

THE SOCIO-CULTURAL DYNAMICS OF THE STRUGGLE FOR LIBERATION AND THE COHERENCE OF BLACK FAITH

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Decades of subjugation and dehumanization by minority white Christians have created a psychologically and physically loaded environment for black Christians in South Africa. From the time of colonial conquest and missionary activity, black faith has been fraught with uncertainty and tremendous external stress. The advent of apartheid with its systematic attempt to disrupt settled black communities and to segregate races has created serious psychic conflict. The stresses and strains of apartheid become heightened as black Christians confront the hypocritical and artificial reality of white religion, while coping with the trauma of continuous adjusting to and surviving the demands of that religion. Negative influences are brought to bear on a black Christian who, as an old person, is treated as a 'boy' or as a 'girl'. The scenario for a positive growth in faith is gloomy in such circumstances. His or her own life of faith strikes him or her as a distortion of fear, ambivalence and incapacitation, resulting in a fragmented self. The black Christian is forced to survive in a perpetual conflict of insecurity in society and uncertainty about the faith he or she professes, and may decide to cling to the 'two sidedness' of faith in the Mainline church or break with it to join an Independent Church.

The white church falsely claims to be based on the concept of One Body, when in fact it is an integral part of the overall socio-economic and political structure, and tends to reflect, and even fuel the ideological conflict that divides South Africa. The church has not been able to agree, in practice (a) to a generally equal status for its ministers; (b) to a truly integrated ministerial training and (c) to a generally united and non-racial congregation at any local level. To use Charles Villa-Vicencio's words:

"Any fanciful dreams that one day the church will stand up against the government and say, 'NO MORE', are both naive and dangerous". (1983)

The tendency in the white church has been to stand in the 'grey area' in the middle calling for reconciliation. The situation changes when church buildings are burning in the townships; when solemn moments of sacraments are invaded by police firing shots and tear-gas cannisters - only then does the black section of the church move from the 'grey area' to a more

positive commitment in the struggle for liberation. (Hope and Young 1983).

THE BLACK MAINLINE CHURCHES:

By the black Mainline Churches is meant the multiplicity of denominations which arose in South Africa because of a number of factors. One factor is that almost every British and Continental European Missionary Society, as well as several from America, undertook work in South Africa. Moreover, white immigrants in successive waves brought their churches with them. These churches through their mission work drew black people into their fold.

Mainline denominations can be divided into: 1. the Dutch Reformed Church; 2. the Methodist Church; 3. the Anglican Church; 4. the Congregational Church; 5. Conservative Evangelical Churches; 6. Presbyterians and 7. the Roman Catholics. All these churches gradually acquired a fair number of black adherents who, in most cases, have become a majority of members. In reference to this majority of membership, these churches are often called black Mainline churches or simply *Black churches*.

The origin of the Black Mainline churches may be outlined according to the philosophy of the comparatively liberal Synod of 1891 of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Cape, which declared that:

"The conversion of the heathen must be followed by setting up a church for converts ... the Mother Church must not frustrate aspirations towards full independence or destroy their indigenous culture".

For a long time most of the Black Mainline churches were supervised and administered by white people; although they often worshipped in separate churches.

There is a popular argument that only churches that are owned and operated by black people, that are free from white authority and interference, can be considered part of the black church. It is assumed that the black Mainline churches are comprised of mostly lower-middle class blacks, though legally owned and operated by white people rather than black people. The question revolves around whether or not the Mainline churches are "black". Some people are adamant in their denial of the appropriateness of the term 'black church' for congregations of these white denominations. Black members of the Mainline churches often reflect class attitudes which separate them from Independent churches. Paradoxically, the Mainline churches cannot be said to have total control over their own members, who often mix Christianity with African indigenous

religions, and sometimes drift away to join Independent Churches.

Most black members of the Mainline churches are determined to stay put in the Mainline churches. They believe that they have as much a right to be there as whites have. Frank Chikane declared that:

“ ... I am there to subvert the mission of the powerful and reappropriate the message of the Bible itself. We shouldn't leave the oppressor with that Bible. We must go and take it ... when we pick it from them, they say to you - “Die Bybel maak jou 'n terrorist”, (Afrikaans for, you are subversive), ... what is at stake here is that the church itself is paralyzed by the presence of two interests, the interest of the powerful and the interest of the weak”. (Boesak 1986)

In South Africa, it is perhaps more blatantly obvious and poignant, that Blackness, more than just being skin color, is a condition indicative of state of oppression, as with black people all over the world. It is within this perspective that the role of white leadership in some of the black Mainline churches should be seen. Allan Boesak, referring to this, says of these whites who have committed themselves to the struggle against apartheid that, “They have taken upon themselves the condition of blackness in South Africa”. He writes:

“They are part of the black church, not as Lords and masters but as servants, not as liberals but as brothers and sisters, for they have learnt not so much to do for blacks, but to identify with what blacks are doing to secure their liberation”. (South Africa 1982)

The black Mainline churches are the most outspoken critics of the government. The daughter churches, especially in the Dutch Reformed group, were too timid and powerless to voice much opposition to the ever-hardening racism of the ‘Mother church’ until the 1970's when they became bold enough to rebel. Although the Methodist church differs from the church of the Province in many ways, it is also very outspoken against apartheid and racial discrimination. The Methodist church, with a membership of about 2 million (with over one million black membership in 1970) is the largest of the black Mainline churches in South Africa. The whites numbered only 220,000 in 1951. Both the Methodist and Anglicans have adhered to a polity of one church for both blacks and whites and thus one Conference or Synod. But on the parish level, congregations have always remained racially segregated. The multiracial character of the church is generally expressed only at the highest level and it is at that level that bold attacks on apartheid are expressed.

Within the Presbyterian group, the black major denominations are: (a) the Reformed Presbyterian church, which has an all-black membership; (b) the Presbyterian church of Africa (the Mzimba Church) also an all-out black church; and (c) the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, which is more ethnically determined than the other two. There are also black members in the mostly white Presbyterian Church of South Africa (the PCSA) but the black membership is small and insignificant. The Congregational Church, which grew out of the London Missionary Society, has a majority of black members. Especially after 1948, the Congregational Church began to condemn all legislation that discriminated on the grounