

A BLACK CHRISTOLOGY: A NEW BEGINNING

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1. WHY START AFRESH?

The situation in South Africa today makes it imperative for black christians to search for a new understanding of what Jesus the Messiah is doing in our country today in order for them to respond appropriately to his call. We live in a country in which white domination of black people is enforced with the use of teargas, the rubber bullet and buckshot during the day and by handgrenades and petrol bombs, kidnappings and murders at night. We also worship many of us – in churches wherein the same relations of white domination and ruthless brutalization of black christians are reproduced. The unsuspecting black christian believers are also dominated, brutalized and deformed theologically albeit unintentionally in many cases. They are forced to accept unconditionally for confirmation, a denominational doctrine which was made by white christians in response to challenges that are totally different from and in most cases even contradictory to those facing black christians of all classes today.

The abnormal situation makes it imperative for those black christians who, in these days of many religious and ideological options, still want to retain their faith in Jesus the Messiah and regard the christian tradition as their source of liberative information, to ask the question of how theology emerges. What makes it even more imperative for black christians to grapple with this question is the time in which we live and the great challenges that face black people of this country and young black christians in particular.

It is at times like these when political pillars are being shaken by the burning anger of oppressed black people who have had enough of oppression, that new theological questions arise. It is at times like these when the once large economic rivers are visibly drying, when the ideological cement that is pumped into the ears of people through the media loses its power to hold the structure of apartheid together that the black christians have to think anew and redirect their faith. It is when the hitherto unshakeable firm theological foundations are clearly unable to support the once mighty white ecclesial empire that black christians are freed to search scriptures anew for a message of support. Paradoxically it is at times like these when black life hangs very precariously on the precipice that a liberative theology is a real possibility. Such times of deep cleavages in life and faith are paradoxically times of great theological possibilities. It is in reference

to such times that the prophet Joël announced that "God will pour his spirit on all flesh, to let your sons and daughters prophesy clearly and sharply, and see visions; and old men and women dream dreams" (Joël 2:28-29).

At last the trauma of the unprecedentedly fierce struggle for liberation is forcing black christians to ask questions which they dared not ask in the past. It frees them to ask real burning questions without fear of the oppressor or his God. It frees them to stand and confront their black God whether the oppressor likes it or not. And as James Cone stated in the 1960's, the questions we ask determine the answer we get. We can add that if you ask a moderate question, you'll get a moderate answer. And if you ask a deep and radical question, you'll get a profound and radical answer.

It is clear by now that I am saying that it is you, the community of young black christians that is deeply scarred by your noble efforts of asserting your God given right to be human and to own the means that will affirm your humanity, who have to create a theology that will hasten the process of liberation of black people in this country. It is you who have to do that because basically the creation of theology is an ecclesial business. It arises when those people who are truly converted to the liberating praxis of Jesus the Messiah, acting as a community and as individuals who, infused with the power of the Holy Spirit of the Messiah and guided by Him, attempt to imitate him or translate his liberative praxis into their saving praxis to affect the lives of their fellowmen and transform the world around them making it a worthy reflection of the coming Kingdom of God. As they do so in the face of forces and structures which are opposed to this transformation of society and the world or to use a biblical term "the birth of a new man and a new world" they encounter opposition, new obstacles and questions which they did not anticipate. They also gain success beyond their own calculations and expectations. Being true christians, they cannot but return to scripture which is the source of their existence as a christian community and of their knowledge with thanks to Jesus their Messiah but also with questions in search of what he has to say to them. They approach Scripture in search of what and how to think and articulate what is happening to them and their world. They also go to it to find the most appropriate way of going a step further. It is in this way and in this process that an ecclesial christian theology arises.

In fact this is how the various and different Gospels and other writings in the New Testament arose. Each christian community (which was) based at a place different from that of the other community, and, responding to different socio-economic and ideological challenges which threaten their faith and their praxis and

which were different from those facing the other christian community, went back to the source of their faith and guide to their praxis and interpreted the praxis and person of Jesus Christ in the light of their peculiar situation and questions arising from it.¹

We are therefore, continuing the old and proven ecclesial tradition of the first century christian communities when we as a black christian community try to be true to the present black experience, and reflect theologically on its questions and challenges. Conversely by being true christians of our time and our locality, we are being true to the legacy of the New Testament communities. And conversely, by ignoring our time, our locality and its challenges we are being unworthy heirs of this noble christian tradition.

We could go further and show that right through the history of the christian church new theologies arose as committed individual christians and communities took their situations seriously and responded to the burning questions of their time in the light of Jesus the Messiah... Martin Luther's and John Calvin's theological efforts as they grappled with the issues of human salvation led to the emergence of Protestant theology.

Karl Barth in Switzerland responded creatively to the challenges which were posed by the first and second World Wars in Europe and created a dialectical theology.² In our own time oppressed and humiliated black people in the U.S. also take the liberating praxis of Jesus the Messiah and their own suffering and crucifixion seriously and end up with Black Theology as their relevant theology.³ In the same way, Latin Americans, reflecting upon their liberation praxis, came up with Liberation Theology as their theological statement.⁴

It is therefore our ecumenical obligation to search for a relevant theology for our situation today. Our positive response to this ecumenical obligation shall not only be continuing the laudable tradition of Martin Luther, Calvin, Black and Latin christians and others but also the tradition of the founding fathers of the church of the first century A.D.

1.1 THEOLOGICAL JUSTIFICATION

Our biblical justification lies in that God of the Exodus who condescended from his throne of justice not merely to the world of man but to the deep dungeon of slavery in which his people were suffering in order to bring them out and create a new people who will be en route to a new human identity, and a new land as he says in Ex. 3:7 "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard their outcry against their slave-masters. I have taken heed of their sufferings, and have come down to rescue them from the powers of

Egypt, and to bring them up out of that country into a fine, broad land ..." It is as they reflect on their own praxis as a "nation of priests" and "a light to the nations" (Isa. 49:6) who were called to follow on his foot steps, and do what their God did (Isa. 42:6 and 7) and on the praxis of this God of the Exodus that Moses and the Israelites sang a song of praise to God whom they had just experienced as their liberator and said (Ex. 15:1-2) "I will sing to the Lord, for he has risen up in triumph; the horse and the rider he has hurled into the sea. The Lord is my refuge and my defence, he has shown himself my deliverer He is my God, and I will glorify him, he is my father's God, and I will exalt him. The Lord is a warrior: the Lord is his name."

This God continues as an act of his grace to condescend and make footprints in the lives and situation of the underdogs in history and transform it. He is consequently being experienced and named the God of the Oppressed. If this God continues to be present and active in our world and make footprints in our present history, and if we are touched and affected by him, and if the world is concretely transformed by his involvement, then we are under an obligation to reflect theologically on his footprints and ours and develop a related theology.

Our obligation to develop a theology for our struggle also has a christological basis. It is based upon the biblical teaching that God became the poor man Jesus (incarnation) as his historical act of solidarity with man who was lost and involved in self destruction by destroying his fellowman. It is based on the historical fact that Jesus of Nazareth chose the side of the underdogs in society, lived a life of solidarity of the kingdom of God with the poor, the weak and the despised. He suffered and died at the hands of sinners. Paradoxically his suffering and death were his ultimate actions that aimed-at-converting man to God his creator and transforming the world, making it a true reflection of the coming kingdom of God. The scripture teaches that he rose from the dead never to die again and is present today in our world, responding with solidarity to the cry of God's suffering creation, a creation which according to St. Paul (Rom. 8:22) "groans like a woman in labour, waiting for the manifestation of the children of God". And because Jesus Christ is present today among those who suffer in an effort to respond to his call for discipleship, a discipleship that aims at creating a new man who responds to God and his fellow man and transforms the world to make it a home for his creatures, we cannot but make every effort to develop a christology that accounts for our hope in the transformation of the world and the coming of God's reign.

