to reconsider.[32] Dwane, though, resigned to become leader of a black 'Order of Ethiopia' within the Anglican Church. Whether it was a case of 'today's seditious Ethiopian' becoming 'tomorrow's upholder of the white man's regime' is debatable. It was certainly not an act of 'real statesmanship' on Dwane's part for to some he appeared to have betrayed the Ethiopian struggle. Yet he may have found his move expedient in terms of the broader Ethiopian programme. For the Resident Magistrate at Willowvale, himself an Anglican, did express his firm belief to Umtata that 'although the Order of Ethiopia may for the present, and in order to gain certain ends, have subjected itself to the control of our Bishops, their ambition will not be appeased until they consider themselves strong enough to throw off the British yoke, their first step being a severance from the control of the Anglican Church which they now seek to employ as a cloak to secure recognition.'[33] If this is to be believed, it certainly alludes to Dwane's commitment to a shift in power relations and the attempt to secure freedom for Blacks in both the political and ecclesiastical realms which remained white in orientation.

3 CONCLUSION

It is lamentable that the formation of African indigenous movements and churches has been subjected to rigid categorisation and falsified typologies by laboratory technicians who have experienced little of the ruthless world of colonial conquest. In the midst of all the 'transmogrifications' one is left theologically bewildered and semantically confused and the subject together with its subjects suffer as a result. Ethiopianism has become that type of movement characterized by political dissent (usually Blacks wrangling over the colour bar in white missionary-controlled churches) while 'Zionist'-type

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32 Cf. the discussion in J.M. Chirenje, pp73-81

33 N.A.498/96, 20 February 1902

churches are supposed to be 'syncretistic' combining 'healing, speaking with tongues, purification rites, and taboos'.[34] Even more controversial has been a new category of indigenous churches - 'Messianic' where a prophet like Isaiah Shembe of the *amaNazaretha* in Natal is afforded a position of mediatorship between his followers and the supernatural forces and where Christ recedes to the background[35]. To a limited extent one may be in sympathy with the use of such labels to understand complex phenomena but their overuse or misuse tends to easily distort the historical experiences of people who for the most part are only now writing their own history. It may well be argued that all secessions have been directly or indirectly motivated by the apartheid ideology and in this way qualify to be regarded as 'Ethiopian'. Similarly a case can be conceivably made for all indigenous churches to be seen as 'syncretistic' since countless cultural practices by black Christians generally (in whatever church) do not conform to white Christian etiquette or Western values. Blacks, when they have written about this aspect of their history, have urged caution and have preferred 'speaking for ourselves.'[36] My contention is that Ethiopianism as it was propagated by black Christians in the previous century, however classified, constituted a black theological enterprise to a degree that it now becomes possible for us to view it as the 'first fruits' of Black Theology in South Africa.

I have been careful to highlight the political overtones of the Christian praxis of men like Tile, Mokone and Dwane since the hallmark of 'modern' Black Theology is its commitment to 'struggle' for liberation in church and society. Progressive elites like Tiyo Soga and the secession of P J Mzimba have been excluded from this discussion because of their own 'ambivalence' in the struggle for black emancipation. By this token some may justifiably argue that Dwane should himself be excluded but since his career overlapped with Mokone's to such a great extent, it is difficult to discuss one without reference to the other. Soga is hailed for having made a 'unique contribution to

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34 See, for example, B.G.M. Sundkler's 'Bantu Prophets in South Africa (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1961) Second Edition, pp53-59.

35 See G.C. Oosthuizen, Post Christianity in Africa (Stellenbosch: Wever 1968)

36 See the incisive account of their churches by the leaders themselves in 'Speaking for Ourselves' (Johannesburg: Institute for Contextual Theology 1985). Cf. also B. Goba, An Agenda for Black Theology (Johannesburg: Skotaville 1988) pp49-55, and, I.J. Mosala, African Independent Churches: a study in socio-theological protest, *Resistance and Hope* Ed. Charles Villa-Vicencio and John W. de Gruchy (Cape Town: David Philip 1985) pp103-111.

the origins of Black nationalism'[37], but one has to be more circumspect here. Soga, who preceded Tile, advocated a typically Western approach to African customs and traditions - he condemned circumcision and saw the cattle-killing episode of 1856-7 as the work of his 'poor infatuated countrymen' who had become 'dupes of designing imposters'.[38] He took the rare step of marrying across the colour line and sent his children to a White school abroad. His many hymns did not continue African pioneer missionary Ntsikana's tradition of using indigenous melodies. Soga seems also to have adopted a 'neutral' position on colonial authority which implied support for the status quo.[39] To portray Soga as a 'black' theologian in light of the above would be a tenuous exercise but I do not deny that it can be done. Mzimba's case is more difficult as he identified with the Ethiopian programme when he founded his African Presbyterian Church in 1898. One particular incident has cast an historical shadow on his illustrious life and from which only ambiguity has resulted in interpreting him. In an address to the Lovedale Literary Society (reprinted in *Imvo*) he outraged Blacks generally by declaring 'Let the White man rule, and the South Africa people be out of politics'.[40] He reasoned that involvement in politics by Blacks in the USA had led to disaster and so Africans in South Africa should learn from that experience:

> 'Let us be content to be ruled by the colonist. Let us only have to do with politics in order to encourage those white men who desire to give us schools and books ... The ignorant, poor and superstitious native cannot rule the intelligent, experienced, wealthy colonists'.

This speech turned out to be most controversial and was even discussed in the White newspapers. Perhaps more research has to be done to establish Mzimba's proper place in Black Christian history.

Whites in South Africa observed the Ethiopian struggle with much disdain believing its primary objective to be a challenge of white supremacy. The deep underlying current and 'morbidly active' race feeling was the distin-

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37 See D. Williams, Umfundisi. A biography of Tiyo Soga 1829-1871, Lovedale, 1978, p97

38 John A. Chalmers, Tiyo Soga: A Page of South African Missionary Work, London: Hodder and Stoughton 1877, p140

39 See W.A. Saayman, Tiyo soga and Nehemiah Tile: Black Pioneers in Mission and Church, *Missionalia* 17:2, August 1989, p97

40 *Imvo*, 30 December 1886

guishing feature of an Ethiopian. The guiding principle that governed the Ethiopian's outlook in life was 'Africa for the Africans' and a resilient No to white domination. Christianity, far from being a personal religion for a future salvation, was turned into a functional guide to secure dignity and justice in this world. In the 'sociology of intentions' it may have been a 'political dodge' to weaken Black people into political submission but Ethiopians boldly challenged this assumption. Ministers of the gospel who experienced a degree of ease in rereading the holy texts tested missionary conduct and discovered it was riddled with contradictions. Unlike many of their elitist contemporaries, the Ethiopians believed themselves capable of and responsible for the liberation of the black masses, albeit sometimes naively. Careful not to forsake their cultural heritage, they incorporated significant customs and traditions of indigenous life to make Christianity compatible with their worldview. Unable to accept an eternal subordinate status, Ethiopians obliged to create new leadership structures where management of their *own* affairs was possible without European supervision and harassment. It is most likely that tribal affiliations would have been transcended in this scenario as early stirrings of black consciousness and black nationalism arose to replace erstwhile warring anger. These 'marginal men' and women were throughout committed to the enhancement of African aspirations and in the changing society education was regarded as the paramount key to success and achievement.

The political rhetoric and simple sermons of the Ethiopian leaders possibly lacked stylish precision and theological polish but these rudimentary elements of their project were to persist in the formalisation of black Christian reflection many years later. That a particular 'theology' was being orally created and continually supplemented in the Ethiopian struggle cannot be denied; it was, however, a theology whose immediate future was unknown, whose tenets remained undefined but whose context impinged upon its adherents most severely. Black Theology in short was being born in the cover of darkness.

THE CHURCH IN SOUTH AFRICAN BLACK URBAN TOWNSHIPS

Tinyiko Sam Maluleke[1]

1 CHARACTERISING THE TOWNSHIP

How can one characterise the black urban township[2]? Shall one speak of endless rows of matchbox houses, the cloud of coal smoke that engulfs many a township - especially during winter, the rabble and the squalor, the crime, the abuse of liquor, the dust roads, the lack of facilities or the songs of protest? One must probably employ all these images and more to visualise the township. Although many townships have an elite petit bourgeois area, the overwhelming majority of township residents live in want, lack and even squalor. In everyday township language, it is interesting to note the 'names' that people have used with reference to townships. Many of these names are direct transliterations of the English and Afrikaans - a probable internalisa-

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2 Although semantically, even in terms of government nomenclature, the word 'township' is not exclusive to areas of black residence in urban areas, in South Africa the word has come to refer almost automatically to black residences. Townships have now become a national aspect of South African settlement patterns. Most cities and towns, in so-called urban and rural areas, there is one or more townships in the outskirts. Homeland created 'cities' have in fact been some kind of glorified townships, adorned by 'parliamentary buildings, government offices, a hotel and a shopping centre. For a discussion of urbanisation in the homelands see Smit & Booysen (1977).The specific focus of this paper, is however not only 'urban townships' but especially those in the Johannesburg-Pretoria areas. A dated, but very helpful statistical overview of black urban areas is given by Wilson 1972:29f. It is however unfortunate that Wilson, whose specific object of inquiry is migrant labour, seems to regard mainly hostels and compounds but not the larger townships as being of relevance to the migratory labour system. But the townships are only a micro reality in the larger South African complex of Black and White, rich and poor, relations. For a more macro discussion of this reality with a focus on church policy and praxis vis a vis labour, see Cochrane (1987).

tion of the official government language in reference to the townships. One is thinking here of words such as, *Ikasi Ilokishi* or *Likeshini*. All these are direct transliterations of the word 'location', which probably emanates from many years during which black areas of abode were characterised as "Native Locations". There is something brutal about the word 'location' insofar as it seems to invoke some kind of 'people control'. 'Locations' were places where the 'natives' were not only 'located', but could, if necessary, be 'located'. But the names that people have given to the different 'locations' express hope, fear and sometimes frustration. Thokoza ('place of happiness'), Katlehong ('place of peace'), Zola ('place of peace and tranquillity), Mdeni ('home'), Kwa-Guqa ('place of squatting'), Tembisa ('place of promise'), Tsakani ('place of happiness'), Madoda Hostel ('men's hostel), Mshayazafe-Hostel, ('place where persons are beaten to death') etc. Township people generally differentiates between themselves and 'rural' people. The chief way in which rural areas are referred to by township people is as 'the farms' (*emaplazini*). This language probably emanates from an era in the nineteenth century when even the remaining black-owned land had been militarily annexed by Whites and turned into farms wherein black people 'squatted' and paid double taxes - to the farm owner as well as the government. In this experience lies the 'shame' of the black 'farm person' who has been the object of much derision in the township - that he has been reduced into a landless unpaid labourer. This landless existence was 'finalised' by the 1913 Land Act which insured that "the areas set aside for Africans became reservoirs of labour for the mines, towns and white farms" (Magubane 1979:82). Township people were landless themselves. One rural land-owner during this period was the church - mostly in the form of 'mission farms'[3]. While the general trend in many churches has been to give special concessions to their members residing in their farms, from their 'squatters' they not only collected taxes due to them, but those due to the government, especially during the time of 'poll tax'. Understandably, church farms were still preferable to White farms for many Black people. There is therefore a fundamental connection between land dispossession and the emergence of compounds, hostels and townships.

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3 For an appraisal of some of the issues regarding the church and its land-ownership see Saayman (1994).

> ... the Native should only be allowed to enter urban areas which are essentially the white man's creation when he is willing to enter and minister to the needs of the white man, and should depart there-from when he ceases to minister. (Stallard Commission report 1922 in Magubane 1979:125)

As can be seen from the above quotation, the element of 'people control' in the word 'location' is more than a semantic or conjectural matter[5]. 'Locations' were primarily urban reservoirs of cheap Black labour. That is the primary motivation for their existence. If cheap black labour was the primary reason why Black people were 'encouraged' to go to cities and inevitably to take up residence there - at least for the duration of their labour; control on their numbers and activities was heavily sanctioned by legislation. Of the numerous pieces of legislation passed to control Black numbers, movement and residence in the Urban area, the 'pass system' was "the most effective coercive method" Magubane (1979:133). This was so as to make sure that their stay involved no more than the purpose for which they came. The story of the genesis of the townships must therefore be traced back to the beginning of South Africa's industrial revolution (1875), following the discovery of diamonds and gold in Kimberly (1864) and the Witwatersrand (1866)[6]. This was the beginning of what has since been called 'the mineral revolution'[7]. To begin with, a few single sex compounds, usually located on the premises of the employer, were enough. But soon these were hardly enough. As the mining industry grew, more and more able bodied men were needed. But mining did not exhaust the industrial revolution. It simply gave it a kick-start as other industries began to mushroom. By 1910, not only had the White race fought their most bitter 'internal war', namely, the Anglo-boer war; South Africa was declared a 'union' and the economy and politics

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5 West (1975:12) describes Soweto life as being "externally determined, with most important determinants being ... administrative and political limitations".

6 Writing on violence, which he considers to be an enduring category of South African history, David Chidester (1992:xv) calls the mines and prisons "two modern versions of hell".

7 It is significant that Mofokeng (1993:135), a black theologian speaks of the 'discoveries' of gold and diamonds as "the dispossession of the mineral wealth of our land"

became the new arena for power struggles. This was the beginning of an era of more complex political domination of black people. Whereas Black-White patterns of relations were somewhat feudal, albeit discriminative, in the nineteenth century; these relations became more capitalist and more sophisticated in the twentieth century. If it was once necessary for White settlers and colonial merchants to coerce Blacks to take up 'employment' especially at the mines; by the turn of this century, having lost their land and livelihood, either to the Boers or the English imperialists, many able bodied black men were migrating to the cities 'by their own volition' anyway. But as noted above, the massive urbanisation of Africans was not desirable to both the government and the mine owners. The city was for Whites and Blacks 'belonged' to the rural areas. Until the mid 1970s even petty Apartheid was still alive and well as a constant reminder to Blacks that the city was not theirs. Writing about the migratory labour system, which gave birth to townships almost accidentally, if not reluctantly, Francis Wilson differentiates

> ...between policies that are designed to regulate the flow of people to urban centres from policies designed to keep them oscillating perpetually between urban and rural areas" (Wilson 1972:192)

Townships, like hostels, were designed to be only a 'moment' in this perpetual oscillation. As early as 1893, "the commission of Labour in the Cape Colony suggested that every male African be taxed, with full remission if he could show he had been employed away from home during the year" (Magubane 1979: 78). Yet today, for all practical purposes, townships have long ceased to be temporary 'moments' in the lives of their inhabitants. They have long become permanent homes. If the authorities resisted this reality as long as they could, it has been emotionally and materially difficult for township residents to face up to the permanence of their stay in the township.

