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-

---

1 Tinyiko Sam Maluleke teaches in the Department of Missiology, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa. The article has been adapted from a paper originally read in two parts as a discussion starter at an Urban Mission workshop organised by the Pretoria based Urban Industrial Mission on the 18th and 25th August 1994 at the St Andrew Presbyterian Church in Pretoria.

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.

---

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

---

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

---

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

---

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

---

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.]

---

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).

---

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.

REFERENCES CITED

Anderson, Allan. 1992. *African Pentecostalism in A South African Urban Environment. A Missiological Evaluation.* (Doctoral dissertation). Pretoria: University of South Africa.

- - - - - - - - 1993. *Tumelo - The Faith of African Pentecostals in South Africa*. Pretoria: UNISA.

Bernstein, Ann & McCarthy Jeff. (eds) 1990. *Opening The Cities. Comparative Perspectives on Desegregation*. Durban: The Urban Foundation & Indicator Project South Africa.

Bosch, David. 1991. *Transforming Mission. Paradigm shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll: Orbis.

Bourdillon, M.F.C. 1993. *Where are the Ancestors? Changing culture in Zimbabwe*. Harare: University of Zimbabwe.

Chidester, David. 1992. *Shots in the streets. Violence and religion in South Africa.* Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

Church and the Urban Crisis. Statements from Black and White Caucuses, National Council of Churches Conference on the Church and Urban tensions, Washington D.C., September 27-30, 1967. In, Wilmore, Gayraud S. & Cone, James H. (eds) 1979. *Black Theology. A Documentary History, 1966-1979.* Maryknoll: Orbis. 43-47.

Cochrane, James. 1987. *Servants of Power. The role of English-speaking Churches 1903-1930.* Johanneburg: Ravan Press.

Cox, Harvey. 1965. *The Secular City*. London: SCM.

Gollwitzer, Helmut. 1979. Why Black Theology? In, Wilmore, Gayraud S. & Cone, James H. (eds) 1979. *Black Theology. A Documentary History, 1966-1979.* Maryknoll: Orbis. 152-173.

Greenway, Roger S. & Monsma, Timothy M. *Cities. Mission's New Frontier.* Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

Knitter, Paul F. 1985. *No other name? A critical survey of Christian Attitudes Towards the World Religions.* Maryknoll: Orbis.

Kritzinger, Klippies. 1993. Working for religious tolerance. In, Venter, Dawid (ed) 1993. *Towards a democratic future. The Church and the current situation.* Braamfontein: Institute for Contextual Theology. 88-96.

Magubane, Bernard Makhosezwe. 1979. *The Political economy of Race and Class in South Africa.* London: Monthly Review Press.

Majeke, Nosipho. 1952. *The role of missionaries in conquest.* Johannesburg: Society of Young Africa.

Maluleke, T.S. 1993a. Mission, Ethnicity and Homeland. The case of the EPCSA. In, *Missionalia* 21:3 (November) 236-252.

- - - - - - - 1993b. Review of, Anderson, Allan. 1992. *Bazalwane - African Pentecostala in South Africa.* Pretoria. UNISA. Missionalia 21:2 (Aug 1993) 186-187.

- - - - - - - 1994. Review of, Anderson, Allan. 1993. *Tumelo - The Faith of African Pentecostals in South Africa.* Pretoria: UNISA. Missionalia 22:1 (Apr 1994) 61-62.

Mofokeng, Takatso. 1993. The Future Image of Black Theology in Sout Africa. *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa.* 7:2. (November) 133-147.

Mosala, J. 1984. The use of the Bible in Black Theology. *Black Theology and the Black Struggle. St Francis Xavier (Cape Town) Conference Report.* Braamfontein: Institute for Contextual Theology. 93-123.

Mosala, Itumeleng J. 1989. *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Oosthuizen, Gerhardus C. 1992. *The Healer Prophet in Afro-Christian Churches.* Leiden: E.J. Brill.

Saayman, Willem. 1994. Christian Mission in South Africa. A historical reflection. In, *International Review of Mission.* LXXXIII:328 (January) 11-19.

Shorter, Aylward. 1992. *The Church in the African City.* Maryknoll: Orbis.

Smit, P. & Booysen J.J. 1977. *Verstedeliking in die tuislande. 'n Nuwe dimensie in die verstedelikingsproses van die Swart bevolking van Suid Afrika?* Pretoria: Universiteit van Pretoria.

Sundkler, B.G.M. 1961 (2nd edition). *Bantu prophets in South Africa.* London: International African Institute.

Villa-Vicencio, Charles. 1992. *A Theology of Reconstruction. Nation-building and Human Rights.* Cape Town: David Philip.

West, Martin. 1975. *Bishops and prophets in a Black City. African Independent Churches in Soweto, Johannesburg.* Cape Town: David Philip.

Wilson, Francis. 1972. *Migrant Labour In South Africa.* Johannesburg: South African Council of Churches & SPROCAS.