

# Review of FAREWELL TO INNOCENCE

(by Dr Allan Boesak – Ravan Press)

Reviewed by Mbuyisozwe Hector Tshabalala

The sub-title of the book is "A Social-Ethical Study of Black Theology and Black Power". That the book is a study is borne out by the fact that in only 119 pages there are 451 footnotes which are quotations from almost every article, report or book ever written on Black Theology, Black Power or Black Consciousness. There are also quotations from Commission Reports ranging from SPROCAS to D.R.C. reports as well as W.C.C. studies.

In the preface the author states that his intention is to react to what other writers in U.S.A., Asia, and Africa have said on the subject of Black Consciousness or Liberation. This is exactly what the book is all about: The author analyses and summarises reports, lectures, studies and books of at least fifty different people such as Adam Small, Ernest Baartman, Manas Buthelezi, David Bosch, Basil Moore, Deotis Roberts, James Cone, Albert Cleage jr., Stokely Carmichael, Martin Luther King, Bishop A. Zulu and many others.

The book was originally submitted for the degree of Doctor of Divinity which was awarded to the author in 1976 by the Theological Academy of the John Calvin Foundation, Kampen, the Netherlands. The book understandably is not easy to read. It needs to be studied and it gives interesting views, for the students of Christian doctrine on the doctrines of Salvation, History and Eschatology, looked at from a black point of view.

Most unfortunately the author is seldom felt in the book. He is buried under a lot of other writers. Now and again I found myself having to ask the question "What do *you* say?" The author reserves his judgement for the little sections at the end of each chapter, subtitled, "conclusion". But even here he still quotes other people's views and then either agrees or disagrees with them.

The book is highly academic and not intended for non-scholars despite the title which gives the impression that this is an easy book to read. I personally feel that it deals with ideals rather than what is actually taking place in the struggle for liberation. It theologises too much. To the author the black people are not the ordinary man in the street or Freedom Fighters in the bush, but sophisticated scholars like Manas Buthelezi, Alpheus Zulu, Adam Small etc. Not once in the book are views of ordinary South African blacks quoted. Non-Christian blacks are not taken into consideration. The sub-title of the book should in fact read "A *Christian* Social-Ethical Study of Black Theology and Black Power". The author ignores the serious identity problem as to who the blacks really are. He seems to be

unaware that the Coloureds are divided amongst themselves on the grounds of length of hair and lightness of complexion, the Indians discriminate against each other on the basis of their ancient caste system and the Africans on language and cultural differences. Not to mention the friction between Coloured, Indian and African. But as I said, academically, the book is invaluable for students of Theology.

In the introduction the title of the book is explained: "When people face issues too horrendous to contemplate, they close their eyes to reality and make a virtue out of powerlessness, weakness and helplessness. This innocence leads to a helpless utopianism . . .". He says that it is absolutely imperative for the oppressor to preserve his innocence just as it is imperative for the oppressed to destroy it. The greatest ally of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. Getting rid of an implanted slave mentality is central philosophy of Black Consciousness. The affirmation of one's personhood is a powerful act that constitutes a farewell to innocence.

Chapter one deals with the basis of liberation theology- Yahweh is the liberator. Jesus Christ Himself said that He had come to heal the sick, free the prisoners, bring good news to the poor and generally proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. The author explains that the black's self-love does not mean that blacks have to hate the whites, but it means that the blacks will no longer accept a brotherhood "when the one brother" is master of the other. Black Theology means demythologizing white supremacy and humanizing white living from its own idolatrous absurdity and black living from its own blasphemous non-beingness. Slavery is not only subservience, but it is also idolatry. It means that one human being is degraded to a sub-human status while another must deify himself in order to justify his superior position. But Jesus Christ came and lives in this world as the oppressed. One who took upon Himself all the suffering and humiliation of all oppressed peoples. If God would be anywhere He must be on the side of the oppressed.

Chapter Two deals with Power, with an emphasis on Black Power. The central point in the power-over-others relation is dependency. Substitute the elements of dependency with the ability to create one's own resources or with the creative use of the resources one has, and the power-over pattern is broken. The author says that when power is abused, as blacks experience daily, it becomes a powerlessness, but a powerlessness of the powerful which will ultimately become manifest in its destruction.

Chapter Three deals with the relationship between Black Theology and Black Power. He defines Black Power as "power expressed in self-identification and self-affirmation, a power which seeks the transformation societal structures to accommodate the new humanity. In this chapter the Doctrine of History is discussed. The acts of God are not restricted to the Church only, the Work of Christ and His kingdom is discernible in the secular, social and political revolutions of our time and the Church's function is to discern it and to witness to it and to participate in God's work in changing the world. He concludes with the statement that "Black Theology realises that Black Power does not have the last word nor can it offer final solutions. In other words the forces of Black Power will never bring about the fullness of the Kingdom of God".

Chapter Four deals with the question of whether or not Black Theology is a mere ideology. He says that to have a political ideology is in itself not sinful, but to equate it to the Gospel of Jesus Christ is. He makes here a remarkable analogy between the ideology of the nation of Israel which was based on the demands of the times and majority opinion

and then equated with the will of Yahweh, on the one hand, and the Christian Nationalism of Apartheid on the other. He says that God will never allow himself to be claimed by one people nor will He be reduced to a mere symbol of nationalistic aspirations.

Chapter Five delves even more deeply into Black Theology and ends with an ethic of liberation as an ethic of Black Theology as proposed by the author. He says that the liberation of the oppressed is a revolutionary activity, it means a radical break with existing political, sociological structures, a redefinition of black life along the lines of Black Power and self determination. He says also that a good reason for not being racist is to observe what discrimination has done to the souls, minds and spirits of whites who hate blacks. To hate someone at sight without ever getting to know him is a form of sickness. Hate destroys the hater as much as the hated. A profound statement is made in this chapter: "The oppressor has not yet learned to know how to deal with non-violence. He still does not know how to deal with a man who has the moral initiative of love on his side". □

Articles printed in REALITY do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Editorial Board.

RATES (6 issues—published every two months)

ORDINARY SUBSCRIBERS

S.A. R2,00 p.a.

U.K. £1,25 p.a.

U.S.A. \$4,00 p.a.

DONOR SUBSCRIBERS

S.A. R10,00 p.a.

U.K. £5,00 p.a.

U.S.A. \$15,00 p.a.

EDITORIAL BOARD

Chairman: Peter Brown

Vice-Chairman: Alan Paton

Board: H. Bhengu; E. H. Brookes, M. Buthelezi, M. Corrigan, N. de Havilland, M. Dyer, C. Gardner  
F. Laband, S. Lundie, S. Msimang, P. Rutsch, J. Unterhalter.

SUBSCRIPTIONS:

Send to: Reality, P.O. Box 1104, Pietermaritzburg 3200