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EDITORIAL

Many black theologians, academic, non-professional, pastors, and black activists who profess the meaningfulness of the Christian faith in social action, have been clamouring for years for a journal of black theological thought. But their clamour did not lead to any concrete action. Many more black Christians have dreamed for years about that journal which would capture theological musings as black Christians talk about God, Jesus, the children of Israel, and what they experience as Jesus' foot-prints in their journey of faith towards their liberated land. But their dreams evaporated in the scorching heat of repression, even theological repression in the 1970's, which resulted in the closing down of black papers and banning of many black theological articles.

With this JOURNAL OF BLACK THEOLOGY in South Africa, a modest response to that clamour and those dreams is being made. We are placing it at the centre of the black community and its struggle to ponder the mystery of the resilience of black faith in the God of the Exodus in a situation and conditions which make this faith impossible. Our hope is that the black community will welcome it and use it as a vehicle of communication and a forum for exchange of ideas that can hasten the dawning of a new day of freedom, and the emergence of new men and women of reconciling justice in South Africa. If this journal can stimulate creative thought, lively theological discussion and somehow continuously reorientate the social life and political action of the black community at the end of the day we shall thank God for it. If this humble journal can contribute to the growing body of liberative black writings which are appearing in greater numbers at the end of the day, posterity will look at the contributors of our time with pride. We all owe it to our fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers who have gone before us as well as to children and grandchildren who will hopefully come after us to leave our foot-prints in the sands of the history of theological thought. Let us rise to this historic challenge and use this journal creatively and enthusiastically.

This particular issue is launched at the moment in the history of South Africa when black people – nominal and practicing Christians – are going through a very long Good Friday with no signs of an impending Easter. The cross as a symbol of tears, pain, and the shedding of innocent blood still rests heavily on the frail shoulders of black sons and daughters of this land. The cold and dark grave that has swallowed so many young followers of the Messiah from Galilee in their prime stares menacingly at many more unsuspecting Christians. It is still displaying a frightening capacity for destruction of all humans who stand up for justice and liberation. The Easter morning which will herald the drying of tears, the healing of wounds and the ultimate 'standing up' of that oppressed humanity which has

suffered during the long Good Friday, is still not coming. Easter faith in the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth still waits with growing impatience for its confirmation which the victorious chorus of the downtrodden will represent. During this time of painful waiting our weakening faith will be sustained by the knowledge that the God of the oppressed, the God of the Christian faith suffers creatively with his crucified creatures, as he suffered with his crucified son. It will hopefully survive as it drinks from the well of steadfast hope and conviction that this God who did not forget nor forsake His beloved son will rise up in righteousness to raise those who seem and feel forgotten in their grave. These painful realities are not eluding our attention.

As a matter of fact the papers which are included in this issue express them either explicitly and directly or subtly and silently. These articles, different in style and varied in content, present more than this. They present the dialectic of the cross of Jesus and its impact of the oppressed in our land. Through them, the readers are invited to revisit critically their theological heritage and explore, with the authors, the identity of Jesus in the light of black experience and hope in the coming Kingdom of God.

As it stands the well of hope from which the thirst of resurrection faith is quenched has to be dug in the depth of the tomb of despair and misery. Here again the witness of scripture comforts us by reminding us that God has already dug this well in the tomb of Jesus of Nazareth and is doing the same today in the "present day tomb" where the oppressed are buried – the crowded townships, squatter camps, shanty towns, migrant labourers' delapidated hostels and peasant shacks. God is miraculously bringing bone and bone together, adding flesh where there was none and finally infusing these lifeless bodies with the life-giving Spirit. Consequently "the dead" in the black communities everywhere in this land are starting to show signs of coming to life in "the tomb" where they are still trapped. They are, in a positive response to God's call, starting their painful journey out of their darklit "tomb" into the sunlit land of freedom and justice where God alone will reign with righteousness.

This act of standing up straight and walking and struggling to get out introduces the followers of "the Messiah out of the tomb" into the dialectic of the cross. They are victimised. But they also suffer redemptively and as that happens hope gains its ground and resurrection faith is strengthened.

One dimension of this exodus out of the tomb of oppression and inhumanity is an ideological one, or to be more accurate, a theological one. And this is where these articles come in. They are all searching for light which will enlighten our path and speed up our long and difficult journey as well as help all those who emerge from the pit to regain their humanity and keep it in the difficult years ahead.

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A BLACK CHRISTOLOGY: A NEW BEGINNING

Dr T.A. Mofokeng

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 countering 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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GOSPEL AND CULTURE

DR S. DWANE

1. THE PARTICULAR AND THE UNIVERSAL

St Paul in his letter to the Romans (chapter 1.3) speaks of Jesus as one who was 'descended from David according to the flesh'. St John echoes this in his famous statement of the fact of the incarnation: the Word became flesh and dwelt among us'. And then in 1 John in somewhat polemic fashion it is asserted that every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not (so) confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of the antichrist . . .! (4.26-3a). The opening words of the epistle make the same point by drawing attention to the fact that Jesus was actually seen with human eyes and touched with human hands. The Gospels are accounts of his earthly life and ministry. The New Testament Community remembered Jesus as a particular person, who was closely associated with the band of twelve, and a few other people like Lazarus and his two sisters Martha and Mary, but who also attracted many other people with his vibrant personality, his genuine love for people, his prophetic preaching and teaching, and his authority and supernatural power. Jesus was born a Jew, and brought up in an environment in which particular national customs were observed, certain religious beliefs held, and formal patterns of religious observance followed. According to Luke, he was circumcized on the eighth day, and brought to the Temple where he was received by Simeon. Some of the details about the life of Jesus may of course be legendary, but perhaps not all of them. As recollections of his earthly life, fragmentary though they may be, they represent an important truth about him, namely, that he grew up in a home in which the culture of his people and their religious beliefs and practices were taken seriously. He assimilated the history of Israel, and acknowledged that the holy scriptures were both a product of that history as well as its commentary. And it was as a participant of that history in all its rich cultural, social, political and religious diversity that he had to discover his own particular vocation.

St Paul also speaks of Christ as 'the last Adam', and 'the first born of all creation'. In him the unity of God's creation is achieved and expressed. The gulf which separated man from God is bridged, and the alienation of human beings from each other is shown to be contrary to God's will, and as such, an evil which is swallowed up in his victory on the Cross. Jesus as the second Adam is the man for others in whom God makes it possible for all human beings to discover what it means to be a person. For in him, God reveals that even sinners and outcasts, the lowly and the despised, are cared for. Both rich and poor who accepted the invitation were able to come to

Jesus, and find in him God's friendship. People of other races too like the Samaritan leper who returned to him to give thanks for his healing, and the Syrophenician woman whose daughter had an unclean Spirit, came to Jesus and sought his help. Jesus was a Jew, but his ministry went beyond the confines of his own people. His passion and death is the expression of God's care and compassion for the whole world. At his resurrection and ascension, his life is made available to all mankind through the outpouring of his Spirit. He commanded his disciples at the end of his ministry on earth, to go out and preach the Gospel to all nations, and promised to remain with them to the end of this age. The day of small beginnings had come to an end, and Pentecost would inaugurate the new era in which he would become known by the whole world, and acknowledged as God's anointed One, the New Adam, in whom peoples of all races and nationalities would discover their true identity and common destiny.

In Jesus therefore the particular and the universal exist side by side. He is a man who lived and worked in a particular historical and cultural situation. But he is also the man in whom God reveals and accomplishes his will for mankind and creation as a whole. The incarnate life is a particular historical event which has far-reaching consequences. It is the affirmation of a fundamental truth about human existence. Each person is influenced by his or her own environment, its history, and culture patterns. But the incarnation also opens up cultures to each other so as to enable them to interact and enrich each other. Culture is the expression of group loyalty, a common identity, and shared memories and ideals. These memories and ideals find their expression in the celebration of festivals of a religious or socio-political nature. What God in the incarnate life does is to indicate that the origin and the ultimate destiny of all these human ventures is himself, because Christ as the New Adam has appropriated for himself what is best in all of them. In him there is unity in diversity.

2. THE GOSPEL AND HUMAN DIVERSITY

The Christian Gospel is for all people irrespective of language or race or culture or sex, or age. But then each tribe or nation has to receive it in its own way, and find its own appropriate ways of expressing it and living it out in theology, in forms of worship and spirituality, and in patterns of church administration and of maintaining discipline. The process of receiving and living out the Gospel is the one that gives christianity in any given context a particular character whether it be Western European, or Oriental, or African. Just as God in Christ became a particular person i.e. a Jew who recognized certain Jewish

beliefs, customs, and practices, so God in creating us made us particular human beings who to some extent are circumscribed and influenced by our own environment, culture, and prevalent religious outlook in our communities. The environment of our upbringing is the particularity in which the universal has to be earthed and rooted. The Gospel shows itself to be truly universal when it goes round the world and finds itself a home in every human situation. This is what the incarnate life is all about. God meets people where they are, as they are. And as the Gospel adapts itself to its new circumstances, so it gives a new soul to that community, and in return the community gives to it a new outward expression, a character.

On the face of it, this need for the Gospel to take root by assimilating what is best in every culture, and transforming it, appears to be a straightforward matter which should be taken for granted, and cause no dispute. But when one looks at what has in fact happened in Africa, one sees a different picture. What does emerge, is that European missionaries behaved towards African converts rather like Judaizers in the days of St Paul. Judaizers were those opponents of St Paul's approach to mission, who insisted that Gentiles had to become Jewish before they could be accepted into the fellowship of the church. St Paul rejected this, and even rebuked Peter when he wavered (Gal. 2.11ff). At the end of the day it was his view which held sway, for which those who have interest in the Catholicity of the christian faith must be truly grateful. I maintain, and there is enough evidence for it, that the early missionaries to Africa behaved like Judaizers towards African converts. Instead of accepting them as they were, they attempted to make them in their own image, after their own likeness. Of course one has to admit that there were exceptions to this rule, but the general assumption was that Africans were 'savages' and 'thorough infidels' who had to be persuaded to abandon their own way of life, and adopt christianity with all its Western trimmings, lock, stock and barrel. The outcome of this is that when African christians now look at themselves, they realise that they are dressed up in borrowed robes. We have been made not only to look European in outward appearance by our manner of dress, but more seriously, to think, speak, and behave European. But we are beginning to realise that we are in captivity, and that we need to be liberated in order that we may be ourselves, the people whom God has made, and wants us to be. We are learning in this process of re-orienting and re-educating ourselves how to become African, and what it is that makes us African. And as we 'de-colonize' ourselves, we are discovering that there are riches in our own heritage, and learning to appreciate them. These riches have been by-passed in previous attempts to bring the Gospel to Africa. But they are still available and ready to welcome it, and give it a home and a new character. Christianity must have a truly African character if it is to

remain in Africa, and be the religion of Africa. The words of E.W. Smith are words of great wisdom and should be pondered over and over again:

“What can be done, then, to naturalize christianity in Africa? . . . It is necessary to urge that our religion be presented to the Africans, not in antagonism to, but as a fulfilment of their aspirations. In actual practice this means, among other things, cultivation of their languages, conservation and sublimation of all that is of value in their customs and institutions, frank recognition of the measure of truth contained in their religion. It implies not a paganization of christianity for the purpose of making it easier to the Africans, but the christianization of everything that is valuable in the African’s past experience and registered in his customs” (*The Golden Stool*, p. 260).

We engage in this search for our true being, and the culture which has contributed in making us what we are, as christians. I want to emphasize that this is not a romantic exercise, but a listening to those suppressed voices within ourselves and in our community. We have come to recognize that we are a people whose heart is divided. For we are torn apart by loyalty to our faith on the one hand, and loyalty to our culture and history on the other. I want to tell you a story to illustrate this. Some years ago I was doing some research into the problem of relationship between christianity and Xhosa culture. I came to a village in the Cape Province in which there was an old Presbyterian Church, a witness to the fact that christianity had been in that village for about a Century. The resident minister with whom I stayed, entrusted me to one of his elders in order to allay any suspicions of me which people might have, and make it possible for them to speak to me openly and honestly. As we went from house to house, the elder began to show signs of impatience with christian people’s adherence to the old traditional beliefs and practices. Matters came to a head when he could not contain his disappointment any longer. At the end of an interview which was honest and frank about our host’s continuing observance of traditional festivals, the elder burst into a triade, the substance of which was, that people were being obstinate and resisting the Gospel by indulging in these ‘heathen’ practices. At which point our host cracked out laughing and said “not to worry Mfundisi about Mdala’s structures, he knows all about this, and he attends our festivals”. Now this story illustrates what I mean when I say that our heart is divided. The elder, as an officer of the church, was trying to maintain the position of the church. But the other side of him had to live with the reality of where people are, and where he himself is, to some extent. We African christians are torn apart and seek wholeness. So we begin this exercise by looking at the One who

alone can give us that wholeness we seek, our Creator and Redeemer. We look at what he has done for us in creation and in the act of redemption, and we see ourselves reflected in him in whose image we are made.

3. THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

I want to suggest to you that there are four theological principles which constitute the framework for our discussion, and on the basis of which we can do our future planning for action. This, I believe, is not an armchair or ivory tower exercise, but a seeking to apply theological principles and convictions to pastoral situations which face us, and to deal with our own inhibitions, the result of past prejudices. Let us begin with our belief that God created the world and us human beings in it, and saw that it was good. What this means in practice is that there is basic goodness in the important human values which African people hold, and which we ourselves as African Christians embrace to some extent. Those values have to do with the common life which binds us as families, clans and their ancestries, with the key concept of *ubuntu* – the recognition and respect of other people's humanity, and the demands which their humanity make upon us as fellow-human beings. Those values are an expression of human solidarity. Arising out of those values, are the traditional ceremonies observed at certain times – child-birth, puberty, when preparations for marriage are being made, and in the marriage ceremony itself, at death, and on those occasions when the deceased members of the family are remembered and honoured. Of course creation has been spoiled by our fallen condition. So African culture as any other human culture has its own strengths and weaknesses. But to reject it because it is a mixture of good things and bad ones is surely to throw away the baby with the bath water.

The second principle is implied in the affirmation that God in Jesus Christ became flesh. God, through his incarnate life, affirms our humanity and its particularity. He becomes to us of Africa, our own flesh and blood. In practical terms this means that God affirms what is good in us, and claims it as his very own. God in Christ tells us that we need not be ashamed of ourselves, our blackness, our modes of thinking, our norms and values, and our traditional culture because we are the work of his hands. Instead we ought to be proud and thankful and not take ourselves for granted as other people have done to us, but should receive ourselves and our condition as given by him.

And as the particularity of Jesus became at his resurrection universally significant, so too when we are truly ourselves we shall be able to contribute something precious to the common wealth of nations, and to the Catholic Church.

Thirdly, the death and resurrection of Christ is the moment of truth for us and our culture. In and through it, the tares in us and in our environment shall be sorted out and cast into outer darkness, while the good harvest shall be collected into the barn. The thought which is often in people's mind is that when the two traditions are allowed to come face to face the result will be a syncretism, a kind of fusion which is neither the one nor the other, and that such a co-mixture would adulterate the Gospel. It could be argued by some people that just as christianity had to break away from Judaism in order to become universal, so it has to take people out of their cultural environment, so as to remain untarnished by any human culture, and thus retain its integrity and universality. Such an argument would of course fly in the face of the facts. Christianity has been influenced by the culture of the West and had to be in order to be Western. There is another reason why the syncretism bogey must not be allowed to deter us from this pursuit. And it is the fact that the Cross of Christ is God's victory over demons in any culture. The resurrection is the ultimate expression of God's sovereignty. God can sort out African culture just as he has sorted out so many others, the results of which we see in the church after so many centuries, with a faith alive and vibrant in many parts in spite of the adverse conditions it has been through.

Fourthly, there is the principle of unity and fellowship in the Spirit. Because christianity is able to claim all cultures as God's gift while it is not the prerogative of any one of them, it follows that they all have a share in the common life of the body. Unity in the spirit is unity in diversity because it takes into account the variety of God's gifts to his people. Fellowship in the spirit is therefore reconciled diversity, a truth clearly enunciated on the day of Pentecost. Because it is one Spirit in whom all members drink, in the body, peoples and cultures are meant to interact, correct as well as enrich each other. The African, we must understand, has nothing whatsoever, to contribute to the common life unless he discovers his true personal and culture identity, and finds a way of identifying with it.

4. SOME SPECIFICS OF THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

Before we come to the end of this discussions I would like us to turn to some of the specifics of our African context, and en flesh the dry bones we have had thus far, in the hope that that will liven up our subsequent debate.

First, there is the matter of marriage and polygamy. In the African tradition, marriage is both a contract and a relationship between two families, clans and ancestries. It is a contract in so far as it has legal

binding, and is meant to be permanent and life-long. But it is more than a contract in so far as it brings about a network of relationships between the living and their members in the ancestral realm. Marriage therefore is a deeply religious exercise, and this fact must be borne in mind when people discuss polygamy. When a male convert to christianity is advised to put away some of his wives and remain with one of them, it is not realised that such a step involves the putting asunder of all the relationships which have been carefully built up, and give that particular person a sense of well-being. The procedure calls for the disruption of family life, and destabilisation of the community of which he is a member, and cannot but remain one. The question which needs to be asked is whether monogamy is in itself a central feature of the christian Gospel, or one of its variable consequences. If it is an indispensable part of the Gospel, then we have to account for the fact that divorced and remarried persons are admitted to communion, and even remarried in church in certain circumstances. It would appear that the church needs to come clean and admit that it does draw a distinction between situations which are ideal and ones which are not so ideal, and then in compassion extend its ministry even to some of its less fortunate members, e.g. slavery is an evil institution which dehumanizes people. But the church lived with it for many centuries. At no period in the history of the church do we hear that slave masters were barred from the fellowship of the church.

If polygamy is not an ideal form of marriage, it seems unjust to isolate it from other comparable human situations which the church is prepared to treat with compassion and understanding.

Secondly, there is the matter of ceremonies in respect of the departed. These are many and varied. But the central truth expressed in all is that God is with the departed in the life hereafter, and continues to make them his gift to us in this life, as we are to them. God holds the two worlds together. However, one must point out that a lot of sorting out of ideas and practices needs to be done in this area as some of its aspects bristle with questions, and raise serious difficulties for people who have come to accept Jesus the High Priest as the only Mediator between God and man. It should however be pointed out that culture is not a static thing, but a thing in process, during which new forms of expression emerge, and begin to replace old ones, as certain emphases become obsolete. It should also be noted that for many christian people who keep traditional festivals, that process of change is already taking place, and will no doubt continue as christianity takes a firmer root in their lives, and as education and urbanization give them a new orientation to life. There are at least two examples to show how people have adapted traditional custom to changed circumstances. In South Africa,

amongst Xhosa people, the custom observed at child-birth as a way of introducing the newly-born to its living family and ancestry is sometimes associated with the baptism of the infant. The other is the 'ukubuyisa' festival by which the deceased head of the family is formally and ritually declared an ancestral Spirit. Some christian families will now observe this ritual at the time of the unveiling of the tombstone, a form of service recognized by the church.

5. CONCLUSION

All these are samples of the specifically African material which has to be carefully explored. The entire African environment has to be opened up and exposed to the light of Christ, and not allowed to remain underground as an alternative to the Gospel. We must recognize that christianity remains foreign to many African people because of its aloofness to their culture. What we should be striving for is complimentarity instead of rivalry between the two traditions. The particular has to find fulfilment in the universal, while in turn the universal can only be earthed concretized and indigenized through the particular.