2. BLACK CHRISTOLOGY: METHODOLOGY

Black christological reflection takes place between two poles which are in an interplay. It is done in terms of the anthropo-soteriological question "who do you say that I am and how can I be liberated to my authentic self?" on the one hand and the christological question "who do you say that I am?" (Matt. 16:15; Mk. 8:29) which was posed by Jesus to his comrades and followers on the other hand.

It will appear strange to the classical christological eyes that the order of the questions has been reversed in our reflection. In classical christology the starting point is always what the bible says coming first and followed by its application in the realm of human history or practice.

The reversal of the order is not just a matter of arbitrariness on our part as theologians of the third world. It is to our mind a christo-pneumatological necessity; we are here following the logic of Jesus of Nazareth praxis which provoked an accompanying praxis of his followers who read it rightly or wrongly and attempted to translate it in their existential situation however feebly. In other words, while Jesus went around the hills, plains and sea shores of Galilee and Judea what he did and said radiated an imperative on the disciples to an extent that they were impelled to ask silently "who are we in the light and as a result of this praxis of Jesus and how can we become our authentic self in the world?" It was while armed with this question which came from their existential situation, in its entirety, a question that was activated by Jesus' praxis that said who he was in terms of the question "who do you say I am?" that the disciples started to work out a praxis of true discipleship and continued to increase and improve on it. In other words their praxis was a concrete answer to Jesus christological question, a practical answer that accompanies and validates the verbal answer "You are the Messiah" (MK 8:29).

In fact it is significant that Jesus did not desire to be identified and in that way have an identification of his Messianic praxis imposed from above. This is why he silenced demons and other people who became aware of his true identity very early. It is even more significant that, according to Mark, the question of his identity was posed only after a series of his actions (words and deeds) whereby he carried out his Messianic programme of realizing the kingdom of God among the Palestinian people of different social classes and religious persuasions, clearly benefitting the down trodden and marginalized. This Messianic secret was a strategy that allowed each and everyone who encountered him to read his praxis, make a decision for or against him and start to concretize that decision or choice thereby saying who He was to him or her concretely.

It should be clear that we do not agree with those who assert that the disciples did not know and follow him in faith before the resurrection. We would ask them to say why the disciples violated so many standard Jewish religious and social norms and practices to an extent that the Pharisees and Sadducees were offended by some of these violations? We contend that Jesus' praxis started very early in their time together to have an impact on them and they also started very early to respond practically and verbally to it.

We also contend that we are right in reversing the order for christo-pneumatological reasons. By virtue of his resurrection Jesus Christ is alive among the downtrodden in the world doing what he did among the downtrodden of the 1st century Palestine or as K. Barth puts it "walking the way from Jordan to Golgotha." He descends deep into the black ghettos where there is intense suffering and frustrations because of the beastly and murderous activities of the police and army of the white racist state as well as exploitative capitalists who dismiss black labourers in protection of capital, and shares their suffering.

Jesus Christ the event of creation awakens those oppressed blacks who had resigned themselves to the mercy of the white oppressor and creates well motivated acting subjects who are determined to go all the way and do whatever is necessary to affirm their humanity and create social and economic structures which will support it. As he is active among these oppressed in the world today they too read his praxis with eyes that are opened by his spirit and undertake a translation of his Messianic praxis because of the infusion of the dynamic power of this Spirit of Jesus Christ. This pneumatologically aroused and dynamised praxis of the oppressed community continues against all repression, propaganda, deceptions and lies to grow in strength, radicality and widen in scope in line with that of Jesus the Messiah. As it widens in scope it includes more and more sections of the black community. Black workers realize their vanguard role in the liberation struggle and use their labour power to strangulate the industrial machine that feeds the white racist state and oils its instruments of coercion – the police (both plain clothed and uniformed) and the army. The black community discovers the power of the money in their hands (small as it may be in one hand but sizeable if pooled) and use it to empower themselves and expose the dependence of white exploiters who used to treat black people with contempt while worshipping their hard earned money. Black school children and students are breaking the myth that apartheid education is a necessary evil which has to be consumed in the absence of a better one. They have paralyzed the entire Bantu education system, depriving the white racist state and its capitalist base of an ideological instrument that projected white capitalist values and

norms that enslave black people. More and more black church people, lay and professional, are withdrawing their apartheid legitimizing theology. They are increasingly discovering the liberating message of Jesus the Black Messiah which condemns oppressive structures and urges the oppressed to go on at all costs and are articulating it courageously as expression of a deep faith amidst conditions that negate faith.

