

*Christ founded no church;  
established no state;  
made no laws;  
imposed no government  
or exterior authority.*

*He simply set himself  
to write the law of God  
in the hearts of men that  
that they might be able  
to govern themselves*

*- Herbert Newton*

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REGISTERED AT THE GPO AS A NEWSPAPER

BY DIE POSKANTOOR AS NUUSBLAD INGESKRYF

**pro veritate**

## PEOPLE MEETING ROUND THINGS

People become very disturbed at the multiplicity of denominations. Spires sprout over suburbs in their thousands, and over townships in their tens of thousands, each marking a group claiming a divine call to existence.

Ecumenism has been the major church issue of the century and many mergers and amalgamations have occurred, but not infrequently those who have fought tenaciously for the principle shy away from the practice. The major denominations are still talking. Many smaller churches seem to have revivals, rows and rifts on an annual basis.

Denominational confusion is compounded by the unscriptural importance given to organisations, constructions, and doctrine. For many people 'church' means a building consecrated and hallowed to God's work; to others it is an organisation born in the days of faith and developed in devotion to national or international status. Others see 'church' as the preserver of sound doctrine, the protector of the faith once delivered to the saints.

Because the church is none of these, those who fight for such partial expressions are inevitably caught in un-Christian wrangles. The Church is the people of God.

Religious people have always tried to anchor God down by pieces of real estate and bitterly resented those, like Stephen; who criticised such action.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus was under constant attack from those affronted by his attitude to religious rituals and social taboos.<sup>2</sup>

Paul agonised over those who fought for religious systems and traditional organisations.<sup>3</sup>

The way of Jesus is not a religious thing but a loving thing;<sup>4</sup>

not a doctrine thing but an action thing;<sup>5</sup>

not a system but a life;<sup>6</sup>

centred not on rituals but on people.<sup>7</sup>

Thus the focus of the church in the New Testament is not a building meant for religious exercise but homes meant for living in; it is not assent to the belief of an individual but the experience of a group; it is not an organisation which seeks to produce action but the experience of actions which have to be organised. It is not rows of people looking at the backs of other peoples heads in pews, but people meeting round things — tables, fires, sick beds, wells, crosses — looking one another in the face.

Many of our church squabbles have little to do with the Christ living in us today, and reveal this when they become more important than loving people.

If we are concerned by conflicts between churches we should get together in our homes and talk about loving like Jesus, instead of talking about worshipping like one another. We should concentrate on the Gospel of love, and not on religious questions which owe most to tradition, taste, and temperament.

This is particularly so when people wish to solve racial tensions by 'going to church together'. The first time might be a rewarding once-off experience, but to expect mere church attendance to achieve between racial and cultural groups what it cannot achieve within them is ridiculous. Those who wish to share religious exercises together can do it in churches, but those who wish to bring the power of the gospel to liberate men must meet where Jesus did — in the homes of the people.

A couple of hours experience in someone's home can produce more love of neighbour than a lifetime of ritual and exposition in a church building. One simple act of service and concern, given or received, means more than all the words written about it. A mixed group that perseveres in meeting in Christ's name to work out what love means in their lives and the life of the community is worth more to the peace and prosperity of men in the Kingdom of God than any ideology or manifesto.

We do not deny that sound doctrine, good organisation, and a roof over worshippers' heads are desirable things.

But it is action taken together in love that leads people to know the truth of Christ's doctrine;<sup>8</sup>

it is making disciples for God's Kingdom in the community that needs organising;<sup>9</sup>

it is the homeless, the needy, the oppressed, the outcast who need a roof over their heads;<sup>10</sup>

and it is where two or three meet together in His name that Christ is present to do these things.<sup>11</sup>

Not two or three hundred, in churches: just a family in a home. That is the source of the Christian revolution we need.

### FOOTNOTES:

1. Acts 7. 44ff

2. Mk. 1.22; 2.6, 15, 24ff; 3.1-6

3. Acts 15.

4. 1 Cor. 15.1-3

5. Jas. 2.14-17; 1 J. 4.16

6. Matt. 23.4; Ph. 2.1ff

7. Matt. 23.23-27; Eph. 5.2; Col. 2.16ff

8. J. 7.17

9. Matt. 28.19; Acts 2.41ff; 4.32ff

10. Matt. 25.31ff; L. 4.18

11. Matt. 18.20

# DEVELOPMENT — ANOTHER NAME FOR PEACE

—by Julius Nyerere

*The following is a slightly abridged version of an address given by President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania to the Marykroll Missionary Order in New York in the autumn of 1970, reprinted from "The Tablet".*

Poverty is not the real problem of the modern world. For we have the knowledge and resources which could enable us to overcome poverty. The real problem — the thing which creates misery, wars and hatred among men — is the division of mankind into rich and poor . . .

The significance about this division between the rich and the poor is not simply that one man has more food than he can eat, more clothes than he can wear and more houses than he can live in, while others are hungry, unclad and homeless. It is not that one nation has the resources to provide comfort for all its citizens, and the other cannot provide basic services. The reality and depth of the problem arises because the man who is rich has power over the lives of those who are poor, and the rich nation has power over the policies of those who are not rich. And even more important is the fact that our social and economic system, nationally and internationally, supports these divisions and constantly increases them, so that the rich get even richer and more powerful, while the poor get relatively poorer and less able to control their own future.

This continues despite all the talk of human equality, the fight against poverty, and of development. Still the rich individuals within nations, and the rich nations within the world, go on getting richer very much faster than the poor overcome their poverty. Sometimes this happens through the deliberate decision of the rich, who use their wealth and their power to that end. But often — perhaps more often — it happens "naturally" as a result of the normal workings of the social and economic systems men have constructed for themselves . . .

Both nationally and internationally this division of mankind into the tiny minority of rich, and the great majority of poor, is rapidly becoming intolerable to the majority — as it should be. The poor nations and the poor peoples of the world are already in rebellion against it; if they do not succeed in securing change which leads towards greater justice, then that rebellion will become an explosion. Injustice and peace are in the long run incompatible; stability in a changing world must mean ordered change towards justice, not mechanical respect for the status quo. It is in this context that development has been called another name for peace.

The purpose of development is man. It is the creation of conditions, both material and spiritual, which enable man the individual, and man the species, to become his best. That is easy for Christians to understand because Christianity demands that every man should aspire towards union with God through Christ. But although the Church — as a consequence of its concentration upon man — avoids the error of identifying development with new factories; increased output, or greater national income statistics, experience shows that it all too often makes the opposite error. For the representatives of the Church, and the Church's organisations, frequently act as if man's development is a personal and "internal" matter, which can be divorced from the society and the economy in which he lives and earns his daily bread. They preach resignation; very often they appear to accept the social, economic and political framework of the present-day world. They seek to ameliorate

intolerable conditions through acts of love and kindness. But when the victims of poverty and oppression begin to behave like men and try to change those conditions, the representatives of the Church stand aside.

## **Rebellion as Development**

My purpose is to suggest to you that the Church should accept that the development of peoples means rebellion. At a given and decisive point in history men decide to act against those conditions which restrict their freedom as men. I am suggesting that unless we participate actively in the rebellion against those social structures and economic organisations which condemn men to poverty, humiliation and degradation, then the Church will become irrelevant to man and the Christian religion will degenerate into a set of superstitions accepted by the fearful. Unless the Church, its members and its organisations express God's love for man by involvement and leadership in constructive protest against the present conditions of man, then it will become identified with injustice and persecution. If this happens, it will die — and, humanly speaking, deserve to die — because it will then serve no purpose comprehensible to modern man.

For man lives in society. He becomes meaningful to himself and his fellows only as a member of that society. Therefore, to talk of the development of man, and to work for the development of man, must mean the development also of that kind of society which serves man, which enhances his well-being, and preserves his dignity. Thus, the development of peoples involves economic development, social development, and political development. And at this time in man's history, it must imply a divine discontent and determination for change. For the present condition of men must be unacceptable to all who think of an individual person as a unique creation of a living God. We say man was created in the image of God. I refuse to imagine a God who is poor, ignorant, superstitious, fearful, oppressed, wretched — which is the lot of the majority of those he created in his own image. Men are creators of themselves and their conditions, but under present conditions we are creatures, not of God, but of our fellow men.