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BLACK THEOLOGY VERSUS THE SOCIAL MORALITY OF SETTLER COLONIALISM: HERMENEUTICAL REFLECTIONS ON LUKE 1 AND 2

REV. ITUMELENG MOSALA

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to address again the question of Luke's audience as it is reflected in the infancy narratives. In order to do so with some measure of intellectual honesty it is necessary to make clear the questions which I wish to use to interrogate these narratives. These are: What social class assumptions underlie Luke 1 and 2? What is the social class market that these narratives are intended for? What social class reasons or solutions frame the discursive practice that Luke undertakes in these texts? In the context of an Apartheid political economy where black people are fashioning for themselves a black theological weapon of struggle for their liberation, what is the social, political, ideological, and spiritual effects of the Luke 1 and 2 discourse?

These questions are influenced by a materialist approach to exegesis and hermeneutics. They emerge out of a perspective that pre-supposes a methodological priority of material conditions over ideological conditions. That perspective is often articulated in the following terse, albeit frequently misleading way: "The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life process in general. It is not people's consciousness that determines their being, but their social being that determines their consciousness" (Ross Gandy, 1979: 119). Our starting point, therefore in addressing the questions we posed above, is the material conditions of production of the Luke 1 and 2 discourse.

2. THE MATERIAL CONDITIONS OF LUKE 1 AND 2

The social-historical context of Luke 1 and 2 is no doubt the colonial occupation of Palestine by Rome which is characterized by the articulation of two tributary modes of production. The Palestinian tributary mode of production of the first century A.D. was overdetermined by the imperial tributary mode of production of the Roman colonial power. It is necessary to reconstruct however briefly these two tributary social formations and their relationship to each other in order to see how the social history of that world at that time is constituted ideologically through the discursive practice of the Luke 1

and 2 discourse.

2.1. THE MODE OF PRODUCTION

By the mode of production we mean an articulated combination of the forces and relations of production. Forces of production refer to the means of production, e.g., land, cattle, trees, rivers, tools, machines, etc., plus human labour, the latter taking different forms and kinds of organization in different historical epochs and geographical areas. As Ross Gandy puts it:

“The productive forces of an epoch are the raw materials, tools, techniques, work relations and co-operation people use to produce the things they need. In primitive epochs we find the hoe, the spear, the bone needle, the grinding stone, the hunting party, common tillage, and co-operative labor; in feudal times, the mill, the plow, the loom, the axe, the craft tool, the workshop, the strip field, and home industry; under capitalism, the steam mill, the power loom, the locomotive, cross breeding, assembly lines, and factory organization” (Gandy, 1979: 125).

The relations of production refer to the places occupied by people in the process of production. These relations are structured by the nature of social divisions of labour in the society. Whether or not these are classes in a society depends on the form and level of development of this division of labour. The specialization that evolves out of the division of labour and the semi-permanent assignment of people to certain relationships to the means of production and their mobilization in productive activities is a key condition of class configurations in society.

The combination of these relations with the forces of production constitutes the mode of production which is the material basis of social formations. Modes of production are differentiated from one another by the means by which surplus social products are appropriated from direct producers in the society.

2.1.1 The Forces of Production of First Century Palestine

The fundamental means of production in Palestine had been, since antiquity and was during the first century A.D. the **land** and especially the **arable land**. de Ste. Croix makes the point succinctly that “Wealth in the Greek world, in the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic periods, as in the Roman Empire throughout its history, was always essentially wealth in land, upon which conducted the cultivation of cereals . . . and of other agricultural products, especially those of the olive and vine and also the pasturing of cattle, sheep and horses” (1981: 120).

Next to the land the other key means of production in the Palestine of the first century A.D. seems to have been the lakes and seas and probably rivers of that country. With respect to the lakes, Joseph Klausner writes:

“The sea of Galilee contained all manner of fish, including certain very choice varieties . . . So plentiful were the fish that they were salted and sold in Palestine and abroad; this accounts for the fact that a town on the lakeshore which apparently bore the Hebrew name Migdal . . . was the Greek called by the name ‘Tarichaea’ from the word Taplxos salted fish. The newly built Tiberias became the fishing centre and fish market of Galilee” (1925: 176).

Minerals such as salt, bitumen, phosphorus and tar were sometimes found in such places as the Dead Sea (Klausner 1925: 176; Cf. Michel Clevenot, 1985: 43). However, first century Palestine seems not to have witnessed any significant development of the forces of production. Technological progress is not evident during this time. The setting of motion of the forces of production through the tilling of arable land seems to have followed ancient ways of labour organization. Peasant family labour appears, as in the olden times in the absence of slave labour, to have constituted the basic economic production unit in agriculture and in the fishing industry.

2.1.2 The Relation of Production of First Century Palestine

The specific mode of articulation of the means of production (e.g., land, lakes with fish, possible crafts industries) with the available human labour and the forms that the latter may take is a function of the existing social division of labour and its consequent ownership and productive relations. In Palestine in the first century A.D. there existed the principal contradictions between the Roman colonial state and the dependent colonized Palestinian social formation. By virtue of its colonial domination Rome extracted a surplus from the population of Palestine through a comprador Palestinian royalty, nobility and priesthood. This contradiction between Rome and Palestine, however, was overdetermined by an internal social division of labour out of which issued a tributary class formation. The social relations of this tributary mode of production resolve themselves into a political and ideologically powerful class of landowners (made up of contending fractions of Sadducees, Pharisees, priests and scribes) which was responsible to the Roman procurator based in the province, on the one hand. This class was, on the other hand, in contradiction with an ideologically powerless peasant class made up of various strata of people from artisans, apprentices, small property holders, tenant farmers to casual labourers, permanently unemployed people, bandits, petty criminals, prostitutes and beggars.

The surplus which was extracted from the peasants in agriculture

and other industries through land taxes, animal taxes, tithes, etc., functioned to finance the resident alien armies, the local ruling classes, and the Roman colonial state. There seems no indication that the surplus was ever invested in productive activities that could help raise the capital needed for developing the forces of production and consequently increasing productivity for the purpose of meeting the overall human needs. The Roman colonial tributary social formation was a dead end.

External trade tended to focus on luxury items such as oil and wine. Internal trade assumed the form of internal regional barter:

“The Palestinian towns exchanged their agricultural produce. Sharon in Judea sold its wines and bought bread. Jericho and the Jordan Valley sold their famous fruits for bread and wine. The Judean Shefela had a superabundance of bread and oil, and Galilee of corn and vegetables. Palestine also exported its surplus of oil, wine, wheat and fruit, while it imported a considerable number of commodities” (Klausner 1925: 186; See also, F. Belo 1981: 62ff; J. Jeremias 1969 31ff).

First Century Palestine was a complex colonial social formation with a complex class structure. This does not mean that the class forces of this social structure cannot be delineated with reasonable precision. It simply means that the forms of surplus extraction that existed in this society were not confined to the relations represented by the principal contradiction. There were, for instance, historically accrued traditional Palestinian ideological mechanisms of surplus extractions which the Romans did not tamper with but certainly benefited from their use on the peasants of Palestine. Michel Clevenot provides a terse characterization of the relations of production of the social formation which formed the material conditions of production of the Gospel of Luke. He writes:

“In short, First Century Palestine was a class-structured society at every level. At the economic level the masses were fiercely exploited by the privileged. In politics the priestly class, supported by the great landowners, held the mechanism of the state in their hands. Ideologically the ruling class imposed its ideology (essentially the system of purity), which was passed on in diverse ways by the groups, sects, and parties” (1985: 50).

3. IDEOLOGICAL CONDITIONS OF LUKE 1 AND 2

What then is the nature of the movement from history as we have described it above to a reconstitution of that history in a gospel discourse? In examining Luke's ideological production of the historical situation of First Century Palestine we shall avoid the empiricist problematic that plagues most biblical historical critics (see

for instance Richard Cassidy, 1978: 9ff). We shall rather take the view that "the notion of a direct, spontaneous relation between text and history . . . belongs to a naive empiricism which is to be discarded" (T. Eagleton, 1976: 70). Equally, the idea of a possible neat division between the ideological, which is hard to trap with scientific tools, and the historical, which is accessible through formal quasi-scientific methods, is regarded here as epistemologically doubtful. Following Eagleton we shall assume that:

"History, . . . certainly, 'enters' the text, not least the 'historical' text; but it enters it precisely **as ideology**, as a presence determined and distorted by its measurable absences. This is not to say that real history is present in the text but in disguised form so that the task of the critic is then to wrench the mask off its face. It is rather that history is present in the text in the form of a double-absence. The text takes as its object, not the real, but certain significations by which the real lives itself – significations which are themselves the product of its partial abolition;" However, "History . . . is the ultimate signifier of literature, as it is the ultimate signified. For what else in the end could be the source and object of signifying practices but the real social formation which provides its material context?" (T. Eagleton, 1976: 72).

Luke's gospel has been described variously as universalist; concerned about the poor and outcasts, and as a social gospel. The reason for such descriptions lies in the subject matter of this gospel which covers these areas of social life more extensively than the other gospels. To my knowledge, however, no attempt has been made to determine more precisely what the social class perspective from which Luke addresses these issues is and how it determines the nature of the historical in Luke. Such a process of inquiry would lead not only to the class position of Luke but also to the class and ideological interests that frame Luke's discursive practice.