2.1 THE INTERLOCUTOR OF BLACK CHRISTOLOGY

The interlocutor of classical theology is an individual modern man (bourgeois) or a collective of modern men who have come of age. In Black Christology as in Black Theology the one whose questions and concerns are given priority is the black community which is struggling to remove all obstacles which prevent it from coming of age in its own way. It is a community that includes christians who derive inspiration for their commitment as well as purification and direction for it from the christian tradition. This Black community as the community that poses questions is a community that is historically broad to include the dead, the living and unborn and qualitatively rich enough to have a history, a culture and a land.

This character of the black interlocutor in Black Theology necessitates the inclusion of Black History, Black Culture and land in christological reflection as elements that inform the self-understanding of the black community, continuously and rapidly transforms its quest as well as enlighten its reading of scripture.

2.1.1 Black Christology and Black History

On the basis of the contemporaneity of Jesus Christ, the victorious Lord of history and time we have to go further and affirm his presence and victorious activity in our past, including our distant African past.⁵ He has been there since the beginning of time (Col. 1:15-16) as the one who is "the same yesterday, today and tomorrow". He was there in our African past traversing the way from Bethlehem to Golgotha, creating new black men and black women and transforming the world. As he traversed this way of the cross black men and black women in our African past were converted to him and to a liberative praxis in their time and world. In other words, Jesus Christ the Crucified was there as the liberative undercurrent in our African past, creating, evoking and empowering a corresponding liberative undercurrent in our African history.

Anthropologically, this liberative undercurrent in our African history is represented by certain names of the "founding fathers" of African existence and resistance who are heroes because they were martyred in struggles for their humanity and land as well as for the survival and future of their posterity – you and I. This is where the names of Chaka, Moshoeshe, Sekhukhuni and others of yesterday come in as the carriers of a liberation tradition in our Black history.

This history of black suffering at the hands of white racists and capitalists who subjected black people of all shades to inhuman oppression and merciless exploitation could not but provoke black christians of the past to translate this experience into theological and religious questions. As they asked the right questions about the relevance of this black liberative current of their own time to the white christian religion and theology of their time the word of God sounded loud and clear to them. They felt commanded by Jesus Christ's love for black humanity that was being trampled upon to sound a clear No to that evil, so clear a No that history would never forget it.

They broke away from white churches in which they experienced a Pharaonic God on Sunday after enduring Pharaonic oppression the whole week, and established their own black churches where they could worship the God of the Exodus in their own churches of the Exodus inspired by Exodus 5:1ff. It was in these churches which were formed in the late 19th century that black church leaders mobilized black resistance against racist oppression in and out of church and purified christianity under the banner of "Africa for Africans" inspired by psalm 68:11. As J. de Gruchy rightly states, they called these churches Ethiopian Churches " ... a name which clearly stresses the fact that christianity came to Africa long before any European missionary".⁶

In these churches the Black Messiah was worshipped and prayers were sent up to him to raise prophets of the caliber of Makana, a religious leader and military commander who was active in 1819 against the white settlers in South Africa.