Surely there can be no dispute among Christians about that. For mankind has never been so united or so disunited; has never had such power for good nor suffered under such evident injustices. Man's capacity has never been so clear, nor so obviously and deliberately denied.

## **A Divided World**

The World is one in technological terms. Men have looked down on the earth from the moon and seen its unity. In jet planes I can travel from Tanzania to New York in a matter of hours. Radio waves enable us to talk to each other — either in love or abuse — without more than a few seconds elapsing between our speech and the hearing of it. Goods are made which include materials and skills from all over the world — and are then put up for sale thousands of miles from their place of manufacture.

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Yet at the same time the divisions between men also expand at an

ever-increasing rate. The national income per head in the United States is said to be more than £1 000 a year; in Tanzania it is approximately £26 — that is, it would take a Tanzanian forty years to earn what an American earns in one year, and we are not the poorest nation on earth. Further, it has been estimated that, while the rich countries are adding approximately £20 a year to the per capita income of their citizens, the average increase per capita in the poor countries is less than £1 per year. It has been estimated that up to five hundred million people on the earth today are suffering from hunger — from never having enough to eat. Further, one out of every two of the world's peoples is suffering from malnutrition — from deficiencies of protein or other essential health-giving foods. And finally, let me remind you that even within the wealthiest countries of the world, the misery and oppression of poverty is experienced by thousands, or even millions, of individuals, families, and groups.

So the world is not one. Its peoples are more divided now, and also more conscious of their divisions, than they have ever been. They are divided between those who are satisfied and those who are hungry. They are divided between those with power and those without power. They are divided between those who dominate and those who are dominated; between those who exploit and those who are exploited. And it is the minority which is well fed, and the minority which has secured control over the world's wealth and over their fellow men. Further, in general, that minority is distinguished by the colour of their skins and by their race. And the nations in which most of that minority of the world's people live have a further distinguishing characteristic — their adoption of the Christian religion.

These things cannot continue, and Christians, above all others, must refuse to accept them. For the development of men, and the development of peoples, demands that the world should become one and that social justice shall replace the present oppressions and inequalities.

### **The Development of Peoples**

In order to achieve this, there must be economic development and equitable distribution of wealth. For what is required is not simply an increase in the national income figures of the poor countries, nor a listing of huge increases in the production of this crop or that industry. New factories, roads, farms and so on, are essential, but they are not enough in themselves. The economic growth must be of such a kind, and so organised, that it benefits the peoples, which means that social and political development must go alongside economic development — or even precede it. For unless society is so organised that the people control their own economies and their own economic activity, then economic growth will result in increased injustices because it will lead to increased inequality, both nationally and internationally . . .

In other words, the development of peoples follows from economic development only if this is achieved on the basis of the equality and human dignity of all those involved. And human dignity cannot be given to a man by the kindness of others. Indeed, it can be destroyed by kindness which emanates from an action of charity. For human dignity involves equality and freedom, and relations of mutual respect among men. Further, it depends on responsibility and on a conscious participation in the life of the society in which a man moves and works. Let us be quite clear about this. If the Church is interested in man as an individual it must express this by its interest in the society of which those individuals are members. For men are shaped by the circumstances in which they live. If they are treated like animals, they will act like animals. If they are denied dignity, they will act without dignity. If they are treated solely as a dispensable means of production, they will become soul-less "hands", to whom life is a matter of doing as little work as possible and then escaping into the illusion of happiness and pride through vice.

Therefore, in order to fulfil its own purpose of bringing men to God, the Church must seek to ensure that men can have dignity in their lives and in their work. It must itself become a force of social

justice and it must work with other forces of social justice wherever they are, and whatever they are called. Further, the Church must recognise that men can only progress and grow in dignity by working for themselves, and working together for their common good. The Church cannot uplift a man; it can only help to provide the conditions and the opportunity for him to co-operate with his fellows to uplift himself.

### **The Meaning of Service Today**

What does this mean for those who give their lives to the service of the Church?

First, it means that kindness is not enough, piety is not enough, and charity is not enough. The men who are now suffering from poverty, whether they are in the Third World or the developed world, need to be helped to stretch themselves; they need to be given confidence in their own ability to take control of their own lives. And they need to be helped to take this control, and use it themselves for their own purposes. This is important to the Church, as well as to mankind. For until men are in a position to make effective choices, few of them will become Christians in anything but name. Their membership of the Church will be simply another method by which they seek to escape from a consciousness of their misery; if you like, religion becomes a kind of opium of the people.

Everything which prevents a man from living in dignity and decency must therefore be under attack from the Church and its workers. For there is, in fact, nothing saintly in imposed poverty and, although saints may be found in slums, we cannot preserve slums in order to make them breeding grounds for saints. The Church has to help men to rebel against their slums; it has to help them to do this in the most effective way it can be done. But most of all the Church must be obviously and openly fighting all those institutions, and power groups, which contribute to the existence and maintenance of the physical and spiritual slums — regardless of the consequences to itself or its members. And, wherever and however circumstances make it possible, the Church must work with the people in the positive tasks of building a future based on social justice. It must participate actively in initiating, securing, and creating the changes which are necessary and which will inevitably take place.

Only by doing these things can the Church hope to reduce hatred and promote its doctrine of love to all men. Its love must be expressed in action against evil, and for good. For if the Church acquiesces in established evils, it is identifying itself and the Christian religion with injustice by its continuing presence.

Secondly, the members of the Church must work with the people. It is important that we should stress the working **with**, not working **for**. Only by sharing work, hardships, knowledge, persecution, and progress, can the Church contribute to our growth. And this means sharing in every sense as "members one of another". For if the Church is not part of our poverty, and part of our struggle against poverty and injustice, then it is not part of us. What this will mean in practice will vary from one country to another, and from one part of a country to another part. Sometimes it will mean helping the people to form their own trade unions. Sometimes it will mean the Church leaders involving themselves in nationalist freedom movements and being part of those movements. Sometimes it will mean co-operating with local governments or other authorities; sometimes it will mean working in opposition to established authorities and power. Always it means the Church being on the side of social justice and helping men to live together and work together for their common good. I am not asking that the Church should surrender its functions or allow itself to be identified with particular parties or political doctrines. On the contrary, what I am saying amounts to a demand that it should stop allowing itself to be identified with unjust political and economic power groups. For the Church should want to be identified with the pursuit of social justice. And that is what I am asking you to promote. The poor and the oppressed should come to you not for alms, but for support against injustice.

It is necessary to recognise, however, that others will also be

working to promote social justice; we have no monopoly of virtue. We must not be afraid of this. On the contrary, we should welcome other workers for justice. It is not necessary to agree with everything a man believes, or says, in order to work with him on particular projects or in particular areas of activity. The Church must stand up for what it believes to be right; that is its justification and purpose. But it should welcome all who stand on the same side, and continue regardless of which individuals or groups it is then opposing . . .

We know that we are fallible men and that our task is to serve, not to judge. We accept into the Church those who create and maintain the present political and economic system. It is this system which has led to millions being hungry, thirsty and naked; it is this system which makes men strangers in their own countries because they are poor, powerless and oppressed; it is this system which condemns millions to preventable sickness, and which makes prisoners of men who have the courage to protest. What right, then, have we to reject those who serve mankind simply because they refuse to accept the leadership of the Church, or refuse to acknowledge the divinity of Jesus or the existence of God? What right have we to presume that God Almighty takes no notice of those who give dedicated service to those millions of his children who hunger and thirst after justice, just because they do not do it in His name? If God were to ask the wretched of the earth who are their friends, are we so sure that we know their answer? And is that answer irrelevant to those who seek to serve God? . . .

### **The Role of the Church**

What all this amounts to is a call to the Church to recognise the need for social revolution, and to play a leading role in it. For it is a fact of history that almost all the successful social revolutions which have taken place in the world have been led by people who themselves benefited under the system they sought to replace. Time and again members of the privileged classes have joined, and often led, the poor and oppressed in their revolts against injustice. The same thing must happen now.