A recent major study on Luke's social and political description of Jesus argues that the picture of Jesus that Luke draws is one of someone who was dangerous to the Roman Empire (R. Cassidy, 1978: 77ff). This study argues that Luke's Jesus "espouses a concern for persons and groups from all social levels and backgrounds, but especially for the poor and the sick, for women and Gentiles" (*Ibid.*). What this study does not do is to scrutinize the class character of a position that portrays Jesus in this way. The study illustrates Luke's description of Jesus as being concerned for groups and persons of all levels by drawing attention especially to his attitude "to the use of material possessions" (*Ibid.*). According to Cassidy "Luke indicates that Jesus adopted an extremely strong position against surplus possessions. Jesus himself lived simply and sparingly and he

praised others like Zaccheus when they took steps to do likewise" (*Ibid.*, .78). It is difficult not to sense in Cassidy's argument hermeneutical assumptions that derive from contemporary liberal humanist ideology. We will argue later that a different set of hermeneutical assumptions that derive from not only a different ideology but also a different cultural and political agenda detects a vastly different ideological manoeuvre on the part of Luke.

Robert J. Karris, by contrast to Cassidy, states more categorically that the "poor and rich" constitutes what he calls "**the lukan Sitz im Leben**". According to Karris "Luke's community clearly had both rich and poor members. Luke is primarily taken up with the rich members, their concerns, and the problems which they pose for the community. Their concerns . . . revolve around the question: Do our possessions prevent us from being genuine Christians?" (in Talbert, (ed.), 1978: 124). Karris is undoubtedly correct in his focus on the rich as Luke's primary preoccupation. What Karris does not do is to draw the hermeneutical implications of Luke's discursive employment of the story of Jesus to address a problem that fundamentally arises out of and concerns a community of rich and powerful people. What happens to Jesus when he is ideologically co-opted into the examine the nature of its 'problems' in the light of its 'solutions' (T. Eagleton, 1976: 88), in order to be able to transcend the ideological limitations of the text. By employing the ideological concerns and aspirations of the oppressed and exploited black people of South Africa as a hermeneutical structuring pole we hope to cause the text of Luke 1 and 2 to yield greater secrets than it has so far done as a result of its encounter with white western ideologies that do not differ markedly from the text's own ideology. For as Eagleton so cogently argues:

"It is not, in other words, simply by virtue of ideology being forced up against the wall of history by the literary text that it is terrorized into handing over its secrets. Its contradictions may be forced from it by its historically determined encounter with another ideology, or ideological sub-ensemble; indeed it is in such historical conjunctures that the moment of genesis of much literature is to be found" (1976: 96).

For Wolfgang Stegemann "the gospel of Luke is a sustained call for repentance – and it is addressed to Christians of wealth and repute" (In Willy Schottroff and Wolfgang Stegemann, 1984: 165). It is absolutely clear to Stegemann that Luke tries to turn into a virtue for the rich and powerful what is a necessity for the poor and powerless majority of the Palestinian people, namely their poverty and homelessness. The experience of starvation, sickness, imprisonment, homelessness, separation from family and friends and persecution from authorities and indeed of being **a single mother** was an inescapable necessity

for the majority of people in first century Palestine. Luke in his gospel turns it into an ethical choice with which the rich and powerful men who make up his audience are faced. The ideological effects of this kind of discursive practice which Luke is engaged in are hinted at by Wolfgang Stegemann when he writes:

“What would it mean for us theologically if the historical Jesus movement had, in fact, drawn its recruits from among the lowly? What if the followers of Jesus, like their master, were from the poor and hungry, not as the result of renunciation of possessions but because in fact they possessed nothing? What if the desired goal of their criticism of the rich was that in the kingdom of God present relationships would be reversed... What this kind of radicality, which has nothing to lose but much to gain, still win our sympathy?” (1985: 166).

Luke's ideological production of the story of Jesus within the historical context of First Century Palestine has made available a gospel that is acceptable to the rich and poor of Luke's community but in which the struggles and contradictions of the lives of the poor and exploited are present by their absence. By turning the experiences of the poor into the moral virtues of the rich, Luke has effectively eliminated the poor from his gospel.

White western bourgeois male exegesis, however, seems incapable of penetrating the ideological practices of Luke in order to reach to the radical story of Jesus and his followers which Luke produces in such a way that it is “handleable” by the rich and the powerful.

In a frenzied attempt to defend the ruling class interests of Luke as revolutionary – of course “responsibly revolutionary” – recent studies of political issues in Luke have colluded with the ideological interests of the texts at the expense of the oppressed and exploited people of First Century Palestine as well as their contemporary world descendants (see for instance R. Cassidy and D. Scharper (eds.) *Political Issues*, 1983: passim; J.M. Ford, *My Enemy*, 1984). The issue, therefore, is not that these scholars misunderstand Luke. They do not. Rather they collude with Luke. In social class terms this is perfectly understandable even though critically indefensible (see Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 1981).

Black theology attempts to transcend the ideological limits that Luke imposes, through his particular production of the Jesus story, by making the history, culture and struggle of the black people a hermeneutical starting point. One of the reasons why black theology takes this position is that it holds that:

“The idea that there are ‘non-political’ forms of criticism is simply a myth which furthers certain political uses of literature all more

effectively. The difference between a 'political' and 'non-political' criticism is just the difference between the prime minister and the monarch: the latter furthers certain political ends by pretending not to, while the former makes no bones about it" (Eagleton, 1983: 209).

Even more importantly, black theology's ideological suspicion in its approach to texts stems from the conviction that:

"Discourses, sign-symptoms and signifying practices of all kinds, from film and television to fiction and the languages of natural science, produce effects, shape forms of consciousness and unconsciousness, which are closely related to the maintenance or transformations of our existing systems of power. They are thus closely related to what it means to be a person. Indeed 'ideology' can be taken to indicate no more than this connection – the link or nexus between discourses and power" (Eagleton, 1983: 210).

Thus in order to situate properly within the wider nexus of power relations what Luke, through the stories of chapter 1 and 2 of the gospel, defines as the meaning of "being a person" black theology must retreat hermeneutically to what black history, black culture and the black struggle defines as the meaning of "being a person".

Prior to the advent of white "civilization" in South Africa a person was a person in relation to other persons. An egalitarian social system in which the means of life production and reproduction were communally owned defined the nature of the dominant morality.

This system of egalitarian social equality was destroyed and replaced by a capitalist civilization whose defining characteristic is private property ownership and the commodification of all aspects of life. The modern form of this civilization is aptly described by Eagleton when he writes:

"Whereas capitalism originally pulled material production away from the spheres in which meanings are produced – the condition of the classical public sphere – it has now returned to reorganize the very production of meanings according to the logic of the commodity" (1984: 121).

In order to enable this process of commodification to take place black culture and history were besieged not only by the subjection of black people to exploitation as cheap labour-power, as providers of raw materials and easy markets, but also by the ruthless uprooting of their languages and customs.

Black theology's starting point, therefore, is an economically,

politically, culturally and morally dispossessed people. It carries with it the morality and social assumptions of a people who have suffered the hypocrisy of a supposedly superior civilization. Black people's liberation as the starting point, the content of the goal of black theology is to be struggled for from the totalizing hold of modern capitalism. With Marlene Dixon, black theology begins from an awareness that:

"Capital leaves not the tiniest corner of society free of its domination. A simple juridical review of marriage, divorce, custody, bastardy, and welfare laws, and of the laws related to sexuality, prostitution, and moral life in general, amply demonstrates capital's direct concern with marriage, the family, children, sexuality, and so-called 'moral'. The supervision by the state of the moral life of the working class is directly related to the role of that class in commodity production, including the production of labor power itself, without which the entire capitalist society would cease to exist" (1983: 15).

Thus armed with this kind of experience of oppression and of struggle against it, and like the Caribbeans Rastas whose appropriation of the Bible is necessarily selective and partisan, black people of South Africa are "mindful of the long and bitter struggles master and slave fought across its (Bible) pages" (Paul Gilroy, in *CCCS* 1982: 295). The question, therefore, of whose side in the political and moral struggle inscribed in the pages of Luke 1 and 2 Luke the writer takes, is of pivotal importance to Black Theology.

For Black Theology the juxtaposition of the story of the birth of John the Baptist with the birth of Jesus is of far-reaching ideological implication. This arrangement is an ideological solution to a fundamental politico-moral problematic that faced Luke's ideological section of the comprador Jewish ruling class. We have seen in our analysis of the social structure of colonized Palestine that the Roman Empire ruled Palestine by proxy of an indigenous comprador class consisting among others of the priestly sector. It is for this reason that Luke, in his attempt to depict Jesus as not being fundamentally in antithetical relation to the ruling class, produces a discursive practice whose function is to produce the ideological legitimation by the priestly class of the birth and subsequent mission of Jesus. This is not to imply that there were no members of the priestly sector who were ideologically and politically opposed to both the Roman and Palestinean tributary oppression of the nation. It is significant, however, that this class plays no part in the rest of Luke's work outside the birth narratives. Our opinion, therefore, is that the story of Mary's visitation to Zachariah and Elizabeth is intended to deal with the embarrassing social class origins and position of Mary. Luke's attempt to sell the story of Jesus to the Jewish priestly groups must

have floundered on the rocks of Jesus' family background which was not socially acceptable. Raymond E. Brown hits the nail on the head even though he does not draw the implications of this when he writes:

"The marriage situation envisaged in Matthew and (seemingly) in Luke where Mary has conceived or will conceive before living with Joseph implies that Jesus was born at a **noticeably** early period after his parents came to live together. This could have been a historical factor known to Jesus' followers and opponents... The Jewish opponents of Christianity eventually accused Jesus of being illegitimate ... but Christians rejected any implication of sin in Jesus' origins ..." (1978: 134).

As the custodians and administrators of what Fernando Belo has called the "symbolic order" – comprising the pollution and debt systems the priestly class would have questioned the messiahship of Jesus on specifically "priestly-morality-class grounds". It is part of the brilliance of Luke as a signifying practitioner to address this aspect of the opposition to Jesus in his writing. Only he must necessarily do it from the perspective of what **he** regards, in class terms, as significant.

We are not, therefore, imputing any conspiratorial motives on the part of Luke. Rather we are recognizing that "Like private property, the literary text ... appears as a 'Natural' object, typically denying the determinants of its productive process. The function of criticism is to refuse the spontaneous presence of work – to deny that 'naturalness' in order to make its real determinants appear." (T. Eagleton, 1976: 101).