2 SOME BASIC FEATURES

Essentially, townships are *firstly*, a hangover from a typical colonial industrial revolution - a revolution built on exploitation of everything 'native' and 'local'. *Secondly*, urban black townships, as reluctant successors of single sex

compounds, are an aspect of a multifaceted programme of 'people control'. Through the pass laws, the migratory labour system, and the group areas act, townships became real places of 'location'. Until very recent times, townships were still regarded as temporary. Thus the image of a township as a temporary 'bedroom' for black workers has been perhaps the most abiding. The government persisted in viewing townships thus. Therefore not much was invested in them in terms of finance and infrastructure. Only the most elemental 'bare necessities' were to be provided. For the rest, the law of the land and its enforcement agents would ensure that townships were kept under control. The notoriety that this country's laws and its law enforcement agencies have earned in their duty of control has been more than well documented. But no words can adequately describe the destruction and the pain. *Thirdly*, townships were places of hiding, and even refuge for many an 'illegal' black person hoping to find work and eventually strike it rich at the outskirts of the city's neon lights. *Fourthly*, as time went by, Townships became 'home' to many people with a distinguishable culture and a sense of history. Thus to date one finds many people who speak fondly of, for example, Sophia Township (forerunner of present day Soweto, Alexandra and Meadowlands), Lady Selbourn and Tikkie-Line (fore-runner of Tembisa). Yet this must not be confused with approval of the conditions that prevailed in those townships.

2.1 Ambivalent Implications

Thus on the fringes of White urban and industrial cities, developed these 'black spots' with a 'sub-culture' of their own. These were urbanised and in their own way industrialised fringe-cities; but their urbanisation and their industrialisation was different in degree, depth and intensity to that of the city proper. They are no 'rural' islands in the fringes of an urban environment. However, as we cited above, townships have, since they were meant to be mono-purpose temporary abodes, always lacked the infra-structure and the wealth to experience a fully industrialised urban culture. The poverty plus the political constraints forced townships to evolve and construct their own peculiar and impure urban sub-culture. The image of impurity may be taken even more literally since township culture has produced several ambivalent

features. Without claiming to be exhaustive, I have chosen a few features for illustrative discussion.

2.1.1 *Crime* has, for a long time, been a significant variable in the township sub-culture. There are several possible sociological, psychological and political explanations for this. But crime, even if it can be explained, is always problematic because eventually it claims the majority of its victims amongst the disadvantaged -namely the blacks. I am not arguing for a halt to the study of crime from various perspectives. On the contrary, as I will argue further below, I am think that far too little studying of the problem of crime exists, at least on the side of the churches. But the studies must do more than revelation and explanation. From the studies resources and strategies to thoroughly address the problem should emerge.

In the wake of gangsterism, crime can easily break out into a circle of violence that may rip a community apart. While White suburbs and white people have been to some extent special targets of this crime, they are by no means the only victims. One truth about crime is that the wealthy are on the whole more resourceful in insulating themselves against it, than the poor. The poor have simply no choice but to walk the Jericho road daily -and it is a road full of robbers. Not so, with the wealthy who have several 'options' open to then. Thus township crime has preyed on poor, helpless and defenceless township residents.

Lately car hi-jackings have been the primary feature of township crime. Stolen goods have been also widely distributed, cheaply sold, and widely accepted. But the oldest and most common form of crime has been 'murder' with people dying like flies, especially over weekends. Township crime is and has been therefore an assault on both human dignity and human life. A disturbing feature of township crime is the fact that for a long time criminals have 'earned' and 'enjoyed' the respect of the Township's young and old.

There is a real sense in which some criminals have become role models for the young. For many the 'skills' of the township thieves and criminals are a source of wonderment and admiration. But, whilst people's wages are low, it is difficult to tell them that cheap stolen goods are to be boycotted. In the light of the ruthless Apartheid regime anyone who could demonstrate some ability to 'beat' the system, however underhandedly, was a 'hero'. It remains to be seen whether the present 'system' will be perceived to be better enough by the township community so that it begins to condemn crime and criminals alike. But what has the church to say to this situation? In the township, little enough has changed, even in 1994, for us to assume that this culture will survive perhaps in a more sophisticated form. Crime must not be trivialised to mean only the 'greed' and 'injustice' of the poor (against the rich). Broadly defined, even the unscrupulous and exploitative conduct of business people, employers, government officials and politicians, can be understood as crime. The fact that crime tends to be, at least in popular mentality, conceptually associated with the 'unlawful' and 'deviant' behaviours of the poor already indicates the prescriptive nature in which the phenomenon is understood. Township crime must perhaps be understood as a variant of the larger criminal reality in South African society. Crime is a description of a particular type of violence. It would perhaps have been more accurate to discuss violence rather than crime. But the word 'violence' is one of the most over-used words in South Africa today. However, there is no doubt that crime should be viewed as a type or even an aspect of the larger reality of violence in South Africa[8].

2.1.2 *Alienation* is yet another feature of township life. Township people are a specific embodiment of the alienation of Black people as a result of years of oppression.

> ...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 constructed far away from white industrial and residential areas, which were also their work places. (Mofokeng 1993:136)

8 Chidester 1992:x argues that "all (these) versions [of] South Africa's history are a history of violence.

I want to suggest that the 'residential racism' cited above, when viewed holistically, is one of the most concrete material basis of Black alienation in the urban setting. To begin with the township houses, (constructed of the most elementary material and often built in compound and uniform style, with little space and no luxuries) could not be even legally owned by their inhabitants until very recently. But this has still not translated into reality for many township residents to date. This was because they merely served as temporary 'bedrooms' for migrant black workers who were expected to live in their designated areas elsewhere. As a result of this situation, township residents never had a sense of ownership for their houses, the township at large and the city as such. The city was a place for work, but it was not home. Like the government, township residents took no care and no responsibilities for the township.[9] It was enough for them to have a bed and a 'prima-stove'. In the process they became alienated from the place in which they spent more than 90% of the year. Is it possible that even the crime issue was made worse by this sense of alienation? Since this was not 'home' was there a sense in which things could be done in the township which would be taboo back 'home'. It could be pointed out that alienation is not unique to urban Black South Africa[10]. Alienation is indeed a general urban problem, not only in

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9 By the early 1980s many South African towns and cities still had "whites only" signs on various amenities. It was only in 1989 that an Act "enabling selective residential integration" was passed by parliament (Bernstein & Mcarthy 1990:11). There is, I want to suggest, a level at which much urban racist laws not only accomplished the effect of impressing upon Blacks that the city was not for them, but were indeed meant to do so.

10 Although writing on the more general topic of cultural change, with a specific focus on Zimbambean society Bourdillon (1994:19f & 124) argues that the prevailing material circumstances (e.g, urban versus rural) influence human behaviour. Thus town people are in general 'alienated' from their 'kin', traditional family authority structures and land, he points out. Some time ago, Cox (1965:39f), included anonymity and not alienation as one of the main features of the city. Accordingly, Cox's suggested cure for so-called urban problems, based on biblical 'evidence', has been secularisation and more secularisation. Cox's position remains very popular (cf Greenway & Monsma 1989). Should the problems and promises of secularisation continue to be generalised?

South Africa, but in the entire world. Its uniqueness in South Africa lies, I want to suggest, in its legal and racist basis. Whilst most of the world's urban peoples suffer alienation and 'enjoy' the 'deliverance' of urban anonymity (Cox 1965:46), Black people tend to experience these realities under the shadow of racism. It is in any case debatable whether South African cities (as with many Third World cities) afforded Black South Africans the kind of anonymity that Cox described so approvingly in his work[11]. In South Africa, this racism was both legal and ruthless[12]. The secular city, in the Third World, certainly in South Africa, has spelled more than "maturation and responsibility" (Cox 1965:109). It has been the vanguard of oppression and racism at its most material sophistication. We must do more than view the secularised city as an embodiment of enlightenment-type progress - for our relationship to the enlightenment tradition is called slavery and colonialism. Black folklore, idiom and humour about the city attests to the reality of the city as the agent and embodiment of oppression. Even when Black people appear to be praising the city , there is often hidden contempt for the city. This contempt is of a different order from Cox's 'antiurbanism' (1965:40). It is often more in the genre of lamentations as opposed to that of apologetics. In their contempt for the city, Black people seldom propagate a mere 'return' to some expired 'period' in their 'development'. Johannesburg is cruel simply because *'ke Magkoweng', ndi makhuwani, hi le valungwini'* - it is and has been

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11 Whilst secularisation and urbanisation need not be understood in mono-causal *either good or bad* terms, it seems to me that some hard contextual analyses and choices must be made with regard to these matters. It is, a little absurd, to suggest, like Mofokeng (1993:136) on the one hand that in South Africa urbanisation occurred primarily as an attack on the humanity of Blacks and yet on the other hand wish to join various mordenist voices in praise urbanisation and secularization (virtually in and of themselves). This dilemma is already noticeable in the pioneering work of Majeke (1952) - for in her work capitalism is responsible for both the erosion of African humanity and the revolutionisation of the African conscience. So what was wrong with capitalism, it is tempting to ask. Is this proof of the enlightenment captivity of even Marxist thought? It must be noted that whereas Westerners may worship the secularised city as having liberated them from the childhood and immaturity of the 'tribal era' and the 'religious era' (Cox 1965 cf Mofokeng 1993), for many Africans the city has been the frontier of oppression and dispossession. The secularised city continues to be a 'nightmare' for millions of (South) Africans.

12 I suppose a die-hard Coxian would still argue that despite and in spite of greedy 'deviations' from the progressive laws of secularization, the net result of secularization has been positive for all involved, including the victims of racism. But it is up to the poor and the Black to attest to or dispute that, not the 'beneficiaries' of secularization.

the place of and for White people. Johannesburg does not only erode Black customs but its laws and ethos ensured that these customs "became instruments of oppression" (Magubane 1979:70).

When we speak of alienation in the township, we are referring to such alienation as can only be experienced by victims of a racist and exploitative society. Not only were township and hostel residents alienated from the 'products of their labour' in the Marxian sense, but they were alienated from the very surroundings in which they moved. In time many township black people lost touch with 'land'. Land for them meant a 'yard' , a 'room' and a 'bed'. But this process also alienated township residents from fellow human beings. In this ruthless 'no man's land' survival was tough. It was often won through the exploitation of others. In any case township residents were elements of a circle of exploitation. Those with little had to devise means of exploiting the little, e.g. people with 'houses' would hire out rooms. The lack of houses has remained one of the most painful features of township life.

2.1.3 *Protest* is another significant feature of township subculture is the feature of protest and struggle. This is by far the feature for which townships have become known for. Since the 1920s urban and industrialised centres have become the scenes of much protest action. Workers have understandably in the fore-front of this. By the 1950s townships were centres of Black political protest and mobilisation. SOWETO and Sharpeville stand out as kites in this tradition. Black people slowly began to realise that if they were to share at all in the wealth they created in the cities, especially in the mines they needed to organise themselves into powerful political movements. The townships provided a largely ready, relatively informed and militant audience. Thus townships have, throughout the history of black struggle in this country, taken the lead. The rural areas have played their part too, but as soon as the power of chiefs and kings were broken, the rural areas were neutralized. By the seventies, the students in the Townships were militant enough to refuse the imposition of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction.

Since then, the protest tradition in the townships has grown. But it has had its downsides, e.g. the necklacing, the collapse of parental control, the collapse of the judicial system (kangaroo courts) etc.

What has been happening since the 1970s has therefore been continuous with an older tradition of protest in the townships. Some of the legacies of this tradition have been a deep-seated distrust of the 'system' and its apparatus. For decades the relationship between township residents and the police, can be described in one word: harassment. Police raided township shebeens and parties for European liquor (during the prohibition), passes, crime etc. But black people who were too closely associated with the 'system' were equally distrusted. A disturbing feature of this tradition has been the lack of viable alternatives. With no trust on the police, there was no viable alternative structures. With the distrust on the justice system an alternative justice system was needed, but there was none. The necklace came in. People who disobeyed the "boycotts" especially the stay-aways, the consumer boycotts and the 'Azikhwelwas' were dealt with very harshly. For about ten years now, rents have been boycotted and services have been nearly inexistant. Much money was wasted on the black town councils of the National Party government.

2.1.4 *Creativity* and innovation is yet another aspect of township life. Not all has been gloomy in the township. A lively and vibrant culture has developed there. In the area of music for example, a peculiar mix of rural and 'urban' sounds and instruments developed - the mbaqanga. In the compounds and later on township hostels, traditional dances and singing groups became a regular feature during Sunday afternoons. People like Spokes Mashiyane, Kippie Moeketsi and Mahlathini became famous for these and other kinds of music. Then there were groups with black American influences especially in

jazz. Township music has become international, thanks to people like Miream Makeba, Jonas Ngwangwa, Abdullah Ibrahim, Hugh Masekela and others. It is to the township that we owe these rich and varied musical developments which have become unique South African contributions to world music.

Another interesting feature of Township life has been the multi-linguality of its inhabitants. Very few township residents would speak only their mother tongue except the newly arrived. Even so, Zulu and Sotho (or township version of the same) have enjoyed a hegemony as the lingua franca of the Townships. As hinted already, new 'languages' have been coined in the township too. And I am not just talking of the mainly mine-based and controversial Fanakalo. People were confronted with new ideas and new 'things' for which their languages had no words. The context required a language different from the rural one. So each language group developed a twin urban one. In the matter of dress it is not possible to typify township people. However it can be safely suggested that township people have developed good if at times expensive taste for clothes, Was this to make up for the political want, material want and alienation? There are good and bad sides to this. There is this very expensive and almost 'pompous' side to township life which sees poverty as something of a disgrace. It is a physical negation of the appalling living conditions. Is this the root of the now very expensive funerals that are being run at the townships, for example? .

2.1.5 *The rural element* has been strong in the township however. Township people have in many ways, for many years remained rural. The herbalist and

the inyanga (in many ways a remnant of the rural setting) is still very much in charge of things and very much in demand. Belief in the power of the herbalist and in the reality of the spirit world is very much alive amongst township folks. The annual migration 'home' has served to entrench the hegemony of the rural over the urban. However we must note that much of what is rural in the township exist does not survive due to preference or even (its) perceived value. Much of what is rural in the township owes to the fact that racism and capitalist exploitation have effectively excluded Black people from Cox's urbanised secular city. The persistence of rural customs is therefore not only due to the resilience of the traditional way of life - nor is it sheer antiurbanism. Poor black people have simply had no viable alternative to the familiar and cheaper rural life-style. There is a significant difference between the circumstances surrounding this type of 'ruralism' and the largely voluntary 'peri-urbanism' of the city's wealthy. City peri-urbanism often consists in the wealthy choosing to live near enough to the city, but far enough from its noise and pressures. Admittedly, it is often the rural minded wealthy who make this choice. But this is not only an exercise of choice, but an expensive lifestyle that excludes the poor. The rural nature of township life must therefore be distinguished from 'peri-urbanism' even when its practitioners are rural and antiurban in disposition. The foregoing is an important qualification in the discussion of the rural element in township life.