Within the rich countries of the world those who have educational opportunity, good health and security, must be prepared to stand up and demand justice for those who have been denied these things. Where the poor have already begun to demand

a just society, at least some members of the privileged classes must help them and encourage them. Where they have not begun to do so, it is the responsibility of those who have had greater opportunities for development to arouse the poor out of their poverty-induced apathy. And I am saying that Christians should be prominent among those who do this, and that the Church should seek to increase the numbers and the power of those who refuse to acquiesce in established injustices.

The same is true also as regards the international scene. The poor and backward countries are beginning to speak up; and to protest against their condition. But they gain strength and effectiveness because of countries like the Scandinavian nations and Canada, which are beginning to recognise the insecurity and injustice of their wealth in a world of poverty, and are beginning to take a leading part in urging change.

I am saying that the Church should join with these nations and, if possible, help to increase their number. I am saying that it should be one of the group of nations and institutions which reject domination by the rich for the benefit of the rich. And it should be the function of Church members in wealthy countries to enlarge the group opposed to international exploitation of the poor and oppression of the weak.

Only by its activities in these fields can the Church justify its relevance in the modern world. For the purpose of the Church is man — his human dignity, and his right to develop himself in freedom. To the service of man's development, any or all of the institutions of any particular society must be sacrificed if this should be necessary. For all human institutions, including the Church, are established in order to serve man. And it is the institution of the Church, through its members, which should be leading the attack on any organisation, or any economic, social, or political structure which oppresses men, and which denies to them the right and power to live as the sons of a loving God.

In the poor countries the Church has this same role to play. It has to be consistently and actively on the side of the poor and unprivileged. It has to lead men towards godliness by joining with them in the attack against the injustices and deprivation from which they suffer. It must co-operate with all those who are involved in this work; it must reject alliances with those who represent Mammon, and co-operate with all those who are working for man.

## **SECURITY**

Paul Oestricher has recently visited southern Africa. At Windhoek in Namibia he sat far into the night in a discussion between SWAPO leaders and Lutheran theological students. At one point he asked the students: "When the revolution is over, will you as Christian pastors be able to play your part in the reconciliation of blacks with those whites who remain?" He was aware of anger all round him. He thought that they were saying "Another white, just concerned with the security of whites!" But one of the SWAPO members said gently "That shows that you think that we too are racists. But we are not. There is not one of us who does not want to build a community in which black and white can live together in peace regardless of colour."

— *Reconciliation Quarterly*,  
March 1977.

# ENCOUNTER OF AFRICAN RELIGIONS WITH CHRISTIANITY

During April a Symposium was arranged at Hammanskraal, north of Pretoria, by the Iziko LamaKrestu group, to consider the relationship between Christianity and the African Religions. It was of an exploratory nature, designed to examine the field rather than justify prearranged conclusions. Most of those who attended had a loose connection with the organised churches, or none.

The speakers included representatives of the historic churches, and the independent churches, and three of the papers are printed below.

The **Rev Timothy S. Moyana** examines the Background of

African Religion, delving into some of the inherited traditions and understandings. **Mr Aubrey Dundubele Mokoena** (Transvaal Director of Black Community Programmes) considers the relationship of culture to theology and especially Black Theology. **Father Lebamang Sebidi** of Hammanskraal tackles the crucial question of whether the Christianity which has encountered African Religions is in fact the Gospel of Jesus at all.

The organiser of the Course was **Rev Mashwabada Mayutula** of the Christian Institute staff who hopes to include other papers and reports of the Symposium in a future issue.

## THE BACKGROUND OF AFRICAN RELIGION

*Timothy S. Moyana*

### CHRISTIANITY AND AFRICANS

Over a long period of growth the church has taken root in Africa and individuals are examining the heritage of the church to see how pertinently it relates to African thought, ideas and life in a rapidly changing situation.

One of the major assignments before those who seek to communicate the Gospel is that of understanding Africa and learning to address Africans as Africans. *"If one", says Rev. Placide Tempels, "has not penetrated into the depths of the African personality as such, if one does not know on what basis they act, it is not possible to understand the African. One is entering into no spiritual contact with them. One cannot make oneself intelligible to them, especially in dealing with the great spiritual realities. On the contrary, one runs the risk, while believing that one is civilising the individual, of in fact corrupting him - working to increase the members of the deracinated and to become the architect of revolts".*

The African peoples are taking over the government of their lands, yet the policies of colonial indoctrination and assimilation have left their effects. All over Africa people have been led to despise their own native traditions and cultures and regard foreign ideas as the only way of human dignity. Some people find a curious compensation under gross oppression and exploitation in striving to forget their antecedents and identify themselves with the cultures of their oppressors. The old, knowledgeable repositories of African oral traditions, are dying out. As generations of Africans embrace a new religion or culture, they abandon and forget the traditions of their own indigenous beliefs, ways and wisdom. This is so especially where they have been effectively convinced that their antecedents are all of the devil.

Africa is in a "transitional stage". With regret we note that Christianity has failed in Africa: the early Missionaries failed to lead the African from the known to the unknown. The church has

been speaking to Africans in strange, partially understood tongues. We must be thankful to God that in spite of man's weakness and short-sightedness the miracle of grace has been taking place all over Africa but both the tools and the methods of evangelism need careful overhauling.

### GOD'S REVELATION

If we are true to the spirit of the Bible we must admit that God's self-disclosure is, in the first instance, to the whole world and that each race has grasped something of this primary revelation. To deny this, is to approach theology with a cultural bias and be traitors to truth.

The predicament of the church in Africa today is caused by the apparent foreignness of Christianity which resulted from the erroneous notion with which evangelism was bedevilled from the start. The church has succeeded in teaching Africans about a strange God whom they have identified as the God of the white man. But what has happened to the God known to their forbears who is the foundation of their traditional beliefs? He remains with them still. The Missionaries have left them with *two* Gods in their hands. Indeed, African nationalism is calling into being a political God of Africa in contradistinction to the God of the European whom a prominent politician once described as a God of oppression, a God of greed and injustice.

Fr. Schmidt claims in *"The Origin and Growth of Religion"* that belief in one Supreme Deity is universal among all primitive peoples. He holds that the belief encircles the whole earth like a girdle and that it *"is an essential property of whatever ancient human culture existed in the very earliest time, even before the individual groups had separated from one another."* The Supreme Being of the primitive culture is a genuinely monotheistic Deity, described as Father, Creator, eternal, completely beneficent,

ethically holy, and creatively omnipotent.

Father Schmidt's assertion should not appear strange. The Creator Spirit who sat upon the primordial chaos and brought forth order, cohesion, meaning and life has left the mark of his creative activity upon the created order. This is the primary stage of revelation. Then He created man in His own image — a rational being, intelligent, someone addressable and responsible: someone to whom God could communicate His revelation through his appreciation of the created order and with whose spirit the Divine Spirit could have immediate communication. We can deny this primary revelation only when we rob the created order of its revelatory quality and relieve man of his inherent capability to receive divine communication. We maintain therefore that God cannot be confined in any way. His realm is the whole universe. All peoples are His concern. He has revealed Himself to them all, each race apprehending the revelation according to its native capability.

Can any people or creed claim to possess a clear knowledge of God in an absolute sense? We hear it glibly stated that Africans have no clear concept of God. This arises largely from the premise that Europeans have a clear concept of God because they have written systematic statements about Him. Is there not a world of difference between an actual, saving knowledge of God and an academic "knowledge" of Him — a process of ratiocination which might make little difference to the life of either writer or reader? The emphasis of the Bible is that God reveals *Himself*. . . God cannot be fully known.

#### AFRICAN CONCEPT

One can speak of a many-sided concept of God in Africa in consequence of linguistic and cultural variations by which it has been affected. Not infrequently foreign investigators over-emphasise these elements of variation and fail to see the basic unity, concluding that it is all amorphous.

#### GOD IS REAL TO AFRICANS

And that is why Africans call Him by names which are descriptive both of His nature and of His attributes. A study of these names will afford us a very deep insight into the African concept of God. The name ORISE in Nigeria and its counterpart UVELINQANGI in Xhosa, both mean "the very Source of Being" or "Source-Being".

#### GOD IS UNIQUE TO AFRICANS

The conception is universal throughout Africa. Various races express in several ways the fact that He is incomparable, and surpasses all. Graven images or paintings of God are almost non-existent, because there is nothing to compare with Him.