Mary, probably a single mother from the ghettos of colonized Galilee needs the moral approval of the priestly sector of the ruling class which is the audience of Luke's gospel. How can the saviour of the world emanate from the ghettos of Cross Road and KTC in Cape Town rather than the royal white suburbia of Johannesburg? How can the messiah emerge out of urban human dumping ground of Oakland rather than from the serenity of Marin County? He could not sell that kind of messiah to his ruling class audience. Luke's ruling class perspectives inscribe themselves even in his choice of places. As Zann Redalie so perceptively observed:

"But to pay attention to locality, land, squares, places is to be faithful to the way Luke writes his story. For him the writing of the Gospel occurs within a geography that goes 'towards Jerusalem' in his Gospel and 'from Jerusalem to Rome' in Acts. The story he tells takes shape within a definite route in the heart of the Greco-Roman world" (1975: 103).

In the Gospel, where he is dealing more directly with the Jewish colonial comprador ruling class, Judea and especially Jerusalem is the place from which legitimation is to be drawn from by Luke. The test of the gospel of Luke moves dialectically from talking about the oppressed and exploited to addressing the concerns of the local ruling class and how they might receive the message and ministry of Jesus without totally contradicting their class position. What is required of them is that they should use their possessions to support the movement. The movement of Mary from Galilee to Judea functions within the same discursive framework.

Luke, however, is not a mere distorter of facts or traditions; he is a shrewd ideologist, who writes for his class in the sense of Antonio Gramsci's "organic intellectuals" (*Prison Notebooks*, 1971: 5ff), but is nevertheless true to his facts. The only difference is that the presence of facts in his text is constituted at the same time by a certain incompleteness. Luke's fidelity to history is represented in the birth narratives by his inclusion of nationalistic revolutionary hymns which reflect the social revolutionary mood of the period he is describing (Luke 1: 46-56: 1: 67-79). J.M. Ford aptly summarises this situation when she writes:

"Our examination of the infancy narratives has shown that the war angel, Gabriel, appeared to Zachariah and Mary. John the Baptist was to work in the spirit and power of the zealous prophet Elijah. The names Jesus (Joshua), John, and Simeon are names found among Jewish freedom fighters. The annunciation to Mary and the Magnificat have political and military overtones. The words of Elizabeth and Mary echo the beatitude pronounced over Jael and Judith. The shepherd verses have impirical overtones, and a heavenly army appears to them ..."

And then in a revealingly approving manner Ford continues:

"From now on in his Gospel, Luke will take almost every opportunity offered him to show that Jesus, contrary to all expectations as seen in the infancy narratives, is a preacher with an urgent message to his generation and to the generations to come, the powerful message of non-violent resistance and, more strikingly, loving one's enemy in word and deed" (1984: 36).

The way in which the birth narratives have functioned in the churches of western Christianity, including those that are geographically situated in the Third World, is an eloquent witness to the success of Luke in his ideological suppression of the social revolutionary class origins of Mary, the mother of Jesus. She has been appropriated theologically more as the priestly "First Lady" than as a starting point of a revolutionary movement to overthrow the

dominant oppressive structures of church and society. The hope that Mary might have inspired in the hearts of millions of single mothers under conditions of modern monopoly capitalism was dashed first by Luke in his gospel. That hope only lingers on in Luke's gospel by its effective absence. It remains for the questions of contemporary single mothers, given discursive articulation by a militant black theology of liberation, to reclaim the gospel's histories, cultures and moralities of the oppressed.

It is not only the priestly apology that Luke needed to integrate into the otherwise embarrassing moral background of Jesus, at least from the point of view of the colonial ruling class. He also needed to temper with the class background of Jesus itself. In other words, Luke did not only have to address the problem of the moral circumstances of Jesus' birth, he also had to specifically face the problematic – for his ruling class audience – of Jesus' class origins.

Again we have to get to this problem by reading the text backwards. In this we concur with Eagleton that:

“It is criticism's task to demonstrate how the text is thus 'hollowed' by its relation to ideology – how, in putting that ideology to work, it is driven up against those gaps and limits which are the products of ideology's relation to history. An ideology exists because there are certain things which must not be spoken of. In so putting ideology to work the text begins to illuminate discourse. And in so doing it helps to 'liberate' us from the ideology of which that discourse is a product” (1976: 90).

In the annunciation of Jesus' birth Luke puts ideology to work in a way that successfully establishes the absences which are the foundation of his discourses. The relevant verses in the text are 1:27 “He had a message for a girl promised in marriage to a man named Joseph, **who was a descendant of King David. The girl's name was Mary**”; 1:32f. “He will be great and will be called the son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him **a king, as his ancestor David was, and he will be the king of descendants of Jacob forever, his kingdom will never end**”; 1:34. “Mary said to the angel, ‘I am a virgin. How, then, can this be?’.”

The problem underlying this part of Luke's discourse is clearly hinted at in verse 34 where the writer makes Mary protest that she is a virgin and that the angel's story does not make sense. Luke had tried to anticipate this contradiction by beginning the annunciation with an explanation that the “girl was promised in marriage to a man named Joseph”. It is quite clear, however, that Luke knew the problem was not really solved since the bounds of historical credulity could not have been stretched beyond asserting a betrothal between Mary and Joseph. As an ideological creation, Joseph could not be made to

serve the function of a biological father because that would be moving beyond ideology to history. The real function of Joseph in this part of the text is to help invoke a royal connection for Jesus. And since the historical context of his story is the national colonization of the Jews, Luke appropriately invokes the Davidic royal connection.

Raymond E. Brown in a perceptive article draws attention to the fact that this angelic pronouncement in Luke “clearly echoes the promises of Nathan to David (2 Sam. 7: 8-16), the promise that came to serve as the foundation of messianic expectation” (1978: 132). The Davidic connection, therefore, plays a double role in this story. On the one hand, given the national oppression by the Romans, the return of the Davidic kingship through the birth of Jesus could be intended to herald the national liberation which the David that Robert Coote calls “the early David” brought for ancient Israel. Coote writes, in relation to a similar use of David in the C-stage, or third edition of the book of Amos, that:

“The reference is to the early David, the folk hero, the protector of the disenfranchised, the David of the byways and caves of the Judean hill country, sprung from the country town of Bethlehem, the ruler who knew his subordination to Yahweh, and who delayed the building of the temple that would serve in folk memory as the functional symbol of despotic royal power” (1981: 124).

On the other hand, there is the David who was an accomplice in the political murders of the nearly monarchy, who used his royal power against Uriah in an act of adultery with Uriah’s wife, who deprived a poor man of his small possession in order to feed his royal visitors, who rationalized his economy by attempting to impose a census – that instrument of political and economic exploitation (See 2 Samuel: 1. J. Mosala, 1980: Chapters 4-6).

Even more importantly for our present purposes there is the David who reinterpreted, through his royal ideologists, the Yahwist faith into a political ideology that served as a glue for keeping the interests of the monarchic ruling class together (2 Sam. 7: 8-16). Walter Brueggemann, in an article that seeks to appreciate the covenant traditions of the Bible sociologically has demonstrated beyond doubt that the Davidic covenant traditions have their **sitz im leben** “among the established and secure” members of society (1983: 308).

Given the fact, therefore, that Luke’s audience is undoubtedly the dominant groups of first century Palestine – even though the subject matter is the conditions and struggles of the poor – there seems no doubt that Luke’s invocation of the Davidic royal connection was meant to suppress the unacceptable low class origins of Jesus.

From the point of the oppressed and exploited people of the world today, Luke's ideological co-optation of Jesus in the interests of the ruling class is an act of political war against the liberation struggle. Black people, and other oppressed groups, recognise in Luke's discursive practice a social class struggle in which Luke has taken a definite side. In their appropriation of the Lukan discourse black people raise their own class sights beyond what Luke wants to permit them, and they made, through their own struggle, a hermeneutical connection with the struggles of the poor that Luke compromise so much for his own purposes.

The limitations of space in this paper does not allow us to explore the racial hermeneutical significance of the part of the text which states: "he will be the king of the descendants of Jacob forever" (1: 33). Suffice it to adapt Norman Gottwald's conclusion of a study of Jewish statehood and social order in the second century B.C.E. for our purpose here: "though we strive not to distort the record of the past, how we assess (the social, political, economic and ideological dynamics and practices of first century Palestine) will be greatly influenced by our own class interests and religious affiliations, as will our views of international politics today, including the claims and policies of Israeli Zionism and Palestinian and Arab nationalism" (1985: 456).

As for black theology and its biblical hermeneutics of liberation it remains for us, after our study of Luke's birth narratives, to confirm the conclusions that Anthony Mansueto draws in his proposal of a new exegesis. He writes:

"Together the results of a materialist history and of historical criticism allow us to read scripture in the light of the real struggles of those who forged the tradition: to reappropriate the real, objective significance of these books which have weighed so heavily in our cultural heritage). The results of such a reading which has only begun to take shape (Chaney: oral presentation, Gottwald, 1979) suggest that those who have found an affinity between our present struggles for national liberation and an end to exploitation, domination, and mystification of all kinds, and the struggles which gave birth to the Jewish and Christian traditions have not erred. We speak with justice when we say that the same God who delivered Israel from Pharaoh, and struck Midian at the rock of Oreb, has even now stretched out his right hand over the battlefields of the revolution from Kronstadt to Yenan, and from Mozambique to Morazon" (1983: 40).

Or as the present writer likes to say, black oppressed and exploited people must liberate the gospel so that the gospel may liberate them. An enslaved gospel enslaves, a liberated gospel liberates.

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WHAT DO THE CHURCHES WANT AND EXPECT FROM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS?