It is abundantly clear from the above that what is being appropriated by Black Theology is not Black History in its entirety. This history can remain as a large fountain that contains data, both positive and negative, from which a critical selection is made. What Black Theology retrieves and appropriates, using the criterion of "liberative current", is only that which has proved its worth in the purifying fire of the struggle for the humanity of our forefathers and its material basis, their land. As a matter of fact, it is these liberative elements in the wide and deep pool of black history that have verified the truth of the christian message of salvation and consequently sustained the faith

of our christian forefathers. Only these resilient elements can serve as instruments for inspiring black people in their present struggle, lifting it up to greater heights and accelerating its pace. They can also serve to criticize and expose the mistakes of the present generation of potential heroes and thereby enhance the quality of our methods and goals.⁷ These elements will create in our here and now a liberation current that witnesses to the victorious presence of Jesus Christ in our black efforts to become free members of the human family.

2.1.2. Black Culture

What is Black Culture? And when and how is it formed? Black Culture in its visible and invisible, material and immaterial, audible and inaudible forms is the net result of black experiences and creative efforts as black people eke out existence from oppressed nature under the scorching heat of the sun. It also emerges as black people arrange their social relations so that they can share the crumbs that are stolen from the table of exploitation in such a way as not to sink together but instead to survive together. It emerges when black people find ways of communicating the spirit of survival and resistance among themselves in order to raise the sunken heads of fellow blacks.

Black Culture as such is an expression of oppression. It is in such a culture that one can measure the depth and the extent of the damage that has been done on black people because it is itself oppressed, shackled culture. It manifests the bruises and scars of dehumanization. But this is just one part of the truth. The other part of the truth is that black culture is at the same time a loud and subversive protest against material, political and social dehumanization of black people. It is black people's way of affirming and asserting their humanity against all odds. As such black culture is that underground stream that irrigates the tree of liberation that will eventually erupt in open struggle.

If black culture is a culture that suffers cultural domination at the hands of the culture of the conquerer with the purpose of completing the process of military conquest, how does it suddenly possess the resources of protest? As long as the vanquished black people still exist and are not exterminated by a total genocide, they will retain the memory of freedom hidden in the dark corner of their subconscious. It is this memory of freedom which includes a culture of freedom which when conditions become more favourable for it to surface will inform the black community and stimulate a new cultural renaissance of a culture of struggle which will go into combat against the culture of the conquerer denying it its legitimating function over black people.

It will rise to ascendancy and take over the function of legitimation from that of the culture of the conquerer. But instead of promoting the right of conquest and calling for subordination it legitimates the right of rebellion and emphasizes the duty of collective insurrection. If black culture is a culture that suffers cultural domination at the hands of the culture of the conquerer with the purpose of completing the process of military conquest, how does it suddenly possess the resources of protest? As long as the vanquished black people still exist and are not exterminated by a total genocide, they will retain the memory of freedom hidden in the dark corner of their subconscious. It is this memory of freedom which includes a culture of freedom which when conditions become more favourable for it to surface will inform the black community and stimulate a new cultural renaissance of a culture of struggle which will go into combat against the culture of the conquerer denying it its legitimating function over black people. It will rise to ascendancy and take over the function of legitimation from that of the culture of the conquerer. But instead of promoting the right of conquest and calling for subordination it legitimates the right of rebellion and emphasizes the duty of collective insurrection.

If Jesus Christ the event of resurrection continues to be in solidarity with the oppressed blacks in their struggle to free themselves to become children of God and brothers of Jesus, and if black brothers of Jesus produce a liberating culture in struggle which in turn dynamizes and energizes their exodus of hope then we should be confident that God accepts their culture as his instrument. He uses its liberative elements and dimensions as witnesses of his will for black people. If that is the case Black Theologians cannot but search for his footprints and his melody in it and use it as a source for Black Theology.

The only way in which the memory of freedom that includes a memory of a culture of freedom can be eradicated is by the extermination of the oppressed. But that would of course defeat the very aim of oppression. And the oppressor will therefore not do that. Paradoxically by not exterminating the oppressed he allows cultural resistance to emerge which will eventually contribute to his overthrow. The oppressors harbour inevitably and powerlessly their grave diggers.