His uniqueness includes the concept of His transcendence. The sense of His uniqueness and transcendence expressed in African thought and emphasised in their practices is partly the reason why the African concept is wrongly described by European investigators as a "withdrawn God".

#### GOD CONTROLS THE UNIVERSE

The concept of God as the Creator is expressed in various ways. Often we are told that He commissions some works of creation through a certain divinity. But creation originated with Him. He is especially responsible for the ultimate issues of life and death.

God is often described as King and Supreme. The Zulus call him "UNKULUNKULU", the Xhosas call him "QAMATA" and the Sothos call Him "MOLIMO": all names meaning "King of heaven" or "King who is in heaven". It is believed that the divinities go to Him regularly to render accounts of their doings.

As King He is believed to be omnipotent. He surrounds the whole world, with sun moon and stars under His control.

As King He is judge. He has set a retributive principle in

operation and in consequence sinners will not go unpunished. He dispenses reward and punishment according to man's deserts, as may be seen in the daily occurrences of life. The concept of the judgement of God is so strong that "the wrath of God" has been conceptualised in a certain divinity. This is the solar and thunder divinity.

#### GOD IS UNIVERSAL

He is the Creator who brought all things into being. The force of this tradition is that the whole earth belongs to God, one God created all, and He "belongs" to all mankind.

There is a wealth of material with regard to the concept of God in Africa. Africans have their own distinctive ideas and God, according to African traditional belief, is not "a loan-God from the missionaries".

#### SPIRITS AND THE SPIRIT WORLD

The traditional heritage of the African who has been influenced notably by Western culture has the force of law. His most important reason for believing what he believes, and doing what he does, is that it was handed down to him. His father and his grandfather believed and practised those things, and any deviation would be calling for trouble from the invisible world. It is this unshakable faith in the tradition handed down that explains the mystification exhibited before scholars who try to find the reasons for most of the things the African believes and practices.

Africans distinguish four main categories of spiritual beings:

- (a) The Supreme God, (b) A multitude of lesser divinities and spirits, (c) The Ancestral spirits, and (d) Evil Spirits.

#### IN THE SUPREME GOD CULT

Regular sacrifices are offered either directly or indirectly through the minor divinities. During these sacrifices, God may be mentioned and His help invoked explicitly. Sometimes He is not mentioned at all; but whether He is mentioned or not, He is generally believed to be the ultimate recipient of offerings to lesser divinities, who may be explicitly referred to as intermediaries. These acts are often performed by slaughtering a chicken, a goat or a beast, accompanied by beer drinking.

#### MINOR DIVINITIES CULT

It is believed that the Supreme Being has created the minor divinities as agents. There are multitudes of these spirits of different ranks, charged with specific functions for men and society. Some of these divinities are recognised by all races and families and they perform the same functions for all men.

The belief that these spirits are only agents of the Supreme Being applies more in theory than in practice. To these deities are brought different kinds of offerings and sacrifices according to the express demands of each particular divinity. The devotees salute, bow, or prostrate themselves as appropriate, when they pass the shrines.

#### ANCESTRAL SPIRITS

Among the good spirits are the ancestors. Their cult is of supreme importance in the life of the African. Life from day to day has no meaning at all apart from ancestral presence and power. The father of the family begins the day by praying to them, dedicating himself and his entire family to their protection. Apart from the daily offering there is the annual feast in honour of the ancestors. Sacrifices are also offered whenever the ancestors so demand, which may happen when a member of the family is ill or some calamity has befallen the family. The diviner prescribes the type of sacrifice demanded by the ancestors if the latter are responsible for the sickness or calamity.

The ancestors are in such close relationship with the people that in some parts of the continent it is forbidden not to reserve some



food in the pots during supper lest the ancestors come and find the pots empty. They are most welcome in the families when they re-incarnate and begin to live among their own again.

## EVIL SPIRITS

Evil spirits also abound. Everything about the nature of these spirits, apart from their work, is shrouded in mystery. Usually the medicine man is consulted and he gives advice in the driving away of the evil. The end is not to make friends with, but to drive away the evil spirits. What is offered is always something that is of little use for human life, unlike that which is given to good spirits. The person who carries this offering to give to the spirits walks in dead silence, and neither salutes nor responds to salutation until he has deposited the offerings at the designated place, usually a cross-roads.

## PRIESTHOOD

The word priest is properly used of an official servant of a god, and he normally ministers at a temple. It follows that such priests are to be found in those places where there are gods worshipped, with temples to which offerings are brought. This is mainly in West Africa.

In the cults of the West African gods there are priests who are highly trained to do their work. Some set aside from birth; others may be called by being possessed by the god's spirit. They then retire from their families and public life, and submit to the training of an older priest. The training normally lasts several years, during which time the novice learns the secrets of consulting and serving the god.

The training of a priest is an arduous matter. The priest in training has to observe chastity, and strict taboos of food and actions, and is regarded as married to the god, though later, he may take a wife. Like an Indian devotee, he seeks by self-discipline to train himself to hear the voice of his god. He learns the ritual and dances appropriate to the cult, receives instruction in the laws and taboos of the god, and gains some knowledge of magical medicines.

Women may be priestesses, and frequently are as prominent as men in the conduct of religious affairs. Their psychic abilities of women have received much more recognition in African religion than in Islam or Christianity. The training of priestesses will be the charge of an older expert, who may train several at the same time.

Priests are often recognisable by their dress. White is a favourite colour, and is sacred. Blue is also seen, and other colours. Some priests have their bodies smeared with lines of white or red chalk. Their hair is shaved in various patterns.

In the ancestral cults sacrifice is normally offered by the oldest in the village, or the chief, as the senior living representative of the ancestors. These elders are called priests in some places, and the succession of priesthood then passes down in the same family group, but such elders are not full time or as highly trained as the priests of gods.

The chief is a priest of his people, for he is a sacred person, and is the one charged with approaching the ancestors on behalf of the tribe. Being next to them in the hierarchy of powers he is the natural link between the living and the powerful spirits of dead chiefs and elders. The chief may have some specialist who will instruct him in the ritual and medicines to be used in his work of propitiation.

## MEDIUMS

Connected closely with the priests are the mediums or devotees, who are "possessed" with the spirit of a god or ancestor. Such people, of whom the majority are women may be attached to any temple or place where men come to consult an oracle.

Priests themselves may be possessed in some parts of Africa.

Sometimes they prefer to have a number of mediums under their control, who are consulted by order and whose possession is carefully regulated. Such mediums may be dependent upon the priest, but frequently they set up as freelances, and go into trances when being consulted by those in need of guidance.

The mediums often have a hard training to undergo. After the initial possession, which may come upon them spontaneously at a dance, they exert great efforts, and endure privations, in an attempt to induce the return of spirit possession, trying to produce coherent messages in a state of trance. Often unintelligible at first, they gradually become clearer till they can be produced at will while the medium is in a genuine trance.

There is a clear difference between mediumistic possession and that of seizure by evil spirits who come to trouble men and make them ill. Many tribes do not think that ancestral spirits possess men, but rather accompany and control them, giving messages through them.

## SPIRITUALISM

The dead are consulted in seances comparable with those of modern Europe and America. The principle figure is the medium, who has a "control", that is to say a spirit that possesses her. The spirit may be a dead person, a divine being, or even an animal. The medium may be only occasionally possessed or under the regular control of one particular spirit.

The medium gives messages from the dead, demanding more attention from relatives, or may declare who has been responsible for death. Recourse to mediums is frequent in cases of mysterious death, and as death is often unnatural mediums are busy people.

## DIVINERS

They believe they can call up the dead directly, into a pot, or by means of the divining-board. This is done for a special purpose, at the demand of relatives who have an enquiry to make; such as whether the ancestor is incarnate in a new born child.

The time spent on ritual connected with the dead is considerable, and shows the profundity of African belief in the spiritual world and in the importance of ancestors. The dead are felt to be near, and no people have a greater consciousness than Africans of the reality of the watching "cloud of witnesses".

## PARTICIPATION

African society emphasises a central principle: participation.

There is a *participation*, an intimate ontic relationship *between members of a family, clan or tribe living and dead*. The link between them comes from the unity of blood, the common life which circulates in the veins of all the members.