PROF. S.S. MAIMELA

Under normal circumstances and especially in a country that professes itself christian, it would have been quite sufficient to ask one "expert" to tell a conference like this what it is that the churches want and expect from religious education in schools. However, the fact that a white speaker and a black speaker had to be asked to offer their respective opinions on this otherwise innocent topic implies that our situation is far from being normal. Indeed, it would have been irresponsible to talk in generalities about what churches want and expect from religious education in schools, as if we have the same churches, and as if the churches talked about are undifferentiated institutions racially, economically and geographically. For it is an open secret that when we, in South Africa, talk about churches we do not merely refer to numerical quantities but also talk about the white and black churches, each of which have their own life, and are an embodiment of a particular social, economic and political realities and interests. Consequently, the hopes, interests and expectations of these differentiated churches cannot and will never be the same. Indeed even when these churches use the same biblical words such as salvation, God, the new life in Christ, et cetera, it has to be admitted that they do not refer to the same things or realities, because in each context those words acquire and have different meanings and connotations. In short, even the word gospel will have different meanings for black and white churches.

Since the content of the life of believers in various churches which are racially, socially, economically and geographically segregated gives rise to different hopes and expectations, I must be honest with you and admit that it is impossible for me to talk about what the churches in general expect and want from religious education in schools. I will therefore confine my remarks to black churches, because I share their life and I know something about their expectations from religious education.

However, before I proceed to spell out what those expectations and needs are, I must resist the temptation of wanting to talk about black churches in abstractions, as though churches are impersonal things or forces, thereby losing sight of the fact that churches consist of concrete men and women of flesh and blood who live a particular life in particular situations. In order not to lose sight of real persons who make up these black churches, I shall first of all ask what does it mean to be black in South Africa, and what actual living conditions constitute black existence? For it is only when we have analysed and are clear about concrete human conditions in which black life

is to be lived that we might know what their problems or sins are from which they want to be saved, and also know what they really expect from religious education in schools, if that religious education is to become relevant to those needs.

they want to be saved, and also know what they really expect from religious education in schools, if that religious education is to become relevant to those needs.

At the risk of oversimplification, allow me to state that blackness in our abnormal society carries with it a weighty sociopolitical value, a value that determines the fate and quality of life that is open to black people. By virtue of being black a certain price is placed on our heads already at birth, a price predetermining what kind of life we must entertain, and what expectations in life we must have. Blacks are simply expected to learn and accept, that they were created to live in certain restricted areas, and to attend particular schools and churches. Put more crudely, in our abnormal "christian" society black existence is barricaded with all sorts of restrictions and limitations all of which are calculated to make them believe that meaningfulness of their lives is found in being tied to an area, so that they should regard larger areas of life in this country as off-limits to them. In sociopolitical conditions that are devoid of security, freedom and human rights, blacks are told that genuine life is possible for them even when their humanity and dignity are negated by a humiliating migratory labour system. They are told that christian life and parental responsibility can be cultivated when black males are locked up in hostels and compounds away from their wives and children. Real joy is possible, blacks are told, when they are objects of forced removals from one place to another. In short, the actual and concrete human conditions in which blacks find themselves are characterized by afflictions, imprisonment for petty offences, and sleeplessness because of congested hostels and location match-box houses. Taken together these legalised demunisations imply that black life and existence are worth very little as far as South African life is concerned, even if these blacks are baptised Christians and therefore are in principle brothers and sisters of those who are members of the one body of Jesus Christ.

Indeed, for Blacks the biblical claim that it is God's purpose that all human beings should enter into a covenant with their Creator and enjoy God's blessing and live a life of dignity and social justice does not seem to apply. For the life they know is one of concrete misery and constant reminder that they are worth "nothing" and therefore are non-persons.

What I have described as the sum total of the concrete black life may come through to you as unnecessary pre-occupation with political issues, which need not concern us at a conference on religious education. However, we ought to ask ourselves whether in our

enquiry concerning the expectations that black churches have of religious education in schools, we would be really talking about black expectations and needs without taking into account this total sociopolitical context in which black members of our churches find themselves. Is it not true that too often in our preoccupation with religious syllabi, the formulation of doctrines that are to be taught, we easily look past ordinary human beings with their pains and sorrows, thereby not really coming to grips with their real expectations, needs and hopes? Of course, in the absence of a real touch with what people feel and are going through in their sociopolitical conditions, the temptation is that religious educators would unconsciously go to these people with their own presuppositions and secret agendas of what they think the people's needs and expectations are. But if their expectations and agendas do not coincide with those of religious educators, is it realistic to expect that the people will listen to educators simply because they teach from the Bible, even if they give irrelevant answers to the conditions in which people live?

The point I am making here may sound academic, but I think it is one which ought to be seriously thought about if religious education is to have an appeal among blacks. Those of us who come from the black churches know too well how often what emanated from religious educators in schools tended to be irrelevant, dull, oppressive rather than liberative, because religious education has not often had sufficient regard for the actual conditions of the suffering members of the black churches. And matters are made worse by the fact that religious education throughout history has been largely in the hands of the middle-class and conservative people, who were much more impressed by the evils to which the poor and suffering blacks had succumbed than by the social evils from which the oppressed and the downtrodden suffered at the hands of the powerful.

Given the fact that the sociopolitical life of men and women who constitute black churches is characterized by humiliations, material deprivation, powerlessness, political and cultural domination – all of which inculcate inferiority complex and negative self-image, it follows that much of what goes on in the religious education in the schools must be radically questioned and rejected as totally irrelevant and incapable of meeting the hopes and expectations of the suffering blacks. This is particularly true because the teaching that goes on in most black schools is too theoretical; dealing with theoretical knowledge of God, creation and salvation, knowledge which often runs along life but does not cut through it by calling for a radical re-orientation of social and personal lives. Not surprisingly, religious education teaches that God is the Creator of all humans without also drawing the conclusion that God stands ready to surround, care for and defend every human being in such a way that he could be believed also as the liberator of humans from worldly bondages such

as apartheid and all other forms of sociopolitical bondage. Even more serious, religious education tends to be "inward looking" and heavenly oriented: it often emphasizes individualistic sins of the human heart, the rottenness of human life on this side of the grave; it emphasizes human weakness and helplessness in the face of sin and evil and that humans are not able to bring about real fundamental changes in this fallen world; it warns people against worldly desires for comfort, money, possessions and other non-eternal values. It teaches even blacks that the primary question is how do they find a merciful God who would save them from their private sins. Christianity is understood somehow as a means of preparing individuals for the life to come, through acknowledgement of their sins and recognition of the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross; salvation is viewed thus as means of rescuing individuals from their spiritual torments; it becomes a gracious act of lifting individuals out of this miserable world of injustice, poverty, hatred and oppression. This individualistic salvation is believed to be a possibility in the midst of broken human relations, in the midst of sociopolitical injustices, in the situation in which human bodies waste away under the crushing burden of poverty and dehumanisations. God in this religious education seems to be capable of putting ony bandages on the casualties of oppression, because this God cannot really and believably bring about a fundamental transformation of this world so that his people might be accorded dignity and social justice.

All these to be sure, sound biblical and correct. However, the question is whether any religious education that leaves people's concrete sociopolitical life untouched and unsaved has any real use or message for people who, by virtue of their blackness, suffer from all kinds of material deprivation, racial humiliations and sociopolitical domination? The question is whether any religious God who is merely concerned about people's souls and the life hereafter can win the hearts of men and women of flesh and blood whose primary question is not how do I get saved but how do I find meaning and fulfilment in my life in a society that denies by being?

Put more pointedly, the question blacks are asking is not how do I have my life hereafter guaranteed but how do I find happiness, prosperity, security, employment, a decent house and physical well-being in a society in which I have no economic and sociopolitical power and role to play?

In the light of the above questions, which are generated by a feeling of racial and socio-economic domination, it is obvious that for most members of our black churches liberation or a desire for a truly human freedom and realization of human worth through a meaningful participation in the structural changes of South African society is priority number one. And this raising of the question of human liberation from social oppression as priority number one should not

be misunderstood as an indication that blacks have succumbed to the temptation of elevating the social and physical needs at the expense of the spiritual values. Rather the contrary is true. Blacks believe that what happened to and with Jesus Christ on the cross constitutes a fundamental breakthrough for human life in the history of the world. For it now means that God has finally succeeded in breaking the power of sin and its sociopolitical consequences, such as injustice, exploitation and denial of freedom. God's victory on the cross means, for blacks, that the face of the world has been turned upside-down because the real possibility of genuine life, fellowship among humans, is created. Put differently, blacks do not for a moment believe that salvation is exclusively exhausted in the

forgiveness of sins, because it also includes a re-orientation of human life and the effecting of social liberation from all worldly powers that trample on human dignity. Therefore, if salvation is for the oppressed people and is to make them whole, it must be bound up with the institutions and structures that bind men and women of flesh and blood. Put in another way, without the transformation of this world into a new world, without the renewal of the sociopolitical conditions, blacks do not believe that salvation for individual souls is real and credible for people of flesh and blood. Indeed, the salvation of this world and salvation of individuals are so intertwined that salvation of one without the other is not really possible, unless one prefers to talk about salvation in the abstract. Consequently, blacks believe that it is irresponsible for any religious education in schools to spend itself out winning men and women of flesh and blood for Christ and the churches, without asking hard questions concerning the quality of human life to which it is converting them. They believe that it is not enough for religious education in schools to proclaim correct and theoretical doctrines about God and Christ, without also seeing to it that what is proclaimed is matched by deeds and actions in the sociopolitical sphere. Indeed, any religious education in school which teaches its adherents that they can both hold their racial prejudices, tolerate the mischief of segregation and injustice, and also remain good christians, sounds to blacks rather more as religious propaganda that is adjusted to the mood of the day in order to undermine the *status quo*, than as the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the light of the above observations which make it clear that for blacks liberation is priority number one because their life is threatened by dehumanization both physically and spiritually, it follows that black churches have specific expectations from religious education in the schools. Among these are that religious education should awaken in black people a critical awareness that injustices, inequalities, and other forms of oppression are not inevitable in the

world in which God already has conquered evil. They expect religious education in schools to teach its adherents that the world in which they live is not a given world, a world that dropped from the skies. Rather it is the world which has been created by men and women and is therefore a world that can be changed by men and women – if only they could remain faithful to the struggle against evil in which God is Himself engaged. Blacks expect and want religious education to make people aware that injustice and oppression are not part of God's creation, but flow out of the sinful way in which society is now structured. And because humans are agents who structured these unjust sociopolitical conditions, religious education must teach people that they are the subjects, who make history, and it is in their power to make the world into a world in which human beings could really enjoy freedom and social justice. That is, religious education is expected to teach people to believe in themselves and their ability to transform the world into which God has placed them. It must therefore teach people to be dissatisfied with this truncated existence so that they might become creatively involved in the transformation of their earthly existence, because the salvation that Christ has procured has to do with a movement from the old humanity in Adam to the new humanity in Christ.

