

## THE CHALLENGE OF BLACK THEOLOGY TO THE PRESENT S.A.

First of all, we are expected to understand fully the present situation in South Africa today, as well as our own existential experience as Blacks. Black Theology in South Africa is a unique combination of disinheritance and oppression and the theology of culture.

It is not a new phenomenon in South Africa. It has been there since the arrival of white missionaries as well as the Western Colonialism. Black Theology is a theological expression of Black people in a political situation of oppression.

One thing we need to understand, is a philosophical and theological analysis of Western concepts based on divine racism.

We ought to examine some concrete examples in which these concepts are highly visible.

The first distinctive example or trait of divine racism to be noted, is its appeal to a "two-category system", it presupposes a basic division of mankind into an "IN" group or divinely privileged group and an "OUT" group or divinely unprivileged group. In addition this division is supposed to be supported and initiated by God himself. God has special concern for the privileged group and it receives His sustaining grace. By contrast He is indifferent or hostile to the unprivileged group. This concept presupposes that God does not value all mankind equally: as a result He treats them differently. And this difference is not supposed to be accidental but central to His will and purpose for mankind.

In the context of divine racism, the unprivileged group suffers more than the privileged group. Therefore, whatever the less privileged group does, they remain the conquered and not the conquerors. In our case in South Africa, the darker group seems to be the unprivileged group. Our economic, social, educational, political and religious structures in our country in particular, are a clear example of this concept. The idea that racial inequality is the work and will of God, describes another feature of divine racism. God must be a member of the "in" group. In the context of this analysis, God must be White.

Now as our Saviour was White, as we are told, did He enter heaven when He arose from the dead as a White man or as "Bantu"? If as a White man, then the "bantu" was left out. As Jesus Christ the Son of God and as God is White (light) and in Him is no darkness (Black) at all, how could He then be the Father of the "bantu"? as like begets like? And if God could not be the Father of the Blacks because He was White, how could our Saviour "being the express image of God's person", as asserted by Saint Paul, carry such a damned colour into heaven, where all are White.

This whole concept has manipulated, depersonalised and dehumanised the Black man to such an extent that he always runs away from himself. He is not himself, and in trying to find himself, he pursues the Western concepts, values, behaviour and culture. The reason for this is that he is being convinced that the ideal man is the White man.

The concept of Black consciousness expresses the attitude of mind of the Black people over and against this diabolical western concept of divine racism. The very fact that the Black man could not rid himself of the religious instinct and a sense of worship, made himself to question the divine racism concept. The concept of Black Consciousness developed a sense of pride amongst Black people, as well as a proper analysis of who they are and what they ought to do. This philosophy made the black man to analyse his surroundings critically and define his role without any influence of some kind whatsoever.

Black theology therefore, helps the black man to find God's will and purpose for himself as well as his responsibility towards those who have deliberately distorted the whole plan of God for mankind.

It must be a theology of liberation from the manipulative forces. It must be a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed or "unprivileged group", relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the Gospel, which is in Jesus Christ. This means that its sole reason for existence is to put into ordered speech the meaning of God's activity in the world, so that the community of the oppressed will recognise that their inner quest for liberation is not only consistent with the Gospel, but is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. A community that does not analyse its existence theologically is a community that does not care what it says or does. It is a community that has no identity. Applying this description, it is evident that white South African theology has served the oppressors well. Throughout the history of this country, the theological problems emanating from the white churches and theological schools are defined in such a manner that they are not related with the problems of being Black in a white racist society.

By defining the problems of Christianity independently of the black conditions, White Theology becomes the theology of the oppressors. Since White Theology has served the integrity of the community of the oppressors, we conclude that it is not Christianity at all. Black Theology seeks to articulate the theological self determination of black people.

There is today in South Africa a quest for a theological assessment of the theological incarnation of the Word of God in the peculiarity of the life and thought processes of the black people.

At this stage and time, I do not think it is necessary for us as Blacks to be bogged down in questions of academic sophistry, namely, whether theology can be black or white. Black Theology is a situational theology, and as such cannot address itself to the white community nor try to make the oppressors understand what it is all about. This is a theology which deals with the questions which are vital to particular people in a particular situation. Its theological dimension is the one that refers to us as black people in our situation. It concerns us and supports us in our drive to be ourselves in our uniqueness. It is a passionate call to freedom. It directs its voice to black people. It asserts and affirms us as people.

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Lecture delivered by Rev. M. Ngakane, Deputy General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches on 5th March, 1976 in Daveyton/ Benoni at a conference organised by the local IDAMASA branch and the Christian Academy in Southern Africa, P. O. Box 31434, Braamfontein, Jhb. 2017.