There is an analogous participation *between an individual or group and its belongings*. Thus the heir, the shadow, etc., are extensions of the human being; the inheritance, the group capital, all possessions, are vitally bound up with their owner. Roots in the same soil, the fact of belonging to the same master and sharing in the same means of existence, create a vital link of solidarity.

Participation is *the element of connection*, the element which unites different beings as beings without confusing them. It is the pivot of the relationships between members of the same community, the link which binds together individuals and groups. It is the ultimate meaning, not only of the unity which is personal to each man, but of that unity in multiplicity, that totality, that concentric and harmonic unity of the visible and invisible worlds.

# AFRICAN CULTURE

— Aubrey Dundubele Mokoena

## BLACK QUANDARY

The Black man's religious conflict nowadays may be traced back to the advent of Whites to South Africa, particularly the White Missionaries. When the White Missionary came to our country, he had the gun in the right hand and the Bible in the left hand.

The primary motive of these settlers was to use the Bible as a weapon to domesticate the Black man, make him accept the authority of the oppressive settler missionary and then, later on, almost as an after-thought, preach to the Black man the good tidings of the salvation of Christ. In other words, the White Missionary was not sure of himself and this lack of security, coupled with avarice for the green pastures of our land, irresistibly compelled him to dispossess us of our land so that he could establish himself. Thus he changed his priorities. The original idea of Christianizing the Black man was overridden by ambition to dominate, oppress and capture the land. Racial hostility began between the invading White settlers and the indigenous people. The Whites used political power to delimitate the land: the onset of racial discrimination. The White Missionary, by deviating from the divine mission of spreading the gospel, made himself a mischievous child of God. He preached *westernised Christianity* which was adulterated by his degenerate cultural values. There was therefore, a definite clash between African culture and the religion of the West.

The Black man who was supposed to be the recipient of this adulterated westernised Christianity, experienced conflict in his mind. He had to choose between abandoning his indigenous way of worship and accepting the White man's religion. In addition, there was the difference in cultural systems and, to make matters worse, the White man denigrated the cultural values of the Black man. He indoctrinated him to believe that his culture was inferior, his religion was pagan, his name was unpronounceable, and his language and life-style were unacceptable to God.

In order to be a Christian, the black man had to relinquish his whole person and assume the image of the White Missionary. In this way, the black man had his culture completely eroded. The highest crime of the white man is that he caused the black man to lose his indigenous identification with God. The white missionary did not bring good tidings but introduced the black man to a white God symbolised by white supremacy, exclusive white interests and privileges, and segregation even in places of worship!

The black man —

Had to accept submissively to white supremacy and domination.

Had to discard the ethos of his community and be "civilised" according to Western norms and standards. This has accounted for the loss of the *esprit de corps* among the blacks.

Had to accept the white man's religion on the understanding that it is superior. Thus the black man was kept under the tutelage of the white man's religion.

It is abundantly clear that such missionaries did not understand the principles of Christianity. Instead of sowing love the white missionaries sowed hatred, mistrust, suspicion and introduced racism, even in Christian circles. Hence the modern black man, with a revolutionary (enquiring) mind, doubts the bona fides of the people who introduced Christianity to us. This loss of faith of the black man in the white man is because he realises he has been robbed of his possession and swindled into accepting the alloyed religion.

Thus we are challenged to seek genuine religion, i.e. practise the Christianity expounded by Christ. This cannot be done by turning a blind eye or a deaf ear to the injustices perpetuated by white in this country. Their pious profession of Christianity on the one hand and diabolical perpetration of human injustice on the other hand, make a mockery of Christianity.

My intention is not to compile a catalogue of the transgressions of the white missionary but to demonstrate the harmful effect which his behaviour had on our people as this is the root cause of the problem in this country. How can the black man extricate himself from this theological and psychological quandary and bring about a just society?

## DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

It is necessary to define the two concepts of my paper, viz. "African" and "Culture", in the context of Black Consciousness.

### (i) African

Black Consciousness is a philosophy that attempts to rid all oppressed people of South Africa of psychological and physical oppression. We define black people as all those who by law or tradition are discriminated against politically, socially, economically and otherwise. Viewed in this light the African, Coloured and Indian are the ones affected. In order to address oppressed people, we devised a nomenclature, and chose the term *Black* to refer collectively to *African, Coloured and Indian*. This is a method employed to achieve black solidarity that will enable us to bargain from a position of strength with whites in order to bring about true political change in this country of our birth.

### (ii) Culture

By culture is understood the traditional practices, habits, customs, norms and general historical development and experience of a people. Amplified, this would mean the achievements and failures of a people. Culture is existential, an anthropological envelope of a people, and it is my intention in this paper to highlight its theological significance. When we speak of African culture, we mean *the culture of Black people*.

## Culture as a Dynamic Ingredient of Change

Culture spans the whole of man's life. In recognition of this fact it is generally held that any major *political* change must be accompanied by a radical *cultural* change if it has to be meaningful at all.

The black man finds himself in a cultural limbo — some waiting state of culture. He is torn apart in his values. He has been forced to abandon his own cultural system and is attempting to reach out for the culture of the white man.

Some cultural therapy is necessary. *Black Consciousness* and *Black Theology* can ably do this, so that he can rediscover himself, and restructure his value hierarchy. Political freedom from the shackles that subject us to perpetual servitude entails the removal of the imposed cultural tentacles that entangle the black man to such an extent that his true image is hardly discernible.

Our application of culture as a dynamic force of change can be effected by pulling together all the cultural cords that are similar among the black people so that we can cement our ranks and instil

black solidarity. We must, therefore, condemn those of us who ape white standards. We want to be measured by ourselves and not by any foreign yardstick. We do not only condemn but assist our brethren who have stumbled into this cultural labyrinth. We must maintain a low profile on any minor cultural differences that exist among us and give prominence to the similarities that bind us together.

I do not subscribe to the self-defeating view that culture is static. Culture grows with the people and adopts itself to their day to day needs. Our outstanding need today is liberation and, if our culture is to be relevant, we must evolve a *liberating culture*. Such a culture provides people with a questioning mind.

We can help in the creation of this culture by composing relevant music, writing relevant poetry, drama and literature. Creating this type of culture means enriching black culture by restructuring it — adapting it to the present need. We must discard certain aspects in our culture that make us appear too polite, almost to a point of servility: bowing, kneeling cowering and curtsying unnecessarily. These things may be misinterpreted to denote docility and suggest tacit acceptance of sub-servience in the eyes of the oppressor.

All men are created equal, in the image and likeness of God. Black people must dismiss the myth that some races are superior to others, remove the psychological chains of an inferiority complex, and stand up to face these most challenging times. They must not apologise for their existence.

### **Black Theology — a Liberating Theology**

“Black Theology” is the exercise of interpreting theology in a relevant manner to the oppressed people of our land. Any theology that enslaves its adherents and subjugates them to be silent in the face of injustices inflicted on its worshippers is meaningless and suicidal. Like education and culture, religion must inspire the oppressed people to seek freedom dauntlessly and unflinchingly.

In the struggle for liberation Black people have a two-fold task, viz. to *emancipate themselves* from the fetters of oppression and to *liberate the white oppressor*. The white man is oppressed by fear and guilt which inspire a sense of insecurity and diffidence in him. Black Theology can play an invaluable role here. It is the duty of the church to champion this cause. The church and all Christians must stand up and be counted.

Moses was both a spiritual and political leader of the children of Israel. Christ himself is the Liberator:

“The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to preach the Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim

liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind; to set free the oppressed, and announce the year when the Lord will save his people.” Luke 4.18.

Black Theology is the recontextualisation of the scriptures in the situation of oppression in which black people find themselves. Culture and theology are interwoven. The means by which the black man seeks to reach God evolve from his cultural background and are undergirded by his existential situation of oppression. You cannot worship God in a cultural vacuum. You have got to be yourself. Religion as a positive spiritual identification of a black man with his God, must speak his language — that of a disturbed worshipper who wants liberation.

### **Liberation and Independence**

Liberation and Independence have a direct bearing on our freedom, but there is a difference between them.

*Independence* is the gaining of political sovereignty. This entails running and managing one's own political affairs as a state. *Liberation* is the psychological preparedness and readiness of a nation to rule its state. This entails national awareness and general conscientisation.