Other township customs that are reminiscent of rural life-style exist. The night-vigil on the day before the funeral seems to be an overspill from rural life. So is the conventional and actual slaughtering of a beast on the day of a funeral. Enclaves of 'tribal' organisations are numerous in many a township. Even churches tend to be organised that way. In many hostels and townships, people have been residentially classified and allocated according to tribe and language. This tend to reinforce language and tribal ties. This geographical reality also impacts on the church. It is a situation that can play havoc with so-called church structures -especially when it comes to leadership roles and patterns. As with the rest of the city, "mobility" (Cox 1965:49f) is a strong feature of township life. Funeral undertakers and Bus companies often do a booming business since many who die in the township are often transported back 'home' for burial. Although this practice is diminishing, it has by no means abated.

Although the church is supposed to be rural in orientation (Shorter 1992), we must note that in Africa the church has for a long time regarded traditional African customs and culture as *the* enemy of the gospel. Yet the church has equally struggled to embrace the 'impure' culture of the township - sometimes even preferring the rural. The township church does suffer therefore, from a serious identity crisis. Having a tradition of rejection in relation to African culture and yet equally uncomfortable with township life, the township church stands in limbo. However, because township people remain excluded from the 'fruits' of the secular city -the rural element seems to have the upper hand even in the church. Thus tribalism, ethnicity, orality and a vernacular culture remain strong influences in the township church[13]. But at the bottom of all the issues confronting the township church is the issue of the racist exploitation of Black people[14].

3 THE CHURCH AND FAITH IN THE TOWNSHIP SITUATION

How can the church meet the challenges that Township life present to its work? To begin with we must note how the church (the institutional church at least) has coped with township challenges.

3.1 Structural issues

It has been said many times that the church is poorly adapted to an urban environment. For one thing the parish system (and its variations), around which many churches, have been and continue to be structured, is European, and medieval in origin as well as rural in outlook. It is a geographic-based system probably built on the assumption of satellite rural (and sleepy) villages with valleys, rivulets and hills between them. In such situations the parish system in fact suggests itself. Boundaries were natural. But it makes

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13 Although at a more general level, see Maluleke (1993a) for a case study discussion of ethnicity *cum* tribalism and church mission.

14 It is curious that an American National Council of Churches conference on 'the church and the urban crisis' held in 1967 produced Black and White caucus statements that clearly identified racism, (and not urbanisation) as being central to the crisis (Wilmore & Cone 1979).

more assumptions than just geography. The envisaged communities will probably speak one language. An agrigarian substinence economy is also assumed. In each satellite village, the chapel will be visible and it will probably be the centre of life within that given community. The centrality of the chapel, often next to the school and the clinic was physical proof of the hegemony of religion and the church in community life.

Even before we contrast the above with the township situation, we must admit that even in South Africa's rural areas - at least during the late nineteenth century, the parish system was under attack. Power and authority lay in the hands of chiefs and Indunas. The chief's kraal was a strong competitor for the mission station. Many chiefs were concerned at their possible replacement as centres of power and authority by church, school and clinic officials. We know of the many fights between missionaries and the rainmakers, and traditional doctors as the former sought to impose the hospital ethos upon the communities. The traditional initiation school stood in direct opposition to the missionary's school.

In the African situation therefore, the church has been poorly adapted not only to the urban situations, but the rural situations as well. Whereas the Western church could be described as biased in favour of a rural life, the African church is neither rural nor urban, really. Naturally, the township has proved to be a handful. The medieval village concept which inspired the idea of the parish system, falls apart in the light of linguistic mixing, and the sheer lack of space. Rather than isolated villages, townships are massive and endless rows of shacks and houses. Multi-linguality is yet another aspect. The chapel and the school are no longer central, but must compete for 'space' with a myriad of other stake-holders. The cinema. The beerhall. The bar-lounge. Down town. Gambling. etc. What is worse, Christianity is no longer the only religion - several other religions, including agnosticism exist. With the highly politicised spirit of the township residents, the church's mission is further problematised. Mobility creates endless problems for the administration of the parish system. Since people can move from one corner of the metropolite to another swiftly due to availability of transport, does the Parish system still make sense?

3.2 Ministerial and pastoral issues

The structural issues we raised above impinge on several ministerial and pastoral issues. Does the minster have to stay in a 'parish' - what if the parish is itself flexible? What happens to the notion of the 'central mission'? Even more seriously, does a parish still have to be structurally and administratively organised around the minister? Our present ministerial structures and protocols not a hindrance to our mission in the urban area. So we try to make the township fit into our scheme of ministry rather than build our ministry around the township context. It seems to me that township churches require and demand more scope for lay leadership than it was ever imaginable before. The constant mobility of persons, and the fast pace of life and events can never be kept up with by one ordained minister. Fellow Christians could be doing a lot of pastoral work amongst themselves at work, in the trains and in the buses more timeously than the ordained minister. The situation calls out for a better defined lay ministry. The ministry of the whole church of God. Lay people have already begun to 'take over' important pastoral functions from the minister. They are doing so quietly and without the express consent of the clergy guild. At the height of anti-Apartheid protests in the 1970s and 1980s, ordinary people, even the youth took over the business of conducting funerals for example allowing the minister very little time. What does this say to us? The lone expert-type ministry seems obsolete in the township. This of course flies against the 'training' that many ministers get at seminaries and universities about forms of ministry, preaching, counselling methods and the like. Ministerial training tends to emphasise clergy-centred and individualist-type ministries. One is not calling for the 'replacement' of the ordained clergy, but for the appropriate 'transformation' of the same. Structures that are in place for lay leadership in most churches are sufficient as structures. It is their functioning, emphasis and role that needs to be redirected.

4 THE DEBILITATING TOWNSHIP MISSIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

In our attempt to characterise the township, we have more a less stated some contextual missiological issues raised by township life. Because townships represent such a vast, important yet neglected constituency in South African society a thorough missiological reflection on its challenges (beyond the limited scope of this article) to Christian mission is required. Theologically, township churches drink from the same wells as most other (Black) churches. Before considering these township issues in the light of Christian mission, let us begin by asking ourselves, why, we as Christians engage in mission. Some of the oldest 'foundations' of Christian mission have been: (a) the Bible (especially the so-called 'great commission' Matthew 28:18-20), (b) Judaeo-Christian monotheism, (c) the time-tested superiority of the Christian religion, (d) its acceptability and adaptability to all peoples and all contexts and (e) its achievements (cf Bosch 1991:5). Today each of these 'foundations' is contested and therefore at least debatable if not inadequate[15]. Slavery and colonialist racism, it has been argued, were perpetrated in the name of Christianity and on Christian grounds. Thus Christo-centrism and the superiority and the absoluteness of the Christian faith are more than theoretical missiological issues about theological method. It was the very absoluteness and superiority that provided theological legitimation for slavery, colonialism and racism. Gollwitzer (1979:154) put it thus:

> The theological reason for western self-understanding that doomed the non-white peoples to slavery lies in the so-called absoluteness of

15 The Bible has long been an issue of theological contestation in Western Biblical historical criticism as well as in Black theology (cf Mosala 1984, 1989). Nor has the 'great commission' sustained its nineteenth century hegemony as *the* foundational text for Christian mission (Bosch 1991:84). In today's pluralistic world, Christo-centrism and mono-theism has become more of a liability than an asset (cf Knitter 1985). The alleged acceptability and adaptability of Christianity to all contexts is at the centre of the theological debate around hermeneutics, contextualisation, enculteration and liberation. The 'superiority' of Christianity is an evaporating belief and racism and colonialism have been counted amongst the "achievements" of Christian mission (see also the "impure motives" for mission in Bosch 1991:5). The 1990 national inter-faith conference organised by the World Conference on Religion and Peace South Africa (WCRP-SA) seems to have initiated a lively debate within which there are ingredients for a challenge to the hegemony of Christianity, at least with regards to religion-state relations (cf Kritzinger (1993).

> Christianity together with the specific form it assumed in medieval sacramental piety: whoever did not share in the sacraments had no part eternal bliss and God was his enemy. Theology and proclamation are not only responsible for that which they *mean*, but also for what the effect.

The best motives for Christian missions during our times have been those of, (a) conversion, (b) the eschatological motive, (c) church planting, and the (d) philanthropic motive (Bosch 1991:5). What we must recognise is that most township churches and most black churches in general, especially so-called 'mainline' churches have evolved and been sustained upon the worst emphases of the above motives and foundations of mission. Conversion has often been solicited by means of the spectre of the forever burning hell. Conversion was understood in an individualistic, dualistic and 'personal' sense. Victorian 'personal sins' such as, smoking, drinking, fornication, adultery, envy, jealousy, and even illiteracy have been shown up to be the things that stand between humans and their conversion to Christ. A strong emphasis on the 'fallen nature' of humanity, especially the Blacks, who were often described as a people in darkness was the hallmark of the theological diet upon which our churches were formed. At its most social and communal, conversion has generally meant the wholesale and unquestioning abandonment of African culture and customs. Thus polygamists were expected to 'get rid' of all but the first wife. Christians were called upon to reject 'lobola' when their children got married. Up until the turn of this century these issues were at the centre of what 'conversion' was supposed to be about. Most seriously conversion often required the assumption of both a physical and an emotional distance from the heathen, including one's kin. It was a conversion into the mission church. Based on the reformation teaching of justification by faith, within the church "salvation in Jesus Christ was understood as merely *offered* ...[and not] realized in definite demonstrable conditions ..." (Gollwitzer 1979:155). Yet more grave is the fact that under the hold of this theology, being Christian and being a church member evoked a sense of being privileged. Belonging to Christianity granted one "the privilege ... of climbing far above the rest of humankind" (Gollwitzer 1979:155). Is this perhaps the reason why absurd membership issues still preoccupy the township church even in the face of dire societal crises? It seems to me that even the

we need to be both critical and suspicious even of the value of the 'giant steps forward' in the theological and ecclesiastical developments of Christendom. Mark Gollwitzer's (1979:155) words:

> The Reformation did not change a thing in the fate white people prepared for the colored peoples of the world. Whether Rome, Wittenberg, or Geneva prevailed, whether justification before God occurred through works or through faith, whether *est* or *significat* was correct, whether the Canons of Dort or the declarations of the Remonstrants became accepted church doctrine ... - for the red, the yellow, and the black all this was irrelevant. It did not change their condition. For the white confessors of the faith ... the people of color were destined for bondage; ... .[16]

The eschatological motive was used more to encourage an 'escape from' rather than and 'engagement with' the world. Thus popular township church hymnology is infested with such dualistic and escapist songs/choruses as

Ke llela Moya.
Ga ke lleli masapo
Ke llela moya oa ka [I weep for my soul. I do not care for bones. Oh how I weep for my soul]

Hamba nhliziyo Yam
Uye eZulwini
A ku sekho uku phumula
Lapha emhlabeni [Take flight my dear heart. Flee to heaven. For there is no rest in this world.]

Si Hlupheka Njalo
Si ne Khaya eZulwini [We may suffer (here). (But) we have ahome in heaven.]

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16 In the same spirit we must ask, if the post-second world war ascendency of the *Missio Dei* concept over against the "narrow and acclesiocentric" views (presumably of Warneck, Schmidillin, Keysser and others) in Christian missionary theory "represents such a crucial break" (Bosch 1991:393). What difference has this 'crucial break' made in the lives of Black Christians and their so-called younger churches? Is this development not merely a moment in the "white-guilt history" (Gollwitzer 1979:153)?

Ku hava Kaya Rin'wana
eKaya hi le tilweni
Ku hava hala
Ekaya hi le tilwen [There is no other home. Heaven is home. Yes there is none this way and none that way. Home is heaven].

Amagugu a le lizwe
A yo sal'emathuneni
Se ngi yo lala ngi ngedwa
Ethuneni lami. [The treasures of this world; Will remain in the graves. (Even) I shall sleep all alone; in my grave]

There are many choruses with this theme and they are very popular across denominational and confessional divides. It could be argued that these type of songs may constitute Marx's 'sigh of the oppressed' and that they serve to re-charged the wretched with a little more spiritual energy with which to face the next moment of dehumanisation. One could also argue that these songs are coded messages whose meaning lie more in the repetitive melody and the rhythmic movement of the body as people dance to the song. There is certainly room for that interpretation. But the preponderance, popularity of songs with 'other-worldly' and dualistic themes whose words inspire a withdrawal is far too blatant to be explained only in this philosophical manner. The history of massive Christian non-involvement in sticky 'worldly matters' by Christians and their churches in South Africa, save in support of the powerful seems to confirm my interpretation of these songs. My argument is that the kind of outlook is not conducive to Christian engagement with such issues as crime and the protest tradition beyond pulpit anecdotes and tear-drenched prayers.

Church planting as a motive of mission, insofar as it has been premised on the absoluteness of the Christian faith is floored in the same way that conversion and eschatology are. St Paul is *the* enduring model for church planting. But Paul had no 'pre-conceived' idea of a church to be planted since he was very much a pioneer. For one thing church planting seems to have tended to be taken too literally resulting in what Bosch (1991:5) has called the "ecclesiastical export trade". Thus "the young churches "planted" on the "mission field" were replicas of the churches of the mission agency's "home front"..." (Bosch 1991:5). The township churches - especially the so-called

"mainline churches", even today, are no exception. These churches are conspicuous by their 'refusal' to adapt to both township life and African culture. The poverty and violence of the township life is yet to become real priorities in the agendas of township church councils, consistories, kirk sessions, circuit meetings, diocesan meetings and presbytery meetings. The township life-style is often rejected in totality as being essentially anti-Christian. Thus the township's 'impure' language and wry humour is avoided like the plague. Instead dated and often no longer used vernacular speech is preferred for both preaching and liturgy. Nor are issues of enculteration, Africanisation and contextualisation embraced. The little Africanisation and enculteration that emerges especially in the worship is often an "extra-liturgical" exceptions. These occur due to the subtle but persistent pressure of township peoples upon the clergy guild. Within a tradition where being Christian and being a member of the church meant not only the rejection of one's culture but a climb into a privileged status, church planting has been synonymous with the formation of an elitist albeit beneficial club. This may be part of the reason why both the Black and White church has been easily co-opted by the state resulting in what the Kairos document called "church theology". Church membership has tended to be the burning issue rather than the praxis of churches and church members in the township. For this reason much time, money and energy is spent on membership issues (church dues and the implications of their non-payment and church uniforms for example) by the township church. With such a warped view of the church in circulation, the still common tendency of viewing the church and human beings as authors and bearers of mission (and salvation) rather than God creates complex missiological problems for the township church. We have already illustrated some or the theological implications; e.g. conversion tends to be understood as conversion to a church. On this both 'mainline' and African Independent Churches (AICs) can be faulted. We must however beware that the refusal to locate mission on God's lap while missiologically inept may be based on a hunger for the practical, concrete, definable and the humanly traceable. Furthermore, the lopsided view of church planting kills ecumenism. Denominationalism remains one of the most potent illustrations of the Western captivity of the township church. In various ways, ordinary church members have been fighting denominationalism in the township. But their church structures have not accompanied them. Inter-church cooperation

between the township youth, women, choirs etc exist. But little on-going co-operation between denominational power structures exist. Yet issues like crime and violence cannot be tackled by any single denomination on its own. Part of the problem of crime is that township people know so little about its patterns and occurrences. No one in the township is studying crime and violence as well as making information on these available to the public. The police are not doing it.The newspapers are simply reporting it; usually because of its commercial value. Here is an opportunity for the churches to do something valuable together.