Black churches expect and want religious education in schools to promote forces that lead to the humanisation of men and women. It must equip and enable men and women to become vehicles of social transformation and agents for justice. In order to do this, religious education will have to believe in people and their ability to do good. Blacks expect religious education to teach people to believe that it is their Christian privilege and duty to witness concretely and unhesitantly to God's creative and redemptive concern for life. But more than this, it must remind people that God, who is able to bring about the final miracle of the resurrection of the dead, is not powerless to transform sociopolitical conditions of life here and now. It should proclaim that God is willing to empower them to start embodying and institutionalising the divine love and justice here and now in anticipation of the final victory that comes with Christ's second coming. Put differently, blacks expect and want religious education to teach people to become involved in a process of liberation, the liberation which was initiated by Christ, so that a life of quality, freedom and justice can become the property of all human-kind.

To be sure, the struggle with and under God to embody the divine love and justice in social structures will be long and difficult, and will be full of temptation to give up because the task appears impossible for humans to accomplish. However, because Christians are expected to become God's agents in the transformation of the world,

black churches expect and want religious education to take its adherents to task for failing to live up to their Christian professions. Religious education must be critical and be willing to take Christians to task when their actions and their words do not match, in order to inspire them towards a more effective embodiment of the divine justice and love in their actions.

Perhaps what the churches expect and want from religious education in the schools is much more than can be achieved realistically in anyone's life-time. But blacks believe that because the victory that Christ achieved cannot be divorced from the transformation of this world into a new world where the possibility of enjoying a truly human freedom and social justice is not something beyond God to bring about, it seems to me that religious education in the schools will have to meet these expectations if black Christians in this country are not to hope in vain for God's promise of salvation to be fulfilled.

Read by Prof. S.S. Maimela at the Conference on "Religious Education in a Changing Society" at The College of Education, Pinetown, Natal in 1983.

BOOK REVIEWS

DE GRUCHY, John W.: *Cry Justice*, Maryknoll, 1986. 253 pp., US\$ 6.95

Professor de Gruchy has done all of us a great service by collecting and bringing together into a single volume, scattered theological meditations and poetry, authored by South Africans of various persuasions. In his long and perceptive introduction, De Gruchy provides his readers with a useful theological perspective from which the anthology could be read meaningfully, thus helping us to focus on the central theme in South Africa, namely: the struggle for "justice, liberation and peace against racism, oppression and violence" (p. 16).

The selected readings not only make for interesting reading but also make for a very persuasive case that the struggle for liberation and justice is a moral imperative placed by God on all South Africans calling them to struggle for and work for the creation of a society in which everyone would be free from both physical and spiritual oppression and violence. Inspired as they are by a deep spirituality, the readings are an expression of that defiant Christian hope that refuses to accept that unjust social structures are beyond redemption and are therefore not reformable for the better. This hope is not born of naive and shallow optimism in the human ability to transform themselves and their social environment, because South Africans know from experience that the road to freedom, justice and peace shall be a long, tortuous and costly one. Rather it is faith in God which lead believers to have hope for God's creation, including humanity and social structures.

The central claim of Professor de Gruchy is that this anthology differs from all the others in the past, because it arises out of and focusses upon the South African situation. Given the fact that in the real and concrete South Africa, it is the black people who bear the brunt of racial oppression and are in the forefront of political struggle for justice and liberation, one would have expected de Gruchy to give more space to writings by Blacks. By failing to do this and by giving equal if not more space to non-Black writers, who are merely supportive of the black struggle for justice, de Gruchy's anthology misrepresents, in my view, the real and concrete South Africa. For it gives the impression that Blacks and Whites are equally oppressed and therefore are all equally zealous to bring racial oppression to an end. This, however, is the white liberal illusion which has no basis in fact and reality, because only a small (and not majority) number of Whites have identified themselves with the suffering Black majority, who are struggling and dying to bring racial oppression to an end. If the opposite were true, namely, that a sizeable number of Whites are

partners in the struggle for justice in South Africa, the so-called racial problem and therefore apartheid would have been a thing of the past. This critical comment, notwithstanding, I recommend the book highly for those who want to read and listen to the testimony of South African Christians who are struggling, in God's name, to transform their society which is perverted by racial ideology.

Prof. Simon S. Maimela
University of South Africa, Pretoria

KWESI A. DICKSON, *Theology in Africa*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984, pp. ix, 243, US\$ 9.95

Prof. Kwesi A. Dickson, Director of the Institute for African Studies at the University of Ghana, is an alumnus of Oxford University and author of numerous Old and New Testament books. In this latest book, Kwesi Dickson raises in a very penetrating way fundamental questions that inhibit the free and vigorous development of an authentic African Theology that will unashamedly take African culture as one of its basic sources. He deals with them in order to lay a firm ground for the development of African Theology and to open the way for African theologians to pursue their task.

Marshalling an impressively wide knowledge of Western theology and that of writings on religion, with a clear and simple style, he argues for recognition of the African cultural context as a legitimate context within which the task of theologization can be carried out. This he does in the face of the traditional western rejection of the revelational meaningfulness of African culture – a religious culture – or its relegation to a pre-Christian stage in the history of salvation. To refute the known old arguments that substantiate this rejection or relegation, Dickson asserts a theological as well as a hermeneutical continuity between, on the one hand, Africans and their life and thought and on the other hand, the people of Israel and their traditions as contained in Scripture. This transfold continuity is affirmed because the spirit of the God of Israel made His footprints on the African cultural context from the beginning, even before Christianity was brought to Africa.

Since African culture is inextricably intertwined with African traditional religion, making a case for culture, impells one to make a case for traditional religion. The latter is done through use of the latest ideas in the field of comparative religion as propounded by John Hick and Hans Kung. They enable Kwesi Dickson to transcend Karl Barth's argument which reserves an exclusive position for Christianity as well as to elevate African traditional religion, which is still alive in

Africa, to a position where its revelational significance can be recognized.

Having forcefully motivated inclusion of this culture and religion in the hermeneutical circle, but before searching for a suitable methodology that can relate this religio-cultural context to the scriptural text in a theologically responsible and dynamic manner, Kwesi Dickson first defines the concept of culture. According to him culture embraces "... economics, politics, legal systems and all the other societal systems and arrangements set up to ensure the welfare of the community" (p. 47). It is a culture that has survived the colonial assault even though not unscarred, as well as one that contains fundamental values which have passed the rigorous test of history.

These values have admittedly been reshaped and made more resilient and meaningful for our times. With this all-embracing concept of culture he feels confident that he has devised a solution to the raging disagreement and mutual criticism between Southern African Black Theology and African Theology. Black Theology should broaden its socio-economic and political liberation thrust to include African culture while African theology should adopt a broadened and dynamized view of culture that includes socio-economic and political issues in order to achieve a "wider freedom which is cultural ..." (p. 137).

This new approach, Dickson realizes, requires a new methodology. Hence his proposition of a dialectical method with a "two-directional task of hermeneutical translation" (p. 144). Accordingly culture informs scripture and scripture transforms culture even to the point of making Jesus Christ the greatest Ancestor who affirms a cultural identity instead of alienating Africans from it.

The book is concluded with implications for a relevant theological training. These are: (1) bringing of the theologian closer to the laity, the custodians of an indigenous culture, among whom some form of African theology is already in circulation, as well as involving the latter in theological training; (2) employing theologians who are convinced of the validity of African culture in the hermeneutic circle and deeply committed to the training of an authentic African pastor; (3) and lastly, the radical transformation of courses.

In this book Kwesi Dickson has succeeded in presenting a clear picture of African theology and its contents for the benefit of "newcomers" in the area, as well as moving the on-going dialogue between African and Black Theology further and elevating it to a higher plane. What he evidently still has difficulties with, like many other African theologians, is Christology. Jesus Christ is put in the past, as the "greatest Ancestor" with a positive impact on **our** present. What is also lacking is an adoption of a tool of analysis which can be

fruitfully used to analyze the components of this broad concept of African culture and the inherent mechanisms and dynamics.

This is undoubtedly a very good book which we wholeheartedly recommend to students, pastors and theologians.

DR TAKATSO A. MOFOKENG

REPORT:

BLACK THEOLOGY CONSULTATION IN NEW YORK, USA

1-3 December 1986

On 30th November 1986 a team of eight theologians from South Africa converged on Union Theological Seminary in New York to fulfil a historic mission. They went to Union Theological Seminary as guests of the Ecumenical Program and Theological Field at Union with the purpose of attending a long overdue formal consultation on various aspects of the black theology of liberation as it is done on both shores of the Atlantic Ocean. This consultation was historic because it was the first time that black theologians on the continent and those in the African diaspora met formally. It is a well-known fact that contact between these theologians from Africa and US goes back as far as the 19th century. In a way this meeting was a strengthening of centuries-old warm ties as well as an affirmation of the strong bond that keeps us together as Africans over centuries and across oceans.