We may illustrate this by considering the Black States in Africa. Most of these states have gained independence, i.e. have been decolonised. Political power was removed from the hands of white colonialists. But few of these states are liberated. Most of these states are still perpetuating some of the malpractices of the colonialists. They have removed the white colonialists and stepped into their boots. We do not want the same situation to prevail here. It is incumbent on the church to help in the liberation programme.

What the struggle needs is not more and more ministers but more ministers with a relevant orientation. These can be nurtured by a relevant theology. To evolve this syllabus we need to enlist the services and expertise of Black Theologians, Black Traditionalists, Black Educationalists, Black Students, Black Lay Christians and Black resource people.

The ultimate goal is to bring about lasting change in this country. This should be effected by Black people who must first liberate themselves from the fetters of thralldom by the Whites and then liberate the oppressors themselves from a sense of guilt and fear. All this will culminate in the formation of an egalitarian South African society. The dynamic cultural force of Black Consciousness and Black Theology is a quest for true humanity with justice for all people.

## **ENCOUNTER OF AFRICAN RELIGION WITH CHRISTIANITY**

—Lebamang J. Sebidi

When two things meet there is bound to be an interaction of some sort — and very often a *tertium quid*, a third element is given birth to and launched into an autonomous kind of existence. This is a basic truth about Encounters or Interactions on all levels of existence. A Marxist would couch it in terms of *thesis*, *antithesis* and *synthesis* — an upward, eternal, evolutionary march. This helps to lay bear the fact of Encounters.

African Christians or believers should be shocked that centuries of encounter between their Religions and Christianity have left African religions nakedly “African” and Christianity nakedly “Christian”. After that first, initial encounter things should never

have been the same again. Never! If they remained the same, either the encounter did not take place, or it was not an encounter but a swallowing up, a kind of religious cannibalism, a stifling and smothering domination of one element by another.

I believe that Christianity has the same relation to African Religion as the “*perfector*” to the “*perfectible*”. In order to be completely unambiguous, I would like to drop the word “Christianity” in this connection in favour of the “*Gospel*”, the *Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth*. The word Christianity is loaded with an amalgam of overtones — some pleasant, others not so pleasant.

It must not be forgotten that Christianity itself is basically an

encounter between Western Religions with the Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth. This encounter may have been more "europeanization" than "gospelization". There are those who think that European culture utilised the Gospel as a means to achieve its own ends; "*The wholesale murder of American Indians and Australian Aborigines and Hottentots to give way to European settlers and the enslavement of Africans makes it difficult to understand the great Western mission to show mankind "the way of the Cross and the grace of the Crucified Redeemer"*", writes Okot p'Bitek. Did European Religion/Culture refuse to be Gospelised? Did it play ducks and drakes with the relationship that should obtain between the "perfector" and the "perfectible"? Did it refuse to pass through "the mystery of death and resurrection", to borrow the words of Cardinal Zoungana? It did refuse. It made itself the perfector, instead of being the perfectible.

So before we can talk about the meeting of African Religion and Christianity we should examine the label "Christianity" and ascertain what lies hidden beneath it. **We might be shocked into the unpleasant realisation that thus far the encounter has been between African religion and Western culture-Europeanisation and never between African Religion and the Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth. This would be a rude but salvific shock.**

We might find out that for centuries we Africans have been enslaved, physically, psychologically and emotionally, in the name of Christianity which we naively mistook for the pure and unadulterated Gospel of Jesus. There is an urgent call for a thorough de-mythologisation here on various levels. We must separate the Gospel from the dry husks of Westernisation alias Christianity and separate the Good News from its Judaic stranglehold, a task which St. Paul initiated but barely won (Acts 15). Then let us rephrase the theme of this Symposium thus: **THE ENCOUNTER OF AFRICAN RELIGION WITH THE GOSPEL.**

### Gospel

What is the Gospel? The Gospel is salvation in all its many forms, but we may make a start by reading Matthew 1, 18-24. "... you must name him JESUS, because he is the one who is to SAVE his people from their SINS". The key words are: Jesus, Save, Sins.

The word *Jesus* is the English corruption of the Hebrew word "Yehoshua", which means "Yahweh saves". He is the absolute culmination in a long line of "Yehoshuas". When we see him seated in the Synagogue at Nazareth at the beginning of his ministry we hear him say with prophetic vigour and fearlessness: "*The spirit of the Lord has been given to me - for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour*" (Luke 4). Yehoshua is concerned with the "poor", the "captives", the "downtrodden": this is Jesus: this is the Gospel: not "Christianity".

When the disciples of John the Baptist want to know whether or not Jesus is the one — the Yehoshua, — his answer is: "*Go back and tell John what you hear and see: the blind see again, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, and the dead are raised to life and the good news is proclaimed to the poor...*" (Mt. 11, 2-5). Yehoshua is concerned with the "blind", the "lame", the "lepers" the "poor".

**The sin that Yehoshua is to save us from is not "sin" in its narrow, spiritualised sense in individuals only but sin in all its parlous ugly dimensions. The redemptive, saving mission of our Yehoshua touches the social order in which we live not only indirectly, peripherally or tangentially but it challenges the roots and basic structure of this order.**

The history of Western Theology shows numerous evidence of a basic tendency in every one of us to emphasise one part of truth to the almost total extinction of another part. It is true that sin has to do with the individual, that sin is interior, that Yehoshua came to save us from our interior evil thoughts, delectatio morosa, egocentricity and interior hate. It is true: but it is not *all* the truth

about salvation and its immediate objective.

Salvation is the total liberation of the total man — and the total man is social, political and economical; the total man is psychosomatic; he is not merely an interior, he is also an exterior; not merely a spirit but also a body; he is a besouled — body, an incarnate spirit. That is why sin affects not only his interior but his exterior, his environment, and all these stand in need of salvation, in need of a Yehoshua.

A fleshless spiritualism which has been identified with Christianity diminishes the seriousness of sin. Sin is evident in our oppressive structures, in the exploitation of man by man, in the domination and slavery of peoples in all its myriad forms. Sin is evident in our laws and statutes, in the great disparity in standards and incomes. Sin demands a radical liberation: and this is the work of Yehoshua. This is Christ. This is the Gospel.

A de-emphasis of the social dimensions of sin leads to the error St. Thomas made in the 13th century. He divides sexual sins into two broad categories: *peccata secundum naturam* and *peccata contra naturam* and says that *peccata contra naturam* are worse than *peccata secundum naturam*. One wonders how sin could be described as *secundum* according to nature — unless there is something very awry with one's definition of nature. According to this the sin of self-abuse (masturbation) would be more heinous than the sin of rape!

The social dimension of sin cannot be lost sight of without leading us to some terrible and frightful distortions of the saving Gospel of Yehoshua.

### Soul and Body

This is not new. The problem was particularly acute in the days of the first plantation owners who imported African slaves. These planters were hardy and enterprising men who had inherited strong feelings about freedom and religion; they were from the stock from which the great American founders would descend. Yet, in the harsh realities of the day, slavery seemed to be demanded by the economic necessity of protecting the huge investments necessary for the development of the colonies.

If the planters were uneasy about the condition of their slaves, their pastors were more uneasy. Even if these black people were treated like animals at times, they surely had souls to be saved? They were docile and intelligent. They seemed capable of accepting the truths necessary for baptism. At first the planters balked at the proposal to make Christians out of their slaves. They had certain social ideas about the implications of baptism. It made men subjects of the Crown as well as members of the Church, persons with rights and obligations, entitled to self-determination and property ownership. Baptism meant the benefits of civilisation. That just would not do.

A theological compromise was then reached. The priests assured the planters that baptism did not affect one's body, but one's soul. Baptism should, in fact, make better slaves of them. Their souls would belong to Jesus (Yehoshua), but their bodies would still belong to their masters. Salvation pertains only to the spiritual order of things, they said, not the material order. Didn't Paul exhort slaves to be obedient to their masters? Slaves were required to take an oath stating that they were not requesting the Holy Spirit out of any desire to free themselves from their masters, but merely for the higher good of their souls and hereafter. This was "Christianity", but not the Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth.

This platonic dichotomy between soul and body is a tendency we have to fight because it is not Christian. St. Paul declares, "No! bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit", to those who would like to treat the body as dirt or filth, or as something peripheral to the area of salvation or liberation.