5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Alienation is not exclusive to Township peoples. It is perhaps a typical 'urban' problem. Though urban centres are overpopulated, urban people live as lonely (and often selfish) individuals. The lack of space seems to make people more individualistic, guarding the little space that they have jealously. If this is so of city life in general it is more acute in the exploitative and race-based Township. The lack of space often ends up producing 'pockets' of over-crowded clanspeople or people who speak the same language. But these 'pockets' can be as 'individualistic' as the young white female renting a kitchen, a bedroom and a TV set. Without repeating the points discussed under alienation above, the task at hand is obvious. Alienation should be an important 'sin' in the agenda of the township church. Viewed theologically, even this must not be approached superficially. For behind the alienation there are political, social, psychological and economic reason. My fear is that even when alienation is recognised as a problem, the church through its teaching and praxis tend to reinforce rather than confront it.

There are some positive things about the culture of protest. (Not that the church - as an institution, could be accused of having encouraged it in the township). It was mainly a refusal to accept inhumanisation. Protest was a means of salvaging some dignity in 'a foreign land'. It is a feature that resonates well with the prophetic tradition in scripture. There are ways in which the church must only refine and sacralise aspects of this tradition. It is damning that although the adult population in many townships consists

mainly of a "workforce" - either employed or seeking employment, the township church (as is the larger church) remains largely 'unconnected' to workers in general let alone organised workers. Although many of these churches survive on the contributions of these very workers, these workers do not feature in the calender and theology of the church. The church clings to a theology informed by an agrigarian society, yet we live now in an exploitative capitalist and monopolistic society. While one hears current calls for the church to be encourage people to get out of the protest mode; one must point out that this call assumes (a) the church was involved with the people in the 'protest mode', and (b) the present political dispensation has rendered protest superfluous. What the township church certainly need to condemn are abberations such as necklacing, ritual murders and kangaroo courts. But the church must do more than condemn, necklacing and 'intimidation'. It must both locate these actions at a socio-theological level and put forth some (short term and long term) strategies to put an end to these.

The township church has yet to harness the creative genius of its peoples. It may be a poor church in terms of money, but in terms of the quality and the giftedness of the people it is very rich. However, having been trapped in the Victorian mode of obsession with (personal) 'sin', denominationalism and clericalism, the township church tends, not only to disregards the genius of its members, but it actually kills it. Theologically the township churches remains a foreign institution in the township. One is thinking here not only in matters of worship and preaching, but a refusal to draw from the creative well of township life. The upbeat music, the language, the idiom, the dramatic constitution, the humour and the hope.

We have noted that we cannot write off the rural element in township society. Many township peoples remain 'unsettled' in the township for several reasons. One feature which I consider to be a carry-over from rural ethos is the respect for the dead and the solemnity of a funeral. In many ways the funeral has replaced the wedding as both an occasion for ceremony and celebration. It is in my opinion, appalling that, save for the AICs, many township churches rely on very dated funeral and worship liturgies of European origins (cf Anderson 1993). Very little creativity has been shown by the township church in this obviously important aspect of township life. Nor has the church been in dialogue with township communities regarding the theology behind a funeral. Instead the church seems to hang all its hopes on the inherited fu-

neral liturgies. Several problems have cropped up. Strange customs are introduced frequently in township funerals. These are becoming stranger by the day. Yet another significant matter is how funeral costs and funeral spending have increased, especially when one includes the 500km trip 'home' for burial. Here too the church has been a spectator. Are we seeing the beginnings of the marginalisation of the church in the township? Much of what we call the rural element is also what is indigenous and African. While township life is a curious mix of Africa and the West, both in the worst and the best senses, most churches remain resolutely foreign in structure, governance, worship and pastoral style. One is of course not advocating an overall and overnight Africanisation of the church. Much of the Western elements in the Township church have become part of a pervasive popular religiosity. This means that though 'foreign' some Western features of the church have been so internalised that they have begun to serve a function within Township culture. Take the case of hymns and choral music. Many of these, having existed for more than a century in local languages have become part of the people's 'folk culture' if you want. Even the AICs have internalised certain Western customs[17]. Any Africanisation and contextualisation process must beware of that. Admittedly the AICs in the urban areas have been more resourceful (cf Oosthuizen 1992, Anderson 1992 & West 1975). But they are by no means totally exempted from the theological and socio-political captivity of black churches in general. Afterall, they "share the same social space" (Mofokeng 1993:137). In terms of theology, the AICs are perhaps more continuous with so-called Black mission churches that it is immediately apparent (cf Maluleke 1993b, 1994).

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17 Several students of AICs since Sundkler (1961:302) have viewed AICs in the urban areas as "adaptative structures" and not purely as reversions to a rural mode of life. (cf Oosthuizen (1992), West (1975:194f). But the adaptative nature of the AICs relates to more than city life - it includes adaptations to established Christendom traditions.

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AFRICAN THEOLOGY OR BLACK THEOLOGY? TOWARD AN INTEGRAL AFRICAN THEOLOGY

*Mokgethi B G Motlhabi**

Itumeleng Mosala concludes his essay on "The Relevance of Traditional African Religions and Their Challenge to Black Theology" in the words:

> ... without a creative reappropriation of traditional African religions and societies [sic] both African and Black Theologies will build their houses on sand. A Black Theology of liberation must draw its cultural hermeneutics of struggle from a critical reappropriation of black culture just as an African Theology must arm itself with the political hermeneutics that arise from the contemporary social struggles of black people under apartheid capitalism.[2]

This statement has serious implications for the existence of Black Theology in South Africa, more so than of African Theology.

For almost two decades now African Theology has acknowledged the need to broaden its scope in accordance with Mosala's recommendations. This was even before Mosala himself started thinking about or writing on Black Theology. Through their involvement in the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians African theologians are working with other theologians to find ways of addressing common issues, particularly those that keep all third world countries and their people under various forms of bondage and suppression. As far as Black Theology in South Africa is concerned, there are two classical positions on this recommendation in this country. One of the positions is in agreement with, while the other is opposed to, the idea of reappropriating African culture, albeit critically. There is also a third tendency, which proceeds with its work merely along the "traditional" approach

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2 Itumeleng Mosala, "The Relevance of African Traditional Religions and their Challenge to Black Theology," in *The Unquestionable Right to Be Free*, edited by Itumeleng J. Mosala and Buti Tlhagale (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1986), p. 99.

to Black Theology in South Africa, as if the issue raised by the two positions is irrelevant.

The aim of this paper is to examine the implications of Mosala's statement on both African and Black Theologies, particularly in the light of what I have chosen to call the South African classical debate on the subject. The position adopted here is, naturally, in agreement with Mosala's position. However, it goes a step further. It draws the logical conclusion that if South African Black Theology is to extend its scope of reflection to traditional and current religio-cultural aspects, on the one hand, and African Theology to contemporary liberation concerns, on the other, then there would be no need to have two main, distinct "indigenous" theologies on the African continent. What would be needed would be a single theology, having common concerns, but responsive to the particular needs of different situations and conditions experienced in different African countries. The question is, which of the two theologies will it be - Black Theology or African Theology? This question leads us back to one of the early questions regarding Black Theology in this country. It was raised by Manas Buthelezi in an article entitled: "A Black Theology or an African Theology [?]"[3]

The answer given to this question will itself lead to further implications, namely, the need for the theology selected as the more fitting to deliberate on and to adjust to a new scope, content, and method of engagement. In scope it will have to cover the issues addressed by the present Black Theology and African Theology combined, and more. In content it will obviously transcend the present Christian theological and Christological considerations to include considerations of the theology of African religion, with all its relevant belief aspects and how they relate as well as contribute to Christian faith and theology. As far as its method is concerned, it will be all at once radical (in the literal etymological sense of going to the roots of and appropriating aspects of African culture and beliefs); contextual (in the sense of addressing current and immediate concerns, whatever their nature); and liberative (in the sense of being engaged in struggle for liberation from the trilogy of contemporary causes of human suffering and oppression, namely,,

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3 See Manas Buthelezi, "A Black Theology or an African Theology," in *Essays on Black Theology,* edited by Mokgethi Motlhabi (Johannesburg: University Christian Movement, 1972).

sexism). The present paper hopes to offer a minor contribution in the discussion, if only to revive the debate that has seemingly become dormant today.

1 THE "CLASSICAL" DEBATE

The "classical" debate on Black Theology and African Theology originates in the article by Manas Buthelezi already referred to. He extended this article under a different title later.[4] An indirect response to Buthelezi comes from Desmond Tutu - indirect because the two theologians were not consciously engaged in an open debate but were writing under various settings and responding to various theological challenges.

1.1 A Black Theology or an African Theology?

While Buthelezi's original article poses a question with two alternatives - "A Black Theology or an African Theology [?]" - Tutu's article places the two theologies side by side but, in turn, poses its own question in the subtitle: "Soul Mates or Antagonists?" Buthelezi's challenge focuses on two kinds of approach to theology - with specific reference to African and Black Theologies - which he identifies. The first approach, which he attributes to African Theology, he refers to as the "ethnographical approach." The second, followed by Black Theology, is referred to as the "anthropological approach." Buthelezi is strongly opposed to the ethnographical approach for a number of reasons. Instead, he favours the anthropological approach, as will soon be seen why.

The major reason for his opposition to the former, apart from seeing it as suspect because it was, in his opinion, conceived by foreigners (missionaries) and not by Africans themselves, is that it is based on false assumptions. It uses as its point of departure "elements of the traditional African 'worldview.'" In doing so, it assumes that

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4 See Manas Buthelezi, "Toward Indigenous Theology in South Africa," in *Third World Liberation Theologies: A Reader,* edited by Deane William Ferm (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1986), pp. 205ff.

by analyzing and characterizing cultural factors with regard to their historical development in the African church milieu, it becomes possible by means of the 'sifting' medium of the gospel to root out 'unchristian' practices and 'baptize' those that are consonant with the Gospel.[5]

However, as ethnography is, by definition, concerned with the "cultures of non-literate peoples" (Kroeber), the kind of African worldview brought up for analysis becomes an "ethnographical reconstruction." The question is whether such a reconstruction - notwithstanding the extent of its accuracy - can be regarded as a "valid postulate" for African Theology. It is "too presumptuous," according to Buthelezi, "to claim to know how much of their past Africans will allow to shape their future, once they are given the chance to participate in the wholeness of life, that the contemporary world offers."[6] Buthelezi's main fear is that such an ethnographically reconstructed African past may be "romanticized and conceived in isolation from the realities of the present."[7] Such realities, for South Africans, include deprivation, socio-political and economic oppression and the suffering of black people, as well as the need to struggle tirelessly against these evils for total human liberation.

To engage in such struggle a different approach to theology is required. This is what Buthelezi refers to as the anthropological approach. While the chief concern of the ethnographical approach is the African worldview (*res indiginae*), the anthropological approach focuses on persons themselves and on how they can work toward their own liberation and fulfillment as human beings. It focuses on the *causa efficiens* of theology.[8] Buthelezi concludes that inasmuch as African Theology is identified with the former approach, it cannot be a suitable theology for South African black people. Since Black Theology answers to the requirements of the anthropological approach, it is the proper theological method for South Africa.[9]

At the time when Buthelezi first wrote his essay, African Theology was still almost exclusively concerned with issues of indigenization and Africanization

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5 Ibid., p. 208.
6 Ibid., p. 212.
7 Ibid., p. 210.
8 Ibid., pp. 213-214.
9 Ibid., p. 220.

in the "traditional" sense. There was, at the same time, confusion about the precise meaning of the term "indigenization" itself. Did it mean the mere translation of Christianity or the Gospel as it was received from the missionaries into the African idiom and forms of expression? Did it mean a new way of appropriating the Gospel by striving for the "essential Gospel" through some process of "deculturizing" it from its western cloak and substituting the African cloak? Or did it mean merely the substitution of African leadership for foreign leadership in the missionary churches? The common words used in the debate were "indigenization," "adaptation," "translation," "incarnation," and "Africanization."[10] While often used interchangeably, these words often revealed different tendencies in approaches to the end in view regarding the state of the Church in Africa.

It is perhaps not surprising that this kind of campaign took place in the context of independent Africa, mainly from central to northern Africa. Not surprisingly, also, Southern Africa was not much involved in the debate. Its concerns were different from those of fellow Africans to the north. Southern African countries were still struggling against colonialism and its accompanying socio-political and economic oppression. They were seeking answers more directly relevant to their condition and problems, problems of racism, induced landlessness, deprivation, poverty in the midst of plenty, and general suffering and oppression. Theologically, some of the answers to these questions came with Black Theology.

The idea and method of a Black Theology were first received by black South Africans from African-Americans, but its content and concerns were local. It was understood as a theology of liberation, wielding a capital "No!"-signal to oppression and other sins issuing mainly from racism. It advocated a re-interpretation of the Gospel in accordance with the requirements of the situation of black people in South Africa. It sought to understand the meaning of Christ's incarnation in such a situation: was it incarnation for the purpose of suffering unto death; or was it incarnation for redemption, symbolized in Christ's death and particularly his resurrection? If the former, then the incarnation had no meaning for black people and there was no hope for them ever to be free of their oppressors. If the latter, then black people had

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10 See Kwesi Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984), pp. 116-117.

to accept actively the good news of their imminent liberation. This meant resisting their oppression as well as the anti-Christ with his gospel of submissiveness and resignation.

Stated as such, the concerns of African Theology and Black Theology were poles apart, and it is in this context that Buthelezi objected to African Theology as a possible "indigenous theology for South Africa." The question, however, is: Are the concerns of these two theologies as incompatible and mutually exclusive as they may appear at first sight? Upon further reflection, it does appear that Buthelezi overreacted somewhat - and perhaps understandably - in the heat of the moment. So did we all, under the pressure of apartheid. In answer to some of his questions, it is necessary to emphasize the need for interaction between the Gospel and the cultural setting where it is preached. Whether the ultimate appropriation of the Gospel will result from a "sifting medium" or some other method is irrelevant to this initial understanding. Secondly, is Buthelezi entirely correct in relegating African culture to an "ethnographical reconstruction" which can only become a "postulate" for African Theology? Are Africans so completely deculturized and westernized that coming to terms with their culture can only involve making "'platonic' flights to an imagined past, where there was still an ordered system of ideas and indigenous concepts[?]"[11] Are we, indeed, so completely denuded of our cultural heritage that we absolutely do not have anything presently to build upon? Is this a necessary consequence of acknowledging the concept of cultural dynamism?

