

An address to the Koinonia Conference of Theological Education September 1984

PROGRESSIVE THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

This address was given by Frank Chikane, a minister of the African Methodist Episcopal church, at a "Conference on Theological Education" at UWC during September 1984. It was arranged by Koinonia as a creative response to the criticisms levelled at the current theological education received at the Faculty of Theology during the years but specifically during the so-called "Ordination Boycott" of 1984. This lecture was only recorded in note-form at the time and reconstructed nearly a year later. Every attempt has been made to report Rev Chikane's message as accurately as possible, but we accept responsibility for any misinterpretation that may have resulted.

God revealed him/herself not as a set of principles but as an acting God in history.

This was the essence of Frank Chikane's input to the Conference on Theological Education held by Koinonia. This message, supported by his earnest and humble presence at the two day event, emerged as the central theme of the conference - an important part of the struggle for liberation in South Africa.

In the church today, the need of a new method of doing theology has become critically overdue. The old theological status quo is not effective any more. The theological education which the times demand from us must be progressive and democratic, and must teach students a liberating theology.

The starting point for such a theology must be the praxis. Traditional theology aimed only at understanding the world in which we live, and not at transforming it. The result was that traditional theology essentially allowed the status quo to remain. A transforming theology, on the other hand, aims fundamentally altering the status quo. Such a theology has two

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elements: an orthodoxy or the "right teaching" which must be combined with an orthopraxis, or the correct way of acting.

A transforming theology aims at changing the world we live in. As such it is based upon a faith in God revealed to us not as a set of principles, but as acting in history.

Any attempt to do theology in such a transforming way, has to take the praxis seriously. Therefore, any theology has to start by analysing the society in which it exists.

Frank Chikane continued to describe three possible models with which to do such an analysis, secondly to apply these models to our situation, and finally to highlight some questions which this analysis to our way of doing theology.

The first model sees life as cyclical or "orderly". This traditional model only allows change in terms of the "cycle" itself. Life is seen as organic, therefore no interdependence between people is acknowledged and an authoritarian hierarchical structure of society is envisaged. Conflict, in this world, is always seen as deviant. Therefore all conflict should be suppressed.

Secondly, the liberal model of change envisages evolutionary change in society, in which the rate of change is determined by the oppressor. This will cause bloodshed, because those suffering are not part of the process of change. This model has a pluralistic approach to life, in which con-

flikt management could replace the very authoritarian structures of society. Conflict, however, is only seen in a very superficial way, neglecting the deeper conflicts seated in social structures.

The radical model of change has a transformative nature. It sees people as interdependent. This necessitates the need to help and share with each other. It also holds a participatory view of social change, as opposed to the more elitist views of the authoritarian or conflict management models. Most important, this model is creative. It acknowledges that conflict is an indication of sin and injustice, that exists. Conflict, as seen by this model, deals with the situation that exists, and can be part of a creative transformation thereof.

In applying this last model to the South African situation, Frank Chikane described the history of our society as a "history of dispossession". This led to armed resistance of which the last was the Bambata rebellion in 1906. Since then, the people have been disarmed. The Union of South Africa, formed in 1910, continued this pro-

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cess of dispossession in a "legalised" way through acts like the 1913 Land Act. This process of dispossession formed part of the development of *racial capitalism*. Modern South Africa is a mixture between a racial and a capitalist state, in which racism has been a function of capitalism.

In this system, the "super capitalists" use racism to increase profits. The capitalists would also support any government as long as it protects their interests. In the same way the bantustan leaders, participating in the present system, profit from it and consequently do not want to change it.

Frank Chikane then reflected on the question which this analysis posed for the way of doing theology in a society like this. He basically identified three questions which any theology in our situation will have to address:

1. The perspective "we fought for the land, therefore we have a right to it" is often used by those aiming to maintain the status quo. What should be said about "armed repossession of the land today?"
2. What is the appropriate theological position on race and class, and the struggle between classes in society?

3. What do you do in a situation of "class struggle" where the oppressor and oppressed are both together in the same church? This question is even more severe where those who maintain the power also dictate the framework of discussion. What role will such a discussion have in the process of change?

Therefore, what the church needs is the tools for change. This partly consists of a liberatory theology which is transformative and involves itself in the struggle against injustice; the hallmark of such is the belief that God loves the oppressed but takes the side of the oppressed.