Happily, one sees evidence of the Church's acceptance of the notion that salvation includes political, economic, academic and social freedom; that God's love for man is a full-bodied love that demands a full bodied commitment of man to all his brother's needs; that a god not concerned with man's earthly needs is not the

God proclaimed by Jehoshua Christ; that if man is to please God, it is not by the possession of the sublife of metaphysical grace but by the ethical response to the needs of others. Goodness in God's eyes is not some super-physical perfection but moral development and progress. The one thing required by God is love of neighbour.

### Neighbour

I believe this with my whole being: we can dispense with all the concomitants of Christianity and remain with this one thing of love. Love in all of these dimensions: that would be the Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth: not "Christianity".

This love of neighbour is not some sentimental kind of thing, a mocking kind of love. Take the Gospel of Matthew which I call the map of our lives: love is the central theme: but you can destroy the whole book and just read Matthew 25.31 ff: the Gospel is love.

It means just that. Its simple. It's not complicated. It's not mystifying. Don't theorise it or eulogise it, or philosophise it. It's simple.

Loving your neighbour just means: love him. House him, clothe him, give him a job, make him feel important in his community, treat him justly, allow him equal opportunity in labour, give him the environment he needs to develop himself fully. This is the work of Jehoshua and his continuators! It is the ministry and the Gospel of Jehoshua applied to particular human situations.

**There are those who insist that acts of religion save: sacrifices, fasting, rosaries, benediction, Sunday Mass attendance and so on. I am the last person to say these practices are useless, but if they are divorced from a meaningful involvement in society, divorced from concern with our brothers, these practices are pagan, heathen practices and devoid of salvation.**

This was the burden of the proclamation of most of the prophets. (Isaiah 1, 10-17) *"What are your endless sacrifices to me? Says Yahweh. I am sick of holocausts of rams and the fat of calves. The blood of bulls and goats revolts me. When you come to present yourselves before me, who asked you to trample over my courts? Bring me your worthless offerings no more, the smoke of them fills me with disgust. New moons, sabbaths, assemblies, your many feasts - I cannot endure festival and solemnity. Your new moons and pilgrimages I hate with all my soul. They lie heavy on me. I am tired of bearing them. When you stretch out your hands ("as we Catholics do!") I turn my eyes away. Oh, you may multiply your prayers, I shall not listen. Why? Your hands are covered with blood, wash make yourselves clean"*.

He continues to tell them what he regards as true religion: (v. 16) *"Cease to do evil. Learn to do good, search for justice, help the oppressed, be just, to the orphan, plead for the widow. If you do that though your sins are like scarlet they shall be as white as snow, though they are red as crimson they shall be white as wool."*

Salvation is situational, intra-historical. It is in this context of viewing salvation and sin as intra-historical and social that one can speak of different theologies: Liberation Theology, Theology of Hope and Black Theology.

### Theology simple

The word *Black* coupled with the word *Theology* can arouse negative emotional feelings simply because people have not grasped the import of the salvation message brought by Christ to us. Salvation is salvation of man, the whole man, in his concrete, sweaty, nitty-gritty situation. It is not in a vacuum that man is saved, ministry exercised and the Gospel preached.

Theology is man's reflection on salvation, the application of the salvific mission of Christ/Yehoshua to man's particular, specific situation. Situations differ, and so do applications. God in his saving acts has something to say about the situation of the Chinese in Peking; and something to say and do about the situation of the oppressed and cheated masses of our country, South Africa. Therefore, Black Theology is not a negation, but a hopeful sign on the part of those who are dispossessed, disinherited, as they lean towards him who saves, Yehoshua, Jesus of Nazareth.

This is true Christianity: this is what we mean when we say: "Did Christianity, meaning the Gospel of Jesus Christ, have this salvific communication with African religion".

Did it? What resulted? Was there a third element? Should there be? Or do we agree that the encounter between African Religion and the Gospel as we have tried to outline it — the relationship of the perfectible to the perfected — has not happened?

If anyone is tempted to think that I am having an unjustifiable dig at Christianity, tilting boyishly at Christian windmills like Don Quixote, just think back a few years. Almost all of us looked upon our home names as pagan names and would have killed anyone who had the impertinence to use those pagan names in public. Christian Baptismal Registers still have places to fill in the heathen name — plus the Christian name. It mattered little that the "heathen" name "Mpho" meant the same thing as the Christian name "Theodore" (Greek for Mpho-ea-Molimo). It was pagan, unholy, african and unworthy and had to be discarded and give way to a "christian" way of life. This one item is symptomatic of the whole pattern of encounter between African Religion and "christianity".

That is why one of our professors, Albert Nolan, could write a book entitled: "Jesus before Christianity".

The fire-eating African Anthropologist, Okot p'Bitek makes no bones about it. *"The Christian mission to Africa was double-edged. The Missionaries came to preach the Gospel as well as to "civilise", and in their role of "civilisers" they were at one with the colonising forces; indeed they were an important vehicle of Western Imperialism, which readily lent to the churches its wealth, power and influence. The missionaries came with the same arrogant assumptions that they represented a "higher" civilisation, indeed, perhaps that no civilisation existed in Africa. Western values and customs were, to them, identical with Christian morality. They insisted on even minor observances as necessary outward and visible signs of an inward "civilised" state".* Fortunately for us Africans and unfortunately for some Western "christians" we are called upon to recognise that in the world of our time there is widespread revolt against any form of domination by the West".

The Gospel is not dominative but salvific. Its content is not as mysterious or intellectually hard to grasp as Western Theologians would have us believe. White Theology borrowed Hellenistic thought patterns and terminology and introduced metaphysical concepts like "nature", "substance", "essence", "person", "suppositum", "matter and form" into their interpretation of the Gospel and thus managed to turn the Gospel into an esoteric preserve, a monopoly enjoyed only by a few highly intelligent men and women.

But Jesus spent almost all his earthly life consorting with the ordinary riff-raff, the poor, the lowly, while the wise and the wealthy kept (Mt. 11) away from him, and approached him only when the time came to crucify him.

### Believe

It is love that is the Kernel of the Gospel of Jesus. Believe in the Creator God in whom all of you have always, somehow, believed. Believe that this Creator God is "Abba" — Daddy-Father. Africans have always believed there was a power beyond their own powerlessness. There was a certain divinity in thunder; a certain divinity in the majesty of the mountains; in the great flow of the rivers; in massive and colossal trees. There was a certain numinosity about the Earth. You believe it! You have always believed it, though you did not define it and categorise it.

Now Jesus comes and says: "That power that you always believed in, the power beyond your powerlessness, is "Abba": "Father". This is not difficult to understand: it is "Father".

Believe that Jesus of Nazareth is his plenipotentiary and Son *par excellence*, so that when you meet and see Jesus you meet and see the Father. When he was about to return to the Father, Phillip said to him: "Show us the Father". Jesus said: "Look — I have been with you for three solid years and you don't even understand that when you see me you see the Father".

Believe, thirdly, that when you see your brother, you see Jesus, who is the selfmanifestation of this Abba, this great Father. This is the Gospel.

Remember Paul on the way to Damascus crying out: "Who are you Lord?" "I am those you are persecuting" came the reply. This is complete identification between the Christ who is the manifestation of the Father, and the people, my neighbour.

Remember the "Last Judgement" in Matthew 25? There are the two groups, one on the left and one on the right. "When did we love you?" asked the "chosen". "When you gave one of the least of them a glass of cold water you gave it to Me". The complete identification.

When you receive your brother, he is the sacrament of Christ. When you receive Christ, he is the sacrament of God.

The power through which Jesus brings salvation — liberation is the Spirit of God. Hence the Christo-pneumatical dimension of Liberation.

This is what we should believe. You don't have to write big theologies about it. These things are really a distillation of what the Gospel of Jesus is.

It is of this Gospel that we are asked to incarnate Christ's message into our cultural values and religions. We must know what the Gospel is, and incarnate the Gospel of Jesus into our ways of worship.

#### **Challenge**

Every effort at Africanisation must start from the transcendence of Christ's message with respect to every culture. The Gospel of Jesus

of Nazareth is the Perfector, and other cultures and religions are the perfectible. What must give way to what: the Gospel to culture, or vice versa?