One may accept the fact that many Africans, particularly in the urban areas, might have outgrown some aspects of their past cultural heritage. However, to suggest that they have no vestige of African culture left in their system amounts to reducing them to creatures of western culture - born again in the latter's image, as it were. The majority of the African people, particularly in the rural areas, remain rich in traditional culture which can serve as a starting point for a fully intergrated African Theology - even Black Theology. It is important, however, to bear in mind that "culture" does not refer only to a past reality but is an ongoing reality. Thirdly, therefore, reclaiming this heritage is not a matter of allowing the past to shape the future of Africans. As it turns out, the "past" itself is not so past, after all. Nay, it is

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11 See Buthelezi, "Toward Indigenous Theology," p. 216.

part of us; it lives in us. Thus reclaiming the African heritage is, in fact, a matter of integrating the erstwhile African cultural heritage into the "wholeness of life that the contemporary world offers," to use Buthelezi's own words. Consequently, there is, it seems, absolutely no danger of romanticizing the supposedly "distant African past" - "what once was" - and conceiving it "in isolation" from present realities.[12] For behold, the "past" is still with us.

1.2 Soul Mates or Antagonists?

Unlike Buthelezi, Tutu sees no conflict between African Theology and Black Theology, except to the extent that there are certain shortcomings, particularly in the former. His response to Mosala's recommendation can be viewed as one-sided, though. While he takes African Theology to task for its omissions of the socio-political and economic aspects of struggle, he does not take Black Theology - in its South African version - similarly to task for neglecting the cultural aspect. He might, of course, be compensating such omission with implicit reference to American Black Theology, which does not have the same problem. This is not quite excusable, however, for he is obviously writing from his experience as a South African. As he states,

> I myself believe I am an exponent of black theology coming as I do from South Africa. I believe I am also an exponent of African theology coming as I do from Africa. I contend that black theology is like the inner and smaller circle in a series of concentric circles.[13]

The last sentence of this statement is, of course, only applicable to Black Theology in South Africa and not in America.

Speaking of the differences between African Theology and Black Theology in his article, Tutu states that African Theology arose from politically independent Africa, even though he finds Africa's freedom questionable. The positive contribution of African Theology has been, he

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12 Ibid., p. 210.

13 Desmond Tutu, "African Theology/Black Theology: Soul Mates or Antagonists?" in *Third World Liberation Theologies: A Reader*, edited by Deane William Ferm (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1986), p. 262.

states, to expose the lie that "worthwhile religion in Africa had to await the advent of the white person." It has also done a "wonderful service in rehabilitating the African religious consciousness."[14] Yet African Theology has, at the same time, failed to address contemporary human problems of suffering, exploitation, and dehumanization.

> It has seemed to advocate disengagement from the hectic business of life because very little has been offered that is pertinent, say, about the theology of power in the face of the epidemic of coups and military rule, about development, about poverty and disease and other equally urgent present-day issues.

Black Theology, on the other hand, is understood by Tutu as having arisen in a situation of oppression and racism; in a context of "suffering at the hands of rampant white racism." Hence its concern with liberation. In this sense, Black Theology is "more thoroughly and explicitly political than African Theology." Not only is it anti-domination and anti-oppression, on the one hand, and pro-liberation, on the other, but it is also anti-transcendentalist in a sense which denies an equal balance to the immanence of God. It is thus not a theology of pie-in-the-sky (the vertical aspect) but takes seriously the incarnation of Christ (the horizontal aspect). Symbollically, we may say that the vertical and the horizontal equal the cross, through which humankind was reconciled to God and potentially liberated from the ills of this world.

Given the above position, particularly the view of Black Theology as the lesser of two partners, the following conclusion would seem inevitable. Were the deficiencies perceived as inherent in African Theology to be addressed and its scope broadened, it would then be in a position to address directly the concerns presently attributed to Black Theology. In other words, African Theology would no longer be confined to issues of cultural appropriation and indigenization. It would also address issues of liberation in response to the various manifestations of oppression. If this happened, and Black Theology continued to confine itself to the latter issues, in accordance with Buthelezi's protestations, African Theology would become the more representative of the two theologies.

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14 Ibid., p. 261.

No one might begrudge Black Theology its limited program, especially if it was thought to be more effective as such. In this way it would be exactly as Tutu sees it, namely, the lesser of two partners. However, it would also be somewhat redundant, for it would be devoted to a task which African Theology has now also appropriated. If, on the other hand, Black Theology also heeded Mosala's call and, in turn, extended its concerns to religio-cultural issues, then there would no longer be any difference between itself and African Theology. They would be two separate theologies with the same concerns, often existing side by side in the same African countries. This, it seems to me, is where Buthelezi's question becomes pertinent. First, is it necessary to have two theologies in the same country concerned with exactly the same issues and having the same scope? Is it necessary to have such a name-difference only, while the content and method remain the same? Second, if a choice for one had to be made, which one would it be: Black Theology or African Theology?

As already stated at the beginning of this paper, African Theology has, in fact, already extended its scope in accordance with the above argument. In South Africa, a few Black Theologians have begun to think along the lines suggested by Mosala, but seemingly not enthusiastically enough. This may be the only reason why the continued separate existence of Black Theology is justified. For logic would seem to demand that a relevant theology for Africa should be African Theology, particularly if its primary goal is to meet the overall needs of all the peoples of the continent. Some of the reasons for separation cited by Buthelezi may not be easily overcome, particularly if one's attitude to one's cultural heritage is negative. Whatever the extent, at least Tutu's objections to African Theology, as discussed above, have been fulfilled. It is appropriate also to mention that Black Theology in America is far ahead of its South African counterpart in trying to develop a "wholistic theological approach." It is a theology concerned not only with present-day liberational issues but also with the socio-cultural and religious rooting of the African-American struggle. Unless, therefore, black theologians in this country begin to take Mosala's warning more seriously - and also decide once and for all on their true theological identity - their theology will remain at the tail-end of both African Theology and American Black Theology in development.

1.3 Need for More Creative Dialogue Among South African Black Theologians

It is significant that since Buthelezi and Tutu wrote their articles there has been apparently no direct follow-up to their "dialogue" in South Africa. Their essays were originally discussed at international conferences, particularly those of African and other Third World theologians. It is for this reason that they have been promoted, in this paper, to the status of a "debate" and also that they may be considered as a dialogue, even though they were not in themselves a direct dialogue.

While there has been no such follow-up to this "dialogue" in South Africa, there have been individual attempts to address Mosala's recommendations, though not in conscious response to him. Publications and articles that try to address the subject include those by Mosala himself, Bonganjalo Goba, J. B. Ngubane, Khoza Mgojo, and perhaps also the author of this paper.[15] Some of their discussions also include the role of the African Indigenous Churches in Black Theology. Most of the above authors, however, do not seem to learn from one another's insights - if they read one another at all - and to build on these insights by way of debate and further reflection on issues raised in the debate. Unless this kind of attitude changes, there will be no serious development in this area of theological reflection in South Africa.

Of even greater concern in this matter are the "silent majority" of black theologians, who continue to slumber through this "theological cultural revolution." They continue to speak and write as if nothing is happening around them - or at least as if they have never heard of this debate. Some of them find a trusted ally in Marxist analysis, which they seem to see as self-sufficient. It is only in Marxist analysis - as the "new hand-maiden of theology" - that they find solutions to contemporary problems of socio-political and economic oppression. We agree that no serious Third World theologian today can deny or ignore the importance of Marxist analysis. To them, however, as to Buthelezi, cultural heritage remains a remote factor, a flight into the past and almost totally irrelevant to the here and now. They have yet to heed the

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15 See some of their articles in *The Unquestionable Right to Be Free.* Also Buti Tlhagale and Itumeleng Mosala, eds., *Hammering Swords into Ploughshares: Essays in Honour of Archbishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1986).

warning that they might be "setting up their theological buildings on sand." While African Theology and Black Theology are fast approaching convergence in their concerns, which may soon render their separate identities in Africa meaningless, these slumbering theologians are in danger of remaining - for lack of a better expression - a theological "sect" in the midst of a broader theology ultimately, it seems, to be represented by a united African Theology.

2 TOWARD A REAPPROPRIATION OF THE AFRICAN HERITAGE

African Theology is necessarily a contextual theology. It is so called because it is intended to relate to the situation or context of the African people. To relate meaningfully it must speak about God in a way that is understandable to the African people, taking into account their background, culture, traditions, customs, history, and their ongoing life experience. In other words, the God about whom African Theology must address the African people must be an African God: God must be God incarnate in Africa as well as in each distinct context of the African continent. Such a God must reveal Godself in the African medium.

The main charge that has been laid against early missionary Christianity in Africa and other Third World countries was that it came - pardon the trite expression - dressed in western garb. It was totally foreign to colonial peoples and was expected to be encompassed as such. For African Theology the ideal, whether practically achievable or not, was that Christianity must be stripped naked of its foreignness and redressed in African garb. Not only must it assume African form, but it must also be completely African in character and values. The question that arises from this is where the Bible and the Christian tradition fit in in such a theology. Do they have any place at all or are they purely accidental or complementary?

2.1 Sources of African Theology

African theologians have identified a number of sources which, in their opinion, need to be taken into account for African Theology to be a meaningful exercise. Typically, at the top of these sources is said to be the Bible

and the Christian heritage. Other sources named are: African anthropology, African traditional religions, African Indigenous Churches, other African realities - e.g., experiences of cultural forms of life and arts, extended family, hospitality, communal life, etc.[16] Given the priority that the Bible and Christian tradition are given, the real question is not whether they fit in at all in African "incarnate theology" but how they fit in.

One may begin by questioning the way these sources have been prioritized, even though this is not our primary concern. The placing of the Bible and the Christian heritage first reflects the bondage to which many African theologians are still subject. Logically and practically these sources are not first in the life of the African - or any other Christian, for that matter. They are added realities to the African's life and existence. It may be better to speak of their centrality than their priority. Centrality implies indispensability, though not necessarily first in order of happening. If this is accepted, one may say that African anthropology, which is placed second on the priority list, may be conceived within the context of African culture and "other African realities," including African traditional religions. Only after these sources can the Bible and Christian heritage be placed, followed by the African Indigenous Churches. This would answer the question of Where the Bible and the Christian heritage fit in, but not necessarily How they fit - that is, how they make their contribution - in what we may call a "home-grown" African Theology . It is not within the scope of this paper to attempt an answer to this question. Hence it will be set aside for the moment.

In the "Final Communique" of the second conference of Third World theologians, held in Accra, Ghana, in 1977, the above list of sources is followed by three approaches which are recommended for African Theology. The first one "admits the inherent values in the traditional African religions and sees in them a preparation for the Gospel." Why these values should be seen merely as preparatory for the Gospel is questionable. It seems more appropriate to affirm them as consonant with the Gospel, whatever else the Gospel may be considered to contribute in addition. The second approach is one of a critical, dialectical theology that draws a relationship between the

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16 "Final Communique: Pan African Conference of Third World Theologians, December 17-23, 1977, Accra, Ghana," in *African Theology En Route,* edited by Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979), pp. 192-193.

Bible and African realities. This means that to perform its tasks, African Theology "needs an interdisciplinary methodology of social analysis, biblical reflection, and active commitment to be with the peoples in their endeavours to build a better society."[17] The third is represented by Black Theology in South Africa.

On the whole, it is felt that for African Theology to address the freedom struggles of the African people, it must be both contextual and liberative. Although liberation is implied in contextuality in this instance, the former term is used narrowly to refer to freedom from racism, socio-political and economic oppression, as well as sexism. In this respect it is felt that "African theologians outside South Africa cannot legitimately ignore situations that affect the humanity of people adversely."[18] Contextuality is used broadly to refer to accountability to the context in which African people live. Hence "Contextualization," the Communique concludes, "will mean that theology will deal with the liberation of our people from cultural captivity."[19] "Cultural captivity" here seems to carry a double meaning. Not only does it refer to the refusal to accept change or cultural dynamism, but it also refers to cultural domination of the African people, particularly by the West and Western theology.

One of the foremost African theologians, Kwesi Dickson, thus argues for a more inclusive theological approach that would aim not only at winning the socio-economic and political freedom, but also - "and more importantly - [at winning] the cultural battle, for it is," according to him, "the latter which defines, more fundamentally, the humanity of a people."[20] This position, and the rest of the foregoing, is summarized effectively in the "Final Communique" of the 1977 Pan African conference:

> We believe that African Theology must be understood in the context of African life and culture and the creative attempt of African peoples to share a new future that is different from the colonial past and the neo-colonial present. The African situation requires a new theological methodology that is different from the approaches of the dominant theologies of the West. African theology must reject, therefore, the prefab-

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17 Ibid., p. 195.
18 Dickson, *Theology in Africa,* p. 136.
19 "Final Communique," p. 194.
20 Dickson, *Theology in Africa,* p. 139.

ricated ideas of North Atlantic theology by defining itself according to the struggles of the people in their resistance against the structures of domination. Our task as theologians is to create a theology that arises from and is accountable to African people.[21]

2.2 African Traditional Religions

As the centrality of the Bible and Christian tradition in African Theology have never been in question, they can safely be put aside as we examine the contribution that can be derived from some of the sources named. We will begin by isolating the African traditional religions.

Traditional Christian theology has tended to look down upon other world religions and generally to associate them with paganism and superstition. Only Christianity was considered to be a "true" religion; only Christianity possessed authentic revelation; only the God of Christianity was the true God, spelled with a capital "G." God as spoken about in other religions - "false religions" - represented a false god or false gods, spelled with a small "g." If the term "religion" itself was conceded to them at all, it was given up by Christianity in favour of seeing itself as a "faith," and thus not as a religion. The implication of such a concession was that those subscribing to the faith rather than to religion were superior.

In accordance with this attitude, Christian evangelization to colonial peoples meant persuading them to turn away from their "false beliefs" and to throw away their "false gods" in favour of Christianity and the Christian God. This is what conversion meant primarily. Turning away from "evil ways" in conversion focused more on indigenous cultures, their religions, and the God worshipped in the various religions, than on evil behaviour and general immorality. Little was it recognized that this was not necessarily the "battle of religions and their gods" but more the battle of cultures: the Western desire to assert its general cultural superiority in the name of Christianity. Had this not been the case, Christian missionaries would have first made objective studies of the areas they identified for evangelization. They would have determined which aspects of their religions and cultures complied with Christian norms and ideals, and proceeded "respectfully" with their task of evangelization. This would have been along the lines of affirm-

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21 "Final Communique," p. 193.

ing what was not inconsistent with the Gospel in these religions;[22] trying harder to understand what seemed mysterious and "mumbo-jumboish" in them; and noting what was contradictory to Christian teaching, offering, in its place, Christian alternatives . Such an approach was not, however, in accordance with Western arrogance and superiority complex. The Western approach was to recreate everything strange in the Western image: to transform and refashion all that was different and that the missionaries and their colonizing companions did not understand.

It is seemingly in reaction to this attitude that Dickson states, regarding the task of African Theology, that "there can be a meaningful theology only when account is taken of the African religio-cultural situation as one of the source materials for theologising."[23] While this does not mean advocating, according to Muzorewa, a return to the past, it is for him an acknowledgement that God's revelation cannot be dismissed as irrelevant merely because it happens to be pre-Christian. As Muzorewa puts it, "a backward drift is unnecessary because what God reveals continues to live."[24] Noting that Western traditional theology has remained a "resident alien" among most African Christians, Muzorewa states that their majority are "turning to the traditional religious beliefs for clarification on Christian doctrine." This is done because the former are found to be "more concrete and spiritual" than the latter as it is currently presented to Africans.[25]

Mbiti argues along the same lines that revelation is not given in a vacuum but within particular historical experiences and reflections. Hence, "salvation history must widen its outreach in order to embrace the horizons of other people's histories."[26] He questions the distinction made between "special revelation" and "general revelation," emphasizing that God's revelation is not confined to the Biblical record. As the Bible itself declares that God is the creator of all things, it seems to follow, for Mbiti, that God's activities in the world must go beyond what is recorded in the Bible. God must have been

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22 This, as will be noticed, is in direct contradiction to the view expressed by Buthelezi above.