The following papers were read and intensely discussed in meetings which were very well attended by students, faculty and black theologians from different seminaries and universities in the US.

"Historical, Social & Cultural Origins", Prof. James Ngcokovane, Federal Theological Seminary.

Prof. James M. Washington, Union Theological Seminary (UTS).

"Black Feminist Theology", Prof. Kelly Brown, Edward Waters College; Rev. Roxanne Jordan, Pastor, Jeffrey's Bay Congregational Church.

"Present Socio-politico-economic movements for Change", Prof. Cornel West, Yale Divinity School; Prof. S.S. Maimela, University of South Africa (UNISA)

"Theological Reflections", Prof. James H. Cone, Union Theological Seminary (UTS); Prof. Takatso Mofokeng, University of South Africa (UNISA).

"The Future and Mutual Support", Prof. Josiah U. Young, Colgate University; Prof. Itumeleng Jerry Mosala, University of Cape Town.

It was decided that these papers, which were of a very good quality, should be published, in order to widen the dialogue to include those theologians who were not able to attend. Both sides affirmed the necessity of a continuing formal dialogue which will culminate in another meeting in 1988, a year after appearance of the report of the 1984 dialogue.

The Black Theology Project heartily thanks Prof. James H. Cone and Mr Dwight Hopkins, who worked tirelessly to make the dialogue a success and the stay of our delegation at Union very pleasant. The Union Theological Seminary community also deserves our gratitude for the support given to that delegation.

DR TAKATSO MOFOKENG

REPORT ON THE SECOND GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE ECUMENICAL ASSOCIATION OF THIRD WORLD THEOLOGIAN (EATWOT), HELD IN OAXTEPEC, MEXICO, DECEMBER 7-14, 1986

I. PARTICIPANTS

Some 56 EATWOT members represented Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and the United States minorities. Africa was represented by 14 people, and three of them came from South Africa. They were Rev. Frank Chikane, Dr Takatso Mofokeng and Prof. Simon Maimela. Of the 56 present, 33 were men and 23 women. There were also observers from the First World, representatives from the press, local theologians, members of the host committee and invited guests from Mexico.

II. THEME OF THE CONFERENCE

The general theme of the assembly was: "Commonalities and Divergences in Third World Theologies". The objective was to examine closely the common and diverse aspects in the theologies that are developing in Asia, Africa and Latin America, as well as from US minorities. This examination focused on theological issues, orientations and methodologies as well as the challenges that particular realities of these continents pose to one another.

To facilitate discussion and sharing of ideas, each continent was

asked to write a position paper of about 20 pages on the theme of the assembly, focusing on:

- (a) Commonalities in Third World Theologies
- (b) Differences in Third World Theologies
- (c) Cross-fertilization among Third World Theologies
- (d) The future of Third World Theologies

This attempt at theological exchange among the continents was only partially successful. Although the quality of the position papers and the experience and competence of the participants were ample basis for an enriching and fruitful dialogue, the interspersing of General Assembly business, such as elections and amendments to the constitution, precluded a more in-depth analysis of the Conference theme and frustrated some of the participants.

Despite this difficulty, several conclusions were arrived at as a result of the group and plenary sessions. It was the general consensus that the situation of oppression in the Third World, which has given rise to the new theologies, has remained unaltered. Thus the practice and reformulation of theology from the perspective of the oppressed, continues to be in service and support of the struggle for the liberation of all marginalized peoples. From this standpoint, there are many commonalities among Third World theologies but we need a more comprehensive framework for analyzing the forms of oppression.

The differences arise out of the cultural and religious experiences of the continents, and the religions of countries. Dialogue and cross-fertilization are both necessary and should go hand in hand in the theologizing process for the mutual enrichment of the continents and regions.

The Latin Americans' theological option intends to link the sociopolitical with the cultural and religious traditions of the continent. Asian theology seeks to relate the positive contributions of the traditional spiritualities of the great religions to the peoples' struggle for liberation and poses the challenge for a cosmic holistic theocentric christology. As African theology explores cultural identity in the face of racist oppression, it serves as a critique to the models of traditional theology. The theological efforts of US Minorities challenge both the political and economic system of their nation as well as the main neo-conservative trends in American religiosity.

The sizeable womens' delegation at the Conference presented a critique of EATWOT and asked for an integration of womens' perspective in Third World theologies. A week before the Conference, from December 1-5, an intercontinental meeting of women

theologians from Asia, Africa and Latin America was held on the same site in Oaxtepec to share in the theme "Doing Theology from Third World Women's Perspective".

III. GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The General Assembly of EATWOT was divided into four main parts: reports, elections, working groups on EATWOT business and plans for the future.

A. Reports

The President, Emilio de Carvalho, the Executive Secretary, Virginia Fabella and Treasurer, Sergio Torres, presented their reports. The chairperson of the two working commissions, Enrique Dussel and Mary John Mananzan reported on the work of the Church History Commission and Women's Commission respectively.

B. Elections

The following persons were elected for the period 1986-91:

President: Sergio Torres (Chile)

Vice President: K.C. Abraham (India)

Executive Secretary: Teresa Okure (Nigeria)

Regional Co-ordinators:

Africa: Simon Maimela (South Africa)

Asia: Virginia Fabella (Phillippines)

Latin America: Maria Clara Bingemer (Brazil)

U.S. Minorities: Virgil Elizondo (San Antonio, Texas)

C. Working Groups on EATWOT Business

Six working groups and one *ad hoc* committee were established to study EATWOT's performance in specific areas of its life and work and to recommend plans and directions for the future.

The recommendations regarding publications and working commissions approved by the Assembly are the following:

1. That EATWOT have two official publications: *Voices from the Third World* as a semi-annual theological review and *News Bulletin*, principally for EATWOT members.
2. That EATWOT's two Working Commissions (on Church History and on Theology from Third World Women's Perspective) be maintained.
3. That a new Working Commission be created to deal specifically with the main theological issues confronting EATWOT in the different contexts.

IV. PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Plans for the future include the deepening of EATWOT's theological thrust in methodology and content, and facing the new challenges presented by experience and reality. Programs will continue to be developed in the regions as well as inter-regionally through the Working Commissions.

REGIONAL PROGRAMS

1. Africa

EATWOT will work on different levels in Africa, considering the experience of the past years and facing the new challenges to African theology. Some of the projects are as follows:

- (a) To pursue a dialogue between South Africa and the other African countries on the general theme, "Religion, Development, Power and Liberation".
- (b) To continue the dialogue already initiated between South African theologians and black theologians from the USA.
- (c) To develop a feminist approach in theology from the experience of African women.

2. Asia

EATWOT will develop in Asia a program on three levels:

1987-88

Level 1 — EATWOT people engaged in grass-roots movements and organizations will get together in different countries to share among themselves their experience and reflections.

1987-89

Level 2 — EATWOT people engaged in theological teaching or ecclesiastical institutions will reflect from a philosophical and theological point of view and will exchange with others similarly engaged through mutual critique of their reflections and writings.

August 1989

Level 3 — There will be III Asian Theological Conference (ATC III) where about 30-35 participants of these two groups will get together for dialogue, mutual challenge, critique and the formulation of a holistic Asian theology.

3. Latin America

- (a) Latin American theologians will continue the publication of a collection of books, which deals with all the major theological issues from a liberating perspective.
- (b) The following activities are planned for the next five-year period:
 1. February, 1988 - A second Consultation on "Black Culture and Theology" (1988 marks the 100th anniversary of the

abolition of slavery in Brazil).

2. A third Consultation on "Indian Culture and Theology" (place to be determined later).
3. 1988-1991 – Participation in the preparation and celebration of the 500th Anniversary of the arrival of the Spaniards on the continent.
4. US Minorities – The regional co-ordinator of the US Minorities will submit his program at a later date.
5. Caribbean Islands – Episcopal Bishop Alfred Reid from Montego Bay, Jamaica, EATWOT member, committed himself to make renewed efforts to start an EATWOT chapter in the Caribbean.

V. NEW PROGRAMS

Sensitive to the "signs of the times" in Third World countries for this new state, we listened very carefully to the experience of the people present at Oaxtepec and formulated a consequent program of action for the next five years, which is described in the enclosed report.

Among the different aspects, I would like to underline the following:

- (a) New sensibility to religions and cultures, as the real raw material of Third World theologies, going beyond the mediation of the Westernized middle-class of our countries.
- (b) Serious consideration of the women's perspective in theology.
- (c) Dialogue with socialist countries. Last year an EATWOT delegation went to China and had a fruitful encounter with Catholic and Protestant church leaders. EATWOT was perceived as a credible partner for dialogue renewal.
- (d) New openness for dialogue and relationships with First World Christians and theologians.
- (e) Creation of new EATWOT chapters in the Caribbean and in the Pacific Islands.

VI. CONCLUSION

This was perhaps the most important meeting of EATWOT during which its members had to re-evaluate the programs of EATWOT and re-orient its focus and vision and its work in the years ahead. Among many issues that will receive special attention are the problem of racism, class and sexism in the Third World countries. The issue of race was a particularly painful one to deal with, especially by people from Latin America where on surface there seems to be no racial problem. But the fact that there are a few members who are Black and Native American Indians is indicative of the reality of racism in Latin America, especially in Brazil where the population is more than 60%

black. The EATWOT assembly resolved to freeze the membership from Latin America until one-third is black and/or Native American. EATWOT has teething problems but its courage to face these problems is a sign of maturity and promise that no stumbling block, however great, will frustrate its work. Indeed, Oaxtepec, Mexico, rediscovered its importance as the forum for dialogue among Third World Theologians. Therefore, it resolved to be ever more determined to be a progressive and radical witness to the gospel of Jesus, as it tries to do theology in a new way so that both theology and God's people might be liberated.

PROF. SIMON S. MAIMELA