2.1.3. Black Christology and Land

In our history in which black people's land has been forcibly and illegally stolen, it is necessary to restore and sustain the hitherto battered and besieged sense of ownership of that land. It is no secret

that South African history is characterised by a psychological campaign that is aimed at alienating blacks from their land as well as at destroying their sense of ownership and value of their land. In this history in which every generation of black people has suffered one or more uprootings, it is imperative for the sense of belonging to our land, South Africa, to be restored and for an awareness of the injustice of these uprootings to be heightened.⁸ This is made more pressing and urgent by the escalating systematic uprootings of black people from their highly cherished and treasured lands which are going on presently in South Africa. This process of uprootings is exacerbated by the collaboration of bantustan administrations that are hard at work, as is shown by their anthems and propaganda media, to falsify our land claims and nurture a bantustan land consciousness. Lastly in the present ideological debate among our people in which, in many cases, an ideological reduction of the significance of land is done, we need to ponder reconciliation with land in theological and cultural terms.

As far as the Black cultural tradition is concerned, land is the mother and Black people are "sons and daughters of the soil." It gives black people an identity and in turn receives an identity from them. Land is the source of livelihood for all people and has, therefore, to be cherished and cared for. It is, however, not sufficient to regard land only as a means of production in a narrow sense. It is more than this. Our land is the source of individual and communal health. We dig our health roots out of it and pluck our tree leaves and tree bucks from trees growing on it. It is also of religious significance as the location of sacred places where we dialogue with the founding fathers of the black community. There are mountains, ponds, streams and bushes in our country which are still regarded as sacred by many black people today. Tearing these people away from this land is sacreligious. The land is also socially and psychologically significant as a locus for our habitation and as the area where we sink our roots and derive our freedom to move around through the breadth and length of our country. We always come back to our roots. It is against this view of land and the effects of the belonging to some land that the present brutal uprooting of black people which is so mercilessly and insensitively executed comes out in clear relief. We have grandparents, parents and children today who have no roots anywhere and who are losing the sense of rootage. This will undoubtedly have unavoidable detrimental effects on the black personality. The land is also the bedroom where we put our departed loved ones to bed. It is also the house of our ancestors. We always go back to them to have our dialogue with them, to retain and promote our sense of community.⁹ Without them we lose our sense of continuity and history. Without them and their land we float like a ship without an anchor and compass on a stormy sea. Incidentally, some

of our people who were forced to leave our country many years ago even go to an extent of requesting those friends who may still go to South Africa and come back, to bring them some small quantity of soil or a small piece of stone. In this way they retain an emotional bond with the land of their birth.

It is for this reason that Black Christology cannot ignore the issue of land as informer and transformer of christological thought. If accepted, I am convinced, it will deepen christology and expose the wealth of a materialist reading of, especially, the Gospels.

3. THE THREE DIMENSIONAL APPROACH TO THE STORY OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

If we accept that Palestine in first century was a class society with class contradictions, and where a class struggle was being waged, (Belo, Clevenot, Jeremias) and if we also accept that class struggle is fought at the economic, political and theological dimensions of human existence; and if we further agree that Jesus entered that struggle on the side of poor and the oppressed, we have to outline his struggle at these dimensions as well as ask for the immediate and long term impact of his input on these three dimensions-economic, political and theological – of the life of his audience. Since these three dimensions impinge on one another, influencing and determining one another, we further have to search for that reciprocal influence of one area on another.

Recent efforts at development of a historical christology tend to stop at the two dimensions i.e. political and theological (Moltmann, Sobrino). While we accept the importance of these dimensions and highly appreciate the work done on them, we fully agree with Cornel West that the economic dimension as the material basis of the above dimensions needs to be accentuated more than it hitherto has been the case.¹⁰

This is what Black Christology will be engaged in. To achieve that we shall pay much attention to the beneficiaries of Jesus' actions and ask how they are affected by them. It is a pity that the gospel texts do not make our task any easy by articulating the response of the poor and the oppressed in detail. The writers have mostly silenced them and chose to allow the enemies of Jesus more space for self-expression.

The impact of Jesus' liberative work will be followed as it develops dialectically and radicalizes until it reaches its climax in the cross. It is only after this elaboration of the history of Jesus that we shall ask

theological questions which will be based on it.