23 Dickson, *Theology in Africa,* p. 124.

24 Gwinyai Muzorewa, "The Future of African Theology," *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 4 (November 1990): 37.

25 Ibid., p. 39.

26 John S. Mbiti, "The Encounter of Christian Faith and African Religion," in *Third World Liberation Theologies,* p. 201.

active among African peoples, as God was in Biblical records. God must have been present in places like Mount Kenya and Mount Fuji (Japan), among other places, as God was supposedly in Mount Sinai.[27] In light of this, the above distinction is "inadequate and unfreeing," apart from not being a biblically-based distinction.[28]

As a source of African Theology, African traditional religions are seen implicitly to involve "reflection on the beliefs of a people,"[29] that is, the African people. This is so notwithstanding the claim by some of their detractors that these religions are "danced out, not thought out."[30] The real basis of African Theology, according to African theologians, is the conviction that "there is one God of the whole earth." All peoples, in their distinctive religions, seek after this God, "so that all religions enshrine an encounter between God and man."[31] (This issue will be elaborated upon below, with its implicit claims to monotheism.) Because all religions involve the manifestation of deity (in greater or lesser degree), it is thought conceivable that they "would not exist had not God revealed [Godself]." Their groping for God or divinity is believed to find foremost expression in worship.[32]

Speaking with specific reference to Christian theology, but with implications for the foregoing discussion, Dickson states that "Christians in Africa have been theologising all along, even if not in any formal way." Such "informal theologising is done in various ways, such as in song, prayer, and preaching."[33] It would be more accurate not to restrict this kind of theologizing to Christians but to attribute it to Africans in general and their religions. In traditional African religions, it would mean that God's interaction with the African people is recorded in "living form," which also includes forms of oral communication, rituals, symbols, ceremonies, community faith, among other activities.[34] Theologizing in prayer by African Christians takes the form of "praising God; recalling his deeds of salvation, both ancient and

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27 Ibid., p. 200.
28 Ibid., p. 201.
29 John S. Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1975), p. 29.
30 Ibid.
31 Dickson, *Theology in Africa,* p. 123.
32 Pobee, *Toward an African Theology,* p. 73.
33 Dickson, *Theology in Africa,* p. 109.
34 Mbiti, "Encounter," p. 200.

present; petitions; and expressions of confidence in God's ability to save." In this way, the worshippers express their understanding of God and the Christian faith.[35]

The Akan people of Ghana are said to employ also their lyrics to express such understanding of God. In the Methodist Church, in particular, such lyrics are placed alongside traditional church hymns. Further theologizing in African beliefs in general is found in such references to God as: "the one on whom 'you lean and do not fall'; ... he it is who responds when called, ... the one who has always been there, 'the old, old one'."[36] In view of all this, only an outdated attempt to mystify and extol Christianity beyond necessary proportion can lead to the maintenance of the claim that theology is strictly a Christian enterprise. For theology in its elementary sense simply means thinking about, talking - that is, verbalizing - about God. This leads us to the question of who God is for Africans and: How is God perceived in African Theology?

2.3. God In African Traditional Religions

According to Mbiti, the God about whom the Bible speaks is the very God who was already known in traditional African religiosity. For this reason, it can be asserted in faith that those who supposedly brought God to the African people, the missionaries, were, rather, themselves sent by God-Self to Africa.[37] It may have been for the purpose of bringing the "new covenant," as the old one was already implicit in the African people's beliefs. Whatever else may be said about African religious beliefs, the supremacy of God - by whatever name God is called - is unquestionable. God is the Supreme Being. As such, not only is God above all other beings, but God is also accepted as "Creator, the Sustainer of the universe, the final authority and Overlord of society who has power of life and death."[38]

In the Akan (Ghana) worldview, below God in the hierarchy of divinities are lesser gods, the ancestors, and a host of spirit beings. Whether the name

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35 Dickson, *Theology in Africa,* p. 115.
36 Ibid., p. 55. See also p. 109.
37 See Mbiti, "Encounter," p. 201.
38 Pobee, *Toward an African Theology,* p. 46.

"gods" is the correct translation is a question, in view of strong claims made of "traditional monotheism" especially by African Theologians.[39] According to Setiloane, the plural for the Sotho/Tswana term "Modimo," that is, God, is not "Badimo." "Badimo" (ancestors) apparently does not have a singular. On the other hand, the plural "Medimo" ("Gods") does not refer to a plurality of gods worshipped, in the Sotho/Tswana religion, but rather to the various conceptions of God by different peoples and their religions. Thus we may talk about the "Gods" of different religions, meaning not many gods but, for instance, the Christian God, the Moslem God, the God of Hinduism, etc.

Whatever the real meaning of the term "gods" in the Akan religion, the relation of these divinities to God, the Supreme Being, may be likened to that of angels and saints in the Bible and Christian religion. God is believed to have delegated authority to the "gods" and to the ancestors - they act *in loco dei*. The reason for this, it is believed, is that God may not be approached lightly or "bothered with trivialities." In Akan society the "gods" are called children of the Supreme Being. Their power is considered both beneficent and dangerous. Yet although they stand between God and the ancestors, they are more dispensable than the latter.[40] On the one hand, they seem to be adhered to only for the favours they grant to their adherents, failing which they may be dispensed with; on the other, they are "believed to be interested in the moral living of humans." Like the ancestors, they are offended when there is a breach of conduct." They are the Supreme Being's executioners.[41]

The ancestors, for their part, are believed to influence the course of life on earth for good or for ill. Vilakazi refers to the ancestors as the equivalent of patron saints. He writes, "There is in Zulu cosmology the assimilation of parents into divinities, and this assimilation is via death; for death is an act of instant canonization'." Accordingly,

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39 See Gabriel Setiloane's explanation of the terms "Modimo," "Medimo," "Badimo," and their significance among the Sotho-Tswana. *African Theology: An Introduction* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1986).

40 See Pobee, *Toward an African Theology*, pp. 46, 48.

41 Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, p. 56.

> the dead emerge from death through the *ukubuyisa* custom as the saints and the lesser divinities who commune with *umvelinqangi* [Creator] on behalf of the living progeny and with the living themselves, bringing messages and conveying various moods and desires to those who are diseased.[42]

It is in this acquired divine state that they "give children to the living; they give good harvest; they provide sanctions for the moral life of the nation and accordingly punish, exonerate, or reward the living, as the case may be." Their authority is, nevertheless, derived from God. Such dependence of the living upon the ancestors seems, to Pobee, so much as to imply that the attitude of the former toward the latter is "more than veneration."[43] Because of the ridicule they often suffered for allegedly worshipping ancestors, Africans insisted in their own defence that they *venerated* rather than *worshipped* ancestors. The "more" in Pobee's statement obviously refers to this perception.

It may be relevant to ask at this stage: How thick or thin is or should be the line between "veneration" and "worship?" Are not Catholics, for instance, also often ridiculed for "worshipping" the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints? How does their response differ, if at all, from that of those who have to defend their belief in and attitude toward ancestors? This is not an attempt to equate the two kinds of belief; but it is meant to show that while certain practices may be condoned or "understood" among the different forms of Christian faith, there is, among Christians, a general tendency to judge non-Christian religions more harshly and rather disparagingly simply because they are different. It is because of this attitude that African theology has tended to be a somewhat apologetic and defensive kind of theology. Suffice it to note that African Theology now sees the need to understand and explain certain aspects of African traditional religions in order both to learn from them and to discover in what way they can contribute in rendering the Christian faith and theological reflection meaningful to the African people.

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42 See, Absolom Vilakazi with Bongani Mthethwa and Mthembeni Mpanza, *Shembe: The Revitalization of African Society* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1986), p. 37.

43 See Pobee, *Toward an African Theology,* p. 46.

2.4. The Question of Culture

It was earlier suggested that the ideal view of African Theology was originally that Christianity must be denuded of its foreign cultural cloak and donned anew in the dress of African culture. This was a suggestion to "deculturize" Christianity of its foreignness, if only to "reculturize" it in accordance with the demands of its new African context. It was also a call parallel, if not similar, to the call made by Bultmann many years ago for the demythologization of the Gospel in order to render it more understandable to modern society. As the latter call seemingly ended in space, so is it doubtful that there can be any success in removing the Western cultural cloak in Christianity in order to relate it meaningfully to the African context. The problem is, How does one distinguish cultural content from the Gospel itself before separating the two; is it as easy as peeling an orange? In other words, "Is there a core of the Gospel which is not culturally coloured?"[44]

While this may not necessarily be the case, surely it is not so difficult to tell that it is not part of the Gospel, for instance, that one should wear a jacket and shoes to go to worship. This is rendering the issue quite simplistic; and yet it is precisely such simplistic legalisms on the part of the Western missionary church which in the past created obstacles for the Gospel, making it an inseparable part of Western culture. The issue is more serious than this; but this is sufficient to illustrate what we mean by the need to "deculturize" the Christian message before it can be Africanized. This, as well as the idea of Africanization itself - or "reculturization" - at the same time acknowledges Dickson's warning that the assumption that "there can be a proclamation of the gospel that does not have a cultural particularity" is false.[45] Hence, while it may be possible to present the gospel "within indigenous cultural presuppositions," it is obviously doubtful that it can be completely removed from its Western "cultural sheath [in order,]" as Muzorewa suggests, "to speak and remain with the essential gospel."[46] Just as an African or any other "foreigner" speaks English with a foreign accent, the Gospel itself comes to Africa with a "foreign accent" (its foreign cultural cloak). It must, as much as

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44 Dickson, *Theology in Africa,* p. 118.
45 Dickson, *Theology in Africa,* p. 119.
46 Muzorewa, "The Future of African Theology," p. 39.

possible, be understood within and in spite of that "foreign accent." This must not, however, prevent its being indigenized and rendered relevant and meaningful to the African people and context.

The concept of indigenization in Africa, according to Pobee, "acknowledges that there is a whole heritage in the non-Christian culture and consciously attempts to come to terms with that heritage."[47] It should be emphasized, though, that indigenization, as already stated, cannot simply mean "adapting an existing theology to contemporary or local taste."[48] Indigenization cannot mean mere translation. A much better term for this process is perhaps "incarnation," meaning to "take up flesh," or to "take form" - doing so specifically within and in accordance with the context of African culture. Taking form in this way, in the context of African culture, does not simply mean becoming part of African culture but also means "the need for African Theology to address itself to the totality of the African existence." Theology, states Dickson, both judges and affirms. What it affirms "ranges from the African humanity to the Christ, ..."[49] As African humanity is part of African culture, we may conclude, its affirmation is an affirmation of African culture. It is this very culture which is ultimately the African's vehicle to Christian faith and fulfillment.

2.5 African Indigenous Churches As Forerunners in Christian Indigenization

The African Indigenous Churches are often alluded to as forerunners among the African Christian churches in reappropriating the African cultural heritage and so indigenizing Christianity. Among the reasons cited for their original secessions from the missionary churches are not only political and economic ones but also cultural and theological reasons. They sought freedom both from "an oppressive church situation," and "from 'deculturising', de-Africanizing, detribalizing treatment, and reacted . . . against 'a foreign,

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47 Pobee, *Toward an African Theology*, p. 57.
48 Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, p. 120.
49 Ibid., p. 136.

unadapted, western-oriented church which [did] not take note of the African approach and worldview'."[50]

While being generally positive about these churches, however, Dickson warns that they sometimes misinterpret the Bible. He also wonders whether the "facets of African culture adopted by [them] are always the most meaningful in terms of their care, value, or indeed, whether they are not so employed as to obscure the centrality of Christ."[51] One would, of course, be careful about accusing other Christian churches of biblical misinterpretation (for who has the monopoly to correct interpretation?). Yet it may be true that they often deviate from some of the Christian dogmatic tenets. For example, some of them question the divinity of Christ, while others question His equality with the Father on cultural grounds.[52]

Isaiah Shembe, founder and leader of one of the largest Indigenous Churches in South Africa, is recorded as having "stressed the Father in his teachings" while seeming to ignore the Son. His reason for doing so, it is said, was that it seemed to him as a Zulu "to offend against the dignity of the Father to stress the importance of the Son."

> In Zulu thought, the omission of the son is in no way regarded as a derogation of his status because the son's good works redound to the father's honour and because, by Zulu conceptions, the son is the extension of the father's personality."[53]

The divinity of Christ is also questioned by others on the grounds of difficulties with the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Immaculate Conception.[54] Such difficulties arise because of differences in cultural outlook.

As a consequence, Shembe, as also some of the other Indigenous Church leaders, did not accept the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Yet this rejection of the divinity of one person of the Trinity poses a problem. When acts like

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50 See J. B. Ngubane, "Theological Roots of the African Independent Churches and Their Challenge to Black Theology," in *The Unquestionabled Right to Be Free,* p. 80.

51 Dickson, *Theology in Africa,* p. 113.

52 See Paul Makhubu, *Who Are the African Independent Churches* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1988), pp 61-62.

53 Vilakazi, *Shembe,* p. 39.

54 See Makhubu, *Who Are the African Independent Churches,* pp. 61-62.

baptism have to be performed, the three persons of the Trinity have to be invoked. Hence Makhubu comes close to saying that it is primarily this dilemma which renders Christ indispensable in his group of indigenous churches - even though Christ is seemingly still deprived of his divinity. There can also be no healing and holy communion without the invocation of Christ's name.[55] This attitude, unfortunately, seems to reduce Christ to a mere instrument, without which these churches may not function. It thus becomes easy to see why they have often been accused of heresy. In the early church, with its dogmatism and intolerance, they certainly would not have survived the stake because of this. It is also in this light that Dickson's caution may be understood.

It follows that the contribution of the African Indigenous Churches in African Christianity is not in their "dogmatic excellence," nor in their "expert blending" of faith and culture. Rather, their contribution is said to be found chiefly in the following aspects, among others: in their doctrine of the spirit; in their apostolic zeal and missionary power; in their sense of belonging - a new community; in their belief in the universality of the Church; in their tolerance, worship, faith healing, counselling, prophetic advice, sacramental life and symbolism, and generosity - the art of joyful giving.[56] There is, certainly, no doubt that they draw most of their insights from African culture and traditional religion.[57] It has to be noted from the foregoing, though, that such insights can either be a hindrance or a facilitator to traditional Christian faith. The aforenamed aspects reflect the areas of strength of these religio-cultural insights, while the dogmas of the Trinity and the Incarnation represent their (insights) inhibiting nature and serious weakness. The question arising from this observation is: How far can a church deny some of the traditional Christian tenets and still be regarded as a Christian Church? This leads to another question, namely, Who is the judge?