Cardinal Zoungrana writes:

*"The content of the Message is not to be adapted to a given culture: any culture must be purified from those ways of acting and thinking which are obviously incompatible with Christ's teaching. By means of this purification, a culture reaches its full growth. It must pass through the mystery of death and resurrection. Africanisation is not folklore: it goes much further than that; neither is it a systematic exaltation of everything our ancestors have bequeathed to us. They, too, made mistakes".*

Our ancestors were not gods. Their way of life was not infallible. The culture that they lived and that they bequeathed to us was in need of purification.

Because the Gospel is not dominative but salvific it will respect whatever is good in each one of us Africans, in our traditional religion and ways of worship, and in our societies. This dictum must be safeguarded at all costs: if Christ came to save us, he also came to save our religion, our culture, our mores and our worship through the redemptive process of death and resurrection.

This is quite a different kind of thing from saying that Christ came to wipe out everything "African". We resist very strongly the unwarranted bullying of Westernisation with its myth of primitivism.

We accept the hard and difficult challenges of the Gospel — and its promise.

## **THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO BLACKNESS**

—Cedric Mayson

(Part I)

Black Consciousness, Black Power and Black Theology were terms which horrified me when I first heard them. They seemed a denial of the multi-racialism to which I was so passionately devoted as a follower of Christ, an understandable but appalling reaction to the white power and white theology of the apartheid system.

If God was above colour and race, how could he approve of Black Theology? Of course, I did not understand that it was God speaking. I needed to be liberated from the chains which bound down myself, my church, my friends, my relationships, my understandings — and Black Theology was the instrument of release.

The essential content of Black theology is at least 3000 years old, the message and method of God amongst the ancient prophets. What God has been saying to blacks belongs to all men.

God's message to men has always suffered from attempts to control it for political and economic ends. The Gospel has been adulterated, pressed into a religious mould, shaped by the civilisation that it grew up in, caricatured, and disfigured. Revivals, renewals, and reformations have been an essential part of the work of God throughout the centuries.

In our life time men and women have been aware of the decadence of Christianity. The 'christian' west has proved itself as immoral and evil as any age in history. Millions have left the church because it was ineffective, irrelevant, insufferably superior, and unrecognisable beside the Jesus whose Body it claimed to be.

As 'christianity' and 'civilisation' have lost authority, we have seen a fantastic proliferation of sects, theologies and quack religions. A longing for 'revival' has expressed itself in waves of popular religious enthusiasm.

Vast schemes of mass evangelism to call the nations back to God were intended to re-enact the Great Awakening of the 18th century. It did not happen. In another phase, no church was complete without its healing crusade, and whole new churches were born convinced they could call the world to Christ by miracles. It did not happen.

The Ecumenical Movement, and then the Charismatic Movement have swept the world, and rocked the churches, but there has been no change. The world has proceeded towards destruction, the influence of 'christianity' and 'the west' has declined, church membership shrinks whilst populations explode, more churches close in a month than open in a year. People are yearning for God to do something, but what?

All these concerns have assumed that God's will would be found within the restrictions of wealthy white western civilisation. None of them let repentance go deep enough to bring into question the very basis of their culture and civilisation. Even the most extreme evangelists assumed that their nation, though sinful, was essentially on the right lines. They never doubted that 'believers' and 'salvation' had to be seen in terms of white westernism.

Men have been so indoctrinated in the belief that God is a religious being who reveals his purposes in religious activities that it never occurred to them that in fact he was a God of secular men, like Jesus, and that the heart of his activity and revelation was in the daily lives of his people.

They were expecting the theologians and statesmen of 'christian' countries to tell them what God wanted, instead of looking at the people of the world to see what the living God was actually doing.

This was the Christianity that came to Africa. It is as wrong to condemn all missionaries out of hand as exploiters, as it is wrong to pretend that they were not also victims of the thinking of the colonialist era. When Livingstone brought 'Christianity and Commerce' to the Dark Continent, no one doubted that the missionary age and the colonial age should work hand in hand.

Christianity came to Africa as part and parcel of a civilisation which was religious, capitalistic, exploitative, patronising, paternalistic, violent, domineering, destructive and oppressive. It brought education (selective), hospitals (selective), churches (selective), and salvation (both selective and elective).

The system talked of charity to the poor because it decided to retain poverty, taking profits and giving handouts, planning ignorance, enforcing inhumanity. Eventually, in order to protect 'western christian civilisation', it produced apartheid. Let us have no doubt at all that whatever embellishments may be due to Afrikaanderdom, apartheid is the product of western christian civilisation.

It is here, where the corruption of civilisation is at its worst and the caricature of christianity is most distorted that God has revealed himself most clearly.

The rich, important, powerful, religious, people have found him as hard to hear in the 20th century as they did in the first. God has revealed himself, like Jesus, amongst the poor, the powerless, the oppressed, the outcast, the neglected, the sick, the blind, the sinful.

In South Africa those people happen to be black. These categories are definitions of blackness. These ordinary believers have meditated and theologised about their experience of life, and of what the God of Jesus really means to them, and they to him. They have considered their own experience of life and sought to understand this in terms of the revelation brought by Jesus of Nazareth (as distinct from that of western christendom).

Black theology is the name of this revelation of God to men. It appears to be the most profound, important, and simple Christian revolution to have occurred since Pentecost. Like Jesus, it has little

to do with religion as such though religious people will rightly use it to redesign their religions. It did not arise as a result of church programmes and many churchmen will recoil in horror, as the Pharisees did.

- There is nothing exclusively sentimental about it — black individuals and black churches and black states can be as stupid, blind, stuffed up, puffed out and damned as whites.

But in the experience known as Black Consciousness and Black Theology God is speaking to the whole world with a shattering clarity, the voice of a trumpet sounding the good news of salvation and liberation for men.

The experience of being black in God's world leads men to theologise about liberation in terms of beingness, humanness, and communalism. It is not an intellectual instruction to be learnt, but reflections upon an experience, a psychological awareness, a spiritual reality that men know. It is a new way of looking at the Kingdom of God, a rebirth.

It is a christian revival, part of the 20th century reformation and rediscovery of the original gospel of Jesus, whose most bitter opponents are the supporters of the status quo religion.

The attempt to translate the black theology reformation into the concepts of white westernism is as prone to misunderstanding as putting Christianity into Judaistic or Pantheistic terms, or Protestantising the Holy Roman Empire.

The concepts of western civilisation and the 'historic' churches; the life style and approach of traditional Christians, liberal or conservative; the social and political orientation of European or North American society; these are precisely the things from which men need to be liberated, and it is impossible to describe the Gospel in terms of them. The cradle of Christendom has become the corruptor of Christendom and must die before it can be reborn.

Many will say it is Utopian nonsense, a pipe dream, to talk in terms of brotherhood, of a new approach to the design of human societies; a new faith to put driving power into their construction, a new conviction that God is actually liberating men. But that is not the dream.

The dream is to imagine that western civilisation, South African apartheid, or the churches, can go on as they are. They have come to an end. The gigantic pressures of change already have them in their grip, and those men are most foolish who claim they have power to control the change.

God is at work. Black theology reveals him.

*(to be concluded)*

## THEOLOGY AND LIBERATION

*- excerpts from a letter by Cecil Beghie, a young South African minister studying in London.*

Theology plays a very important role in the liberation of the peoples of South Africa, both for the oppressed and the oppressors, particularly in view of the fact that the majority of the people of my country claim to be Christian. My country is today in turmoil and a very real threat to world peace as **we have either distorted the teaching of Jesus Christ or rejected the challenges the Gospel presents to us.** Since the early missionary days, the Church has been doing a great deal of good through its work and witness in South Africa. At the same time it has also done a great deal of harm and is in many respects an agent of oppression. The version of the Gospel

which dominates the thinking of Christians in South Africa, is the one which emphasizes personal salvation, with the promise of "pie in the sky when we die". Any attempt to relate the Gospel directly to the political sphere of our lives is labelled as "meddling with politics." **The greatest need of the hour is that Christians should be made to realize that the Gospel of Jesus Christ has a tremendous relevance for the situation in which they live.** To do this will not be an easy task. There is a general reluctance to allow the Gospel to challenge our traditional South African way of life which so many, both Black and White have come to accept as the norm.

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