This, as you can observe, is a different way of going about with textual material from that adopted by classical christologies which we inherited. In these older traditions a direct theological translation or interpretation of the work and life of Jesus of Nazareth is done. This is done on the assumption that those textual facts as presented by the gospel writers say everything at a historical plane even to the contemporary addressees and hence the immediate theological interpretation. We are not convinced that this is the case, at least as far as oppressed black people are concerned.

Our contention is that these textual facts have to be read historically with contemporary eyes first before they are theologically translated in order for our audience to be able to verify our theological statements with greater ease. This will lead to the emergence of an informed christian community that will be able to account for its faith and hope in situations which oppose their faith and question the ground of their hope.

3.1. GOD BECAME THE JEW JESUS OF NAZARETH

Black christology starts the depiction of the life story of Jesus and reflection on it in the dark lit stable and manger of Bethlehem. The son of God who becomes the lowest of men is born in very humble and inhuman circumstances which are similar to those in which black people are trapped, in which black school children, exploited mothers and fathers and unemployed are "born again" for the struggle of liberation. His habitat is also similar to those in which black migrant mine workers who have been forced to leave their beloved families in rural areas are forced to live and in which they are "born anew" for the liberation of their loved ones and black people in general.

It is while suffering the pain which is inflicted by these circumstances that black christians – searching for their humanity and material and social conditions which will affirm it in terms of the question "who are we" – read the story of the oppressed baby who is born in a humble stable anew and with their own eyes and hear it with their own ears. They stop reading and listening to it with the eyes and ears of their white oppressors. Only now does this story make sense, liberating sense.

This is a different starting point from that of J. Sobrino who finds an hermeneutical opening in the Galilean crisis as well as from that of K. Barth¹⁰ who starts his depiction of the story of Jesus with the Jordan baptism and concentrates it in the cross. What accounts for this

difference are the contexts in which and historical periods during which we do a christological reflection. What is common among all these approaches coming as they do from different continents is that the primary concerns of certain people inform and influence the search for an appropriate entry into the history of Jesus of Nazareth which can enhance the relevance of christology. Hence, faced with similar sets of circumstances and challenges we might also adopt one of these hermeneutical openings to make our christological reflection immediately relevant and fruitful.

As we have stated above, the Son of God is born in Bethlehem of Juda as a Jew from Galilee. This fact implies that christology has to be developed within the context of the Old and New testament together. (Israel "son", Jesus Son) Jesus the Liberator is one of those slave people of God who were liberated by God and transformed in order to undertake an Exodus struggle to a new and free land and become a free people. He is representative par excellence of those people who were also called to be a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19, 6). They were called to be "a light to the nation, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring about the prisoners from the -the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness." (Isa. 42:6-7 RSV) i.e. for the universalization of liberation. But as it is, those people of God did not as a people become what they were intended to be. Only a remnant, the prophetic minority stood out consistently and suffered in an effort to be true to the glorious calling of becoming the light of justice and freedom to the oppressed. And Jesus declared that he stands as a continuation and a fulfilment of this oppressed but dynamic and liberative tradition (Is. 61, Luke 4, 18, 19). He has come as the true Son of God to continue and complete the Exodus of all oppressed and exploited of Israel (particularity) and of the world (universality) with his life, death and resurrection.

Jesus was not only a Jew from "Galilee of the heathens" (Mt. 4:15, 16) at a particular time in the history of that province. As we can establish, Galilee, even while it was the breadbasket of colonized Palestine, was generally poor and rundown because the profits of the labour of Galilean labourers and peasants were expatriated to Jerusalem the capital of Judea and to Rome the seat of the Roman Empire.