It seems obvious that the response of those affected African Indigenous Churches to the last question would be that the Bible, as the "word of God," is the judge. They would continue to say that inasmuch as traditional Christian tenets were formulated within the Western cultural context, they

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55 See ibid., pp. 63-64.

56 See A. R. Sprunger, "The Contribution of the African Independent Churches to a Relevant Theology," cited by Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, p. 112.

57 See Muzorewa, *"The Future of African Theology,"* p. 41.

reflect the Western cultural bias. Hence, African Christians are also entitled to use their own "cultural tools" and outlook to interpret and appropriate the Bible. Some of their interpretations might not be acceptable to the Western Church and its theology, but this would not necessarily mean that they are not Christian, they would say. Essential to Christianity is the centrality of Jesus Christ, the extent of his divinity notwithstanding. What is more crucial is the inspiration that is believed to flow from him and his relationship with the Father and the Spirit.

Might we not, from this argument, speak of some form of indigenous African Christianity in the same way as we speak of Eastern and Western Christianity - the latter divided into Catholic and Protestant Christianity? Yet there is another question still to be answered: What, exactly, is involved in the concept of Christianity or in being a Christian? Is it merely a matter of accepting the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, or does it also include subscribing to the Christian tradition as it has developed through the ages? The answer seems to be that both the Bible and Tradition are imperative to qualify one as a Christian, or a church as a Christian church. The more pertinent question, however, lies hidden in the assumption contained in the alternative question posed above: how the Christian tradition itself developed through the ages.

From their own development, it seems obvious that the African Indigenous Churches do not question the entire tradition of the Christian church but only some aspects of it. Ngubane seems, without any dogmatic commitment, to make a case for them through the following comment on the development of the early church:

> Paul and the early church leaders did not simply condemn and jettison the Greek mystery religions and Greek philosophy. But these provided the matrix for the theologizing of the early church. This theologizing was translated and communicated in Greek religious and philosophical frames of reference ...[58]

It was perhaps in an implicit attempt to follow this example that "leading African Christians" sought to "rehabilitate African culture and the African

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58 Ngubane, *Theological Roots,* p. 76.

way of life in the context of their new faith."[59] Their interpretation of reality was quite different from the Western Christian interpretations because their traditions and customs were different. Because they were not convinced about the inferiority of their religious and cultural values, the majority of them remained - in some respects - "only partially converted according to missionary expectations."[60] Where Christianity could not provide the required explanation and results, they resorted to traditional beliefs and practices. This happened, for instance, in the major crises of life such as birth, illness, death, and in the performance of rites of passage. Shembe's church also openly embraced the practice of veneration of the dead (ancestors), who were viewed as part of the communion of saints.[61]

Ngubane makes the point that most of the traditional values and needs affirmed by some leaders of the indigenous churches were (are?) "recognized and sanctioned by either the Old Testament or the New Testament." Those sanctioned by the Old Testament are revelations through dreams and visions; complex rituals, purification, polygamy, the descent of God's spirit on the prophets, among other similar needs. Those santioned by the New Testament are healing, exorcism, apocalyptic and eschatological doctrines, denunciation of the Pharisees, *inter alia.*[62] On the other hand, most of these churches are also regarded as syncretistic insofar as they accept African "cosmological ideas and patterns of thought" while, at the same time, accepting the Biblical God as the "numinous." In this way, they attempt to make "creative synthesis of traditional and Christian beliefs, creatively formulating a truly African Christianity" which helps in the development of an African identity. Hence they represent, according to Ngubane, "radical indigenization and Africanization of Christianity."[63] Without such Africanization, it was felt, Christianity would remain an alien doctrine, devoid of any serious significance to the African.[64]

It is this desire in the African Indigenous Churches to make the Christian faith meaningful to the Africans through its blending with African culture

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59 Ibid., p. 77.
60 Ibid., pp. 76, 75.
61 See ibid., p. 76; Vilakazi, *Shembe,* p. 76.
62 Ngubane, *Theological Roots,* p. 76.
63 See Vilakazi, *Shembe,* p. 37; Ngubane, *Theological Roots,* p. 80.
64 See Vilakazi, *Shembe,* p. 72.

that makes them challenging to African Theology. In this challenge African Theology will, following Dickson's warning, have to be selective as well as to steer clear of their seemingly "heretical doubt" - in terms of the history of dogma - with regard to some of the aspects of traditional Christian faith. It is in response to this challenge that Dickson, in spite of his caution, states that no study of Christianity in Africa would be complete "without serious account being taken of the life and thought of [these] Churches."[65] Hence, while they do not, strictly speaking, necessarily constitute one of the sources for African Theology, as some have suggested, African Theology can learn from their concerns as well as from the way they try to address some of these concerns. At the same time, African Theology will need to go further and contemporize its approach to indigenization. To do this it must, as it has already acknowledged, take into account not only traditional religio-cultural needs but also present contextual and liberational demands.

In this way it will be able to overcome some of the pitfalls of a mere "ethnographical approach," strongly condemned by Buthelezi, and satisfy his requirements for an "anthropological approach." Not only, following Tutu, will African Theology become a soul-mate of Black Theology, but the latter will also easily blend into the former as an integral part of it. This means that Black Theology in South Africa will not relate to African Theology only as a species to a genus - the "smaller in a series of concentric circles" - as Tutu sees it. It will be fully integrated into the method of African Theology, thus ceasing to exist as a separate entity. In this way African Theology will have entered a period of maturity, and could now seriously engage in the business of real and substantive theologizing - not merely building a case for its own existence, as seems to have been largely the case so far.

3 CONCLUSION

An African Theology come of age, it follows, necessarily renders the separate existence of Black Theology in South Africa redundant. A relevant theology for Africa must not only arise out of and focus on the total reality of African life from south to north of the continent, but it must also be "African" by name.

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65 Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, p. 114.

There is nothing wrong with the name "Black Theology." American Black Theology was more relevant and inspirational to South African black theologians at the time when African Theology, with its emphasis on "religio-cultural indigenization," thought it had overcome problems similar to those common to Africans in South Africa and to African-Americans. Hence it was understandable that the name "Black Theology" would have more appeal and relevance to blacks in South Africa than "African Theology." The issues Black Theology dealt with were also more meaningful to South African black theologians than those addressed by African Theology. However, the situation has now changed. African Theology has been significantly rehabilitated and must continue to be rendered more responsive to all the existential problems of African Christians.

Both African and black theologians share in membership of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), a body which has challenged both and other third world theologians to be more critical and more inclusive in their outlook on problems affecting their different contexts. As a result of these challenges, some of the old conflicts between African Theology and Black Theology have been overcome and efforts are continuing to address remaining obstacles.

South African Black Theology continues to share commonalities with both African Theology and American Black Theology. It has also come to acknowledge that it cannot sacrifice the concerns stressed by either, insofar as they relate to the black South African context, for any single one of them. It must address both; that is, it must both work at indigenizing theology and at implementing its liberative mission. It is to this task that a genuine African Theology, as an African-grown and African-based theology, is called.

In the final analysis, the issue is not between a more relevant and a less relevant theology: an African Theology or a Black Theology. For Black Theology in South Africa is called to the same mission. In its development, however, it has tended to be one-sided and so less relevant. So has African Theology. With this recognition and the determination to address the challenge more fully, the question of relevance becomes less crucial for the moment. The issue that still has to be addressed is one of choosing the more appropriate name, bearing in mind that this is a name for a theology operative in Africa. Such an appropriate name appears to be "African Theology."

The "total reality of African life" to be addressed by this theology refers to all aspects of life as experienced in Africa: religious, socio-cultural, political, economic, sexual, ethnic and racial. These aspects of life call for a three-fold approach by the gospel, hence by African Theology. Such an approach includes affirmation, liberation, and transformation. Insofar as religion and culture belong to the very essence of a people, that is, insofar as they emerge from society and contain within them concrete and transcendent elements, the latter pointing to a higher reality than the present reality, they need affirmation. Insofar as they may be imprisoned in the other-worldly or in the past, refusing to accept their dynamism and need to adjust in accordance with concrete needs of the here-and-now, they need liberation. Liberation itself must necessarily lead to transformation; for we can hardly speak of liberation if life continues as before. New wine in old skins tastes as old.

Insofar as there are positive sides to developments in politics; the economy; gender, ethnic and race issues; they are to be welcomed and affirmed. Unfortunately, these aspects of life seem to be more in need of liberation and transformation than affirmation. There is far too much that is negative in them than what is positive, even to this day. Political liberation in most of Africa has mostly resulted in economic neocolonialism, elitism, corruption, and continued "internal oppression" of the masses. Sexual and ethnic oppression are universal sins from which Africa is not immune. The former is worse because of its subtelty and tacit acceptance as a "way of life." Africa must find its own way of liberating itself from this evil. It may have to begin by liberating itself from related cultural aspects, if this is where the evil is perceived to be embedded. The oppression of ethnic minorities is also universal, though it has often been made to seem worse in Africa through the tag of "tribalism" (all evils are equal but some evils are more equal than others!). A sin by another name, however, remains a sin. Here also African Theology must find ways to help address this problem in Africa.

Racism is a more selective form of ethnicism. It is more than merely ethnic- or colour-bound. It goes so far as to deny the humanity of other people because of their colour and/or racial origin. It dehumanizes and depersonalizes. Consequently, it exploits and suppresses. Black people the world over have been the chief victims of racism, either overtly or covertly expressed. Until recently, it was overtly sanctioned by law in South Africa, and this often gave the impression that it did not exist elsewhere in the world. There re-

mains in South Africa and all over the world groups of overt racists amidst contexts of covert racism. Thus the whole world has a vocation to continue fighting against racism, especially if half of this world calls itself Christian. With the changes currently taking place in South Africa, it remains to be seen what covert forms racism will take in this country.

African theologians must remain alert to confront this evil in all its forms and to demonstrate, as Boesak did in 1981 to the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, that it is "irreconcilable with the gospel of Jesus Christ." Hence it is a heresy.[66] Not only apartheid but racism as a whole is heretical, for it denies the image of God in other human beings because of their race or colour. Indeed, it is because of the dehumanizing nature of all these forms of oppression that they are to be challenged by African Theology. For the primary task of theology is to translate into concrete form the humanizing message of the gospel for God's people in their worldly existence. Such humanization results from their liberation from all forms of bondage.

Finally, speaking of a single, integrated African Theology to address the totality of the African reality is not to imply identity of experience in all of Africa. African Theology, as stated at the beginning of this paper, is contextual (as well as situational). It must, therefore, respond and address itself to the idiosyncracies and typical demands of individual situations and the experiences of people in such situations. Its content and method will, accordingly, remain to be adjusted and to develop in accordance with the demands of different situations or different countries. The overall thrust, however, must be the same.

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66 See Allan A. Boesak, *Black and Reformed: Apartheid, Liberation and the Calvinist Tradition* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1984), pp. 108-119.

JESUS IN THE PARABLES: CLASS AND GENDER READINGS

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1 INTRODUCTION

Many of us have become accustomed to reading the Bible with the use and help of commentaries. This is especially true for those trained in theological disciplines or in homiletics. There is of course nothing particularly wrong with that. In fact, like all technological aids, commentaries save time, are convenient and offer the benefits of previous scholarship. Similarly, however, an over-dependence on commentaries and on previous scholarship has its problems. Among these is the simple problem of de-skilling. All technologies do that, and it might be well for us to keep this in mind as we read the Bible through the eyes of others.

In this paper I propose an exegetical and hermeneutical conversation on the parables of Jesus without the use of commentaries. The aim is to see whether it is not possible to open up avenues and ways of understanding that may not be possible if we simply rely on established perspectives. The conversation will in particular pay attention to social class and gender issues. My motivation to confront the texts of the Bible on my own and with the resources of my community and struggle comes from the words of an introduction to an issue of a Journal entitled: Radical Religion, and sub-titled Class Origins and Class Readings. The editors say:

> Organized religion is not about to give us access to the full story of the Bible. We have to recover the Bible through our own efforts to penetrate and unlock its full resources. The clue to the Bible as a social class resource is the recognition of an inner affinity between life struggle in biblical world and life struggle today. The biblical world only looks placid when viewed from the composure of an established class perspective. If we are comfortable with having 'arrived' at a reasonable end

for our lives, biblical communities will appear to us as similarly secure and 'realized' communities. If we are engaged in identifying and overcoming the splits and barriers to imperfect community, biblical communities may 'open up' to us as kindred struggle contexts. (Radical Religion, vol. ii, nos. 2&3, 1974, p. 3)

2 MARK 14:3-9 THE WOMAN ANOINTS JESUS

The first observation to make is that apart from John none of the synoptic gospels names the woman in this story. There does seem like there is some uneasiness about who she is. Instead, the host and owner of the house where the anointing takes place gets to be named. It is a certain Simon who is to be remembered by the fact that he had 'suffered from a dreaded skin-disease'.

It is John's gospel that takes the jump and tells us who the woman was. Traditional exegesis makes no fuss about the fact that the synoptics, unlike John, do not care to name the woman. If it is Mary, as John's gospel, indicates then there are absences and presences as well as silences and eloquences that we must still probe.

The second observation I would like to make concerns the Action of the woman. In John's gospel she Took a litre of expensive perfume and poured the contents out on Jesus. In Matthew the woman Came with an alabaster full of perfume and poured it on Jesus. In Mark she Came with an alabaster full of perfume. In addition, she Broke the jar and poured the perfume on Jesus head.

I suspect that Mark intends us to capture something with this act of Breaking. Why did she break the jar. Or is this just another word for opening the jar. If not, I would like to know the symbolism of her act. Is this an act of defiance. How are we going to know and why are we not being explained to in the story. More importantly, is this story capable of explaining this to us.

The last point raises a key question for an exegete of liberation: Whose story is this anyway? It is quiet clear who about the story is. But what are the principal ideological and social class questions underlying this story? The reactions of other characters in the story helps to answer this question. The text says: "Some of the people there became angry and said to one another: What was the use of wasting the perfume? It could have been sold for more

than three hundred silver coins and the money given to the poor!' They criticized her harshly."(vs. 5).

The issue of the poor is quiet prominent in the story. It comes out both in the reaction of the group of people who criticized the woman and in the response we are told Jesus made to them. Clearly, we are dealing with a group that sees itself as having a conscience about the condition of the poor. It is also a group that has taste or is able to judge value. The group is concerned about the wasting of an expensive perfume. According to them, if the perfume is to be wasted, there are morally more acceptable ways of dispensing with such a valuable commodity: sell it and use the money to give it to the poor. That is certainly a smart combination of a sense of value and a social conscience.

Jesus also comments on the issue of the poor. And his statement on the poor is responsible for a deeply ingrained attitude about poverty and the poor on the part of a section of Christian people all over the world. The statement says, with a ring of pain for those who are poor today, and I suspect then also, that: "The poor you will always have with you"(vs. 7). I have difficulty accepting that Jesus said this. I would like to have some help from New Testament scholars. Is there a basis for accepting this rendering of Jesus' response? I have an ideological hunch that Jesus said something else. I am, however, open to be convinced otherwise. It seems more probable to me that Jesus would have said, rather, that: The poor you have always had with you, You hypocrites. Why now are you pretending that you are concerned about them when you see what this woman is doing?

Be that as it may. It is unlike Jesus to dismiss the poor in the way the text suggests. On the other hand, it is like the Biblical texts themselves in general to take such a position. And so once again, we are faced with an excruciating hermeneutical challenge.

I am not as impressed as Elizabeth Schlussler Fiorenza about the comment that wherever the gospel is preached what she has done will be told in memory of her. Something else would have made a greater impression on me. It is this: Her own reason, told through her own voice, why it is she did what she did. I am dying to find out what was going on in her heart and mind. What is the point of telling the story of what she did in the words of those who silenced her and disallowed her speaking to us? It seems to me that a hermeneutics of liberation should truly concern itself with the silence of this

woman or the eloquence of her action by engaging it through the silences of women in our time or the eloquence of their actions. Everybody speaks for her. Neither the text, nor the host in the text, nor the unnamed audience, nor even Jesus allows the woman to speak.

3 LUKE 19:11-27 THE PARABLE OF THE GOLD COINS OR THE NOBLE MAN

The key observation I want to make about this parable is that like many texts of the Bible it strongly dictates how it should be read. And surprise, surprise, that is how generations of readers and scholars have read it. It call on us to judge harshly, as it itself does, the servant who followed a alternative logic in dealing with the coins given him by the Noble man. The text also enjoins us by some subtle means to support it in ignoring the voice of protest of the crowed who complained: "Sir he already has ten coins", surely he cannot be given the only coin that the other servant has. And the ideology of this story has ruled the world ever since without an ideological protest from Christians against this ideology. Here is the ideology: "I tell you," Jesus replied, "that to every person that has something, even more will be given; but the person who has nothing, even the little that he has will be taken away from him"(v26).

If you think that is bad, wait for the trump card and imagine the implications in situations of repression especially where the army may be the instrument of such a repression. The story ends with the following words: "Now as for those enemies of mine who did not want me to be their king, bring them here and kill them in my presence!"(vs27)

From the point of view of liberation theology, though, it is the suppression in the text of the story of the explanation of the man who did not invest his coin which is significant. He draws clearly from his experience of oppression and acts on the basis of that. He says: I know you oppressors. You are predictable. There is no way of winning with you. I am afraid of you, and I have cause to be afraid of you: You are a hard man; you take what is not yours and reap what you did now sow!(vs21).

I still do not understand why it is that oppressed readers of the Bible have not found these words resonating with their own experience. I do not know

why scholars of the bible from oppressed and exploited communities have not chosen the side of the marginalized servant in this story?

4 MATTHEW 21:33-45 PARABLE OF THE TENANTS IN THE VINEYARD

It is interesting that the Good News Bible captions this parable: the parable of the tenants in the Vineyard. I would argue that it should more appropriately be entitled: the parable of the absentee landlord.

Be that as it may. In this story, as in most parables and texts of the Bible, there is a clear perspective which the text is championing. The reader is in no doubt as to what needs to be condemned: the beating, killing and stoning of the messengers of the landlord. The concentration of feeling and drama with which the text communicates these acts takes away from any other features of the story. There is no time to think about the landlord to tenant economic and power relations! The reader cannot even begin to ponder the nature of the mode of production that underlies the social system from which the text was produced!

Without much ado, the reader knows which side she or he must take in the story. And most readers do indeed take that side. The situation is made worse by when the tenants kill not only the subsequent groups of messengers, but also the son of the landlord!

It may feel and look really bad for any morally motivate person. For Christians it is really worse because of the christological implications which the story itself draws from this climax of the text: "Jesus to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures: The stone which the builders rejected, has become the head of the corner; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? (vs. 42)

And then the writer adds a piece which I think the ideologists of the IMF and the World Bank will love to know exists in the Bible, in the New Testament, if it is not already the basis of the way they are able to punish countries and nations by moving their resources to obedient clients. Jesus is reported to have said: "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it"(vs. 43).

5 INDEPENDENCE, RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT: BEYOND F.W. DE KLERK AND NELSON MANDELA

In my country in the past four years we have seen a move from an old status quo to a new settlement. The key players in that process have been De Klerk and Mandela. Like the texts of the Bible in which we hear certain things and do not hear others, see certain things and miss to notice others, the political texts of De Klerk and Mandela have made present certain realities and have absented others; they voice to certain formerly unheard things and rendered yet others silent. The challenge for a theology of genuine freedom is whether it can beat the faith of the exodus in its struggle with the Davidic establishment and go beyond De Klerk and Mandela.

It seems to me that in seeking to develop a hermeneutic of good news to the poor in the Third World, the question is no longer on which side God is. That was a good question for its time. Now, however, the relevant question is how to interpret the eloquence with which the poor are silent and the absence through which they are present in the pages of the Bible. It is in struggling with these silences and absences that a new and creative reappropriation of the liberation of the gospel takes place. It would be really nice to know that God is on our side, but in the context of the continuing reality of colonisation and recolonisation in the countries of the Third World, we simply cannot start there. We may indeed end there.

For myself I would not mind a theology of liberation which although it cannot start there but can certainly work itself to a point of ending with the great affirmation of Paul that: "If God be for us, who can be against us?"(Romans 8:31)

BOOK REVIEWS

BEVANS, STEPHEN B 1993. *Models of contextual theology: Faith and Culture.* Orbis Books, (146pp.). R81,95

Third World Theologies, Black Theology and Feminist Theology: all these theologies are regarded as forms of contextual theology. Their aproach is generally described as inductive, critically analyzing the situation and relating the gospel message to this situation. Various emphases are laid on particular situations and the need to affirm some of their aspects while seeking relief from their oppressive aspects. Culture, socio-political and economic factors, racial, class and gender issues all form the bases or starting points for the various forms of contextual theology.

They all ask the question, What does the gospel have to say to *these* particular people in their particular situation under their particular circumstances of life? The major question, however, is, Is its method of approach in dealing with these various factors and situations the same? In other words, is contextual theology a unitary method of doing theology or are there various methods, besides the various starting points or points of emphasis, in contextual theology?

Bevans's book tries to answer this question. To my thinking, this is done quite effectively. In reading the book one cannot help wondering how many theologians, particularly those falling broadly under the label "contextual theology" - whether African Theology, Black Theology or Feminist Theology, i.a. - ever stop to analyze the various possible approaches to their theologies and to determine where exactly they themselves fit. My guess is that few, if any, ever do so. After reading Bevans, it will no longer be possible to write "unconsciously" about contextual theology in any of its various manifestations. Contextual theologians will feel compelled, at least implicitly, to identify clearly their specific approaches in order to explain more meaningfully the bases and significances of these approaches.

Bevans is not necessarily writing about the "popular contextual theologies," nor is he restricting the term "contextual theology" to any particular form of theology, such as those mentioned above. In fact, he seems to have as one of his aims the reclaiming of the idea of contextual theology for all theology, including Western theology. He begins by noting that all theology - not only Third World Theologies - is contextual. It is contextual insofar as it arises from a particular situation and tries to respond to the needs of that particular situation in its totality. This applies equally to the theology of the Bible itself, to patristic, medieval and reformation theologies, right up to present-day American and European theologies, among other forms.

Yet it cannot be denied today that the term "contextual theology" has come to be used more in reference to the method of theology adopted largely by Third World Theologies, particularly those referred to as liberation theologies. In fact, it would seem pointless to attach the qualifier "contextual" to theology if all theology is necessarily understood to be contextual.

According to Bevans, various contextual theologians, even within the same type of theology (e.g., Liberation Theology), often have different ways of theologizing from their contexts. This depends largely on whether their starting point is gospel and tradition, culture and social change, history and general human experience within a specific situation, subjective or objective, etc. Depending largely on these starting points it is possible, according to Bevans, to identify at least five models of contextual theology.

These models include: 1. the *translation model* - often referred to as the adaptation or inculturation model. This model begins with scripture and tradition and tries to adapt them to a particular culture; 2. the *anthropoligical model*, which emphasizes cultural identity and tries to understand the gospel message in relation to a particular culture; 3. the *praxis model*, which begins with experience, going through reflection on the gospel/tradition and ending with informed action; 4. the *synthetic model*, which tries to synthesize the various starting points and their concerns in order to arrive at a more meaningful understanding of the gospel in relation

to the situation; and finally 5. the *transcendental model*, which emphasizes the subject of theology rather than its object (content). The subject is seen as some sort of common denominator of the total socio-cultural experience in the light of which the meaning of the gospel is analyzed and interpreted.

Bevans describes these models and discusses them fully, then proceeds to examine them critically. He further discusses, briefly, two theological figures who - in his opinion - best represent each model. Unfortunately, most of the theologians discussed in these examples are not some of the well-known representative figures of the "common" contextual theologies. This may be in accordance with his plan to reclaim the idea of contextual theology, as suggested earlier. He does, however, mention some of the latter in discussing each model. In criticizing each model Bevans tries hard to be objective and makes it difficult, in the end, for the reader to know where he himself stands concerning a particular model. Most of the examples given on each model are helpful in further clarifying it. The same cannot, however, be said of examples given on the transcendental model. The two theologians chozen to represent this model seem to have been chozen purely arbitrarily and provide almost no clarification whatsoever to this model, in my opinion.

In my own assessment, what Bevans describes as the synthetic model seems to be the more comprehensive and appropriate model that can be employed by all contextual theologies. It seems to pull everything together and to "leave no stone unturned" in mutually relating the context - in its totality - and the message of the gospel. It further seems possible to emphasize the concerns of a particular model (reflecting the situation which forms the basis for theologizing) within the general approach of the synthetic model.

The book, though rather expensive for its size, is a must for all students of contextual theology whether understood as Bevans suggests or as it has generally been thus far. It will assist in their analysis of various writings in the various forms of contextual theology and give them a clear sense of the concerns of various contextual theologians as shaped by their situational experiences. It will also help do away with a feeling of fumbling and uncertainty in comparing different contextual theologies. This will be possible because they may now be able to pin down a particular author to a particular standpoint, while understanding, of course, that these models are not necessarily tight categories but mainly aids for understanding.

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BROWN-DOUGLAS, Kelly. *The Black Christ.* Maryknoll,N.Y.: Orbis Books.

Prof. Kelly Brown-Douglas, an African-American theologian who teaches theology at Howard University in Washington,D.C. is the third black woman to write a book on Christology in recent times. She follows Jaqui Grant and Delores Williams in raising important and uncomfortable questions to traditional christologists. In her particular case, she opens and closes this book with a summary of the story of her grand mother who provides her with a perspective on Christology. She says:'After watching her in Church, seeing how she never failed to get on her knees to pray before going to bed, and noticing her bible always opened to the twenty-third psalm, I had no doubt that it was because of her faith in the God of Jesus Christ that she could 'keep going day in and day out.'(p.2) See also p. 97. In other words, christology will be expounded from the perspective of a black woman's struggle for survival and liberation.

The significance of this perspective lies in the reading of the history of African-American women in the U.S. and the selection of sheroes among them. Brown-Douglas selects those women who are known for their deep faith in the God of liberation as well as for their struggle against oppression. They include Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth and Fannie Lou Hamer. The reading of the history of these black sheroes suggests a particular analysis of American society to Brown-Douglas. That society will be analyzed socio-politically as well as relio-culturally. The results of that analysis are that liberation is indivisible, that it will not be complete if only black women are the beneficiaries. They are members of the black community and their

liberation is therefore inseparable from that of the black community as a whole. In determining the scope of her christology, the concept of wholeness is adopted.

Brown-Douglas also builds on the long tradition of the Black Christ that has its roots in the slave religion in the U.S. She intends to make a contribution to the understanding of the Black Christ from a womanist perspective.

In the first part of the book, Brown-Douglas explores the meaning of the Black Christ to date. She argues that it was with Black Theology that the identity of Christ and His works came together to define Christ's blackness.(p.6) In chapter 1. she explores the historical trajectory of the Black Christ. In chapter 2. she argues that the civil rights struggle in the U.S. in the 1960's compelled Black Theologians to deepen and become more explicit on who Christ was and what he was for Black people in their struggle for liberation. Here two traditions emerged, based on the almost parralel paradigms of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. Chapter 3. examines three distinct models of the Black Christ that emerged in Black Theology during the 1960's and later, namely that of Albert Cleage, James Cone and J. Deotis Roberts. She also discusses how they differ from and relate to each other.

In the second part of her book, Brown-Douglas, explores the strengths and weaknesses of the above images of the Black Christ and goes on to suggests what more should be said in order for comprehensive liberation to be achieved. The critical part she undertakes in chapter 4. wherein she is guided by the questions on adequacy of the meanings of blackness of Christ as seen against the background of the challenges facing black people, both male and female. She also asks explicitly whether those meanings include those that black women derive from their understanding of Jesus Christ's person and works. The answer as well as the way forward will be provided in chapter 5. In this last chapter, the author returns to the use of the analytical tools we referred to in the beginning of this review.

According to Brown-Douglas, African-Americans should strive against all the forces that devide the black community into men and women, that devides them from other oppressed people in the world. They should recongnize instead, the links that exist in the history of oppression as well as that of the struggles of oppressed people in the world, especially that of the people of the Third World. That perspective will encourage a dialogue with other theologians in EATWOT circles. She is convinced that if women theologians in the Third World could dialogue, they would generate enough power to turn the world around.

A religio-cultural analysis enables African-Americans to discover those aspects of black life that have sustained them through the years and empowered them in their struggle against loss of identity and oppression. These elements, namely religion and culture, have empowered them in that struggle. Without being uncritical of them, the author points out the importance of the logical framework of affirmation of African cultural elements, namely Afrocentricism. Wholeness is fundamental in African culture and religion. This is an important contribution that the author makes to the dialogue on black christology. This element distinguishes her approach from those of feminist theologians.

The question that faces Brown-Douglas is:what does she have to add to what black male theologians have said about Christ. Her answer to this question is the following: '... the Black Christ does more than endorse Black people in their struggle against White racism. The womanist Christ is seen ... also as a prophet.'(p.107) Christ carries forth the work of 'Moses and Amos'. Christ works critically outside as well as inside the Black community in order to achieve comprehensive liberation for the entire community. That answer brings the author back to the Black community insearch of living symbols and icons that radiate that image of Christ. She comes full circle back to Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman and fannie Lou Hamer in past history. As far as the present history is concerned , she sees the foot prints of Christ wherever 'people are engaged in a struggle for that community's wholeness.'(p.108). Those people among whom the footprints of Christ are found, are the poores black women. They constitute the measure of the extent to which the Black community is free.

Kelly Brown-Douglas has presented a Christology that criticizes the Black church's image. It is, for all intents and purposes, a church that is male dominated. The leadership is male, the official theology is male determined in a church that is at least 70% female. This Christology also

suggests a remedy to that situation. Only a christology that starts with wholeness can enable the church to achieve wholeness of liberation for the Black community.

This is a good book for academics and students of Christology. It constitutes a distinct voice in the growing body of black women theologians. I recommend it unreservedly.

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