This province was culturally deprived and its inhabitants (under classes) despised, hence the question: "can anything good come from Nazareth?" (John 1:46). Because of its openness to the world in view of the highways that ran through it making it possible for many foreigners of other races and religions to exist and intermingle with the locals of the area, the population of Galilee was suspected of

racial and religious impurity by the racial and religious purists in Judea. Indeed Jesus came from an oppressed and exploited province in a colonized country.¹¹

He was himself the oppressed and poor of Galilee who could not afford even a low grade hotel in Jerusalem to be born in. His parents could only afford a tute dove at a very significant moment in his youth, his circumcision (Luke 2:24).

It is amazing that ever since disinherited black christians and theologians started to point out the poverty of Jesus which is similar to theirs and ever since they affirmed the salvific impact of his comradeship in-poverty, the rich white christians and theologians feel dispossessed of their Jesus who is supposed to belong to the middle class, their class. They thus also feel excluded from the range of the salvific impact of Jesus the poor Messiah. And as beneficiaries and children of an aggressive culture of grabbing they cannot take it lying down. They go into action, in a new game. Since they can no

longer cling to claims of his bourgeois background – this will be a too transparent reaction – they'll instead declare his classlessness, his neutrality. (If I cannot own him alone, you should not own him either! or if he is not white then he is colourless!) B.J. Walt is a classic example of this tactical compromise. He says: "The son of a carpenter in these days would not be rich, it does not follow either that he suffered any privations in material sense of the word."¹² As evidence that he was not poor, the wedding of Cana is misused: "Remember that at the family wedding at Cana the wine flowed freely." Our question is simple: how many Canas were there, where wine flowed freely?

We cannot affirm the poverty and hence the working class position of Jesus often enough as well as the subjective choice of the poor which he made and stuck to while this tactical compromise persists. In agreement with J. Cone who has argued so convincingly, we also say that, Jesus the poor Jew from Galilee is black in South Africa, a country in which black stands for suffering at its worst as well as for struggle to be a "light to the nations" at its height.¹³

This is how God came to us and this is who he is among us: the oppressed poor God. God has not just become man. God has become oppressed man. God has come as the black in the scarred and bleeding bodies of black people of this country (Mt. 25:31-42)

We can rightly assume that during the time of Jesus the sophisticated instruments of social analysis were not available. Social reformers of the first century A.D. could therefore not gain an analytical knowledge of their world. We cannot deny, however, that they did their best in their circumstances to understand it in order to deal with it in the most

effective way. This is at least the case with Jesus. He consistently did a very penetrating reading of his society even without the sophisticated instruments of social analysis. This enabled him to devise effective strategies and tactics as well as change them whenever the situation justified it in order for his mission to be successful.

He was painfully aware of divisions, group antagonisms and conflicts in Israel of the first century A.D. It was clear to him that there were antagonisms and conflicts between the rich and the poor in the economic sphere (Mt. 23:13) as well as accompanying social divisions between the front benchers and back benchers (Mt. 23:6). Cultural deprivation abounded (Mk. 2:23-25) as well as religious manipulation (Lk. 11:46).

This was the situation in which there was no neutrality. No one sat on the fence or opted out of it. It was all embracing and affected each and all. Some benefitted from it and enjoyed it and were even bent on continuing it. Others suffered it, tried to change or prayerfully awaited its end.

Coming from the backyards of rundown Galilee and approaching this reality from the radical prophetic perspective, the perspective of that minority of men of God who were sensitive to the pain of the downtrodden, attentive to God's word of justice and committed to its realization, Jesus chose the side of the poor and the afflicted. He enters their world, not like a tourist or observer who remains safely outside while peering inside and never reaching the bottom of the pit. No, He descends deep into it and makes it his own in such a way and to such an extent that even death could not remove him. Instead it found him in it and came because of it.

Having made the world of the poor and oppressed his own, Jesus immerses himself deeply and totally in it, reaching down to the bottom of the pit. On the other side letting it enter his whole being and increase as well as transform his knowledge. He comes to know it, not like an observer who remains unscarred by his knowledge of phenomena, but as a victim who bears deep psychological, physical and emotional scars of that world. This makes his knowledge not only objective but also subjective knowledge of the condition of the world.

To be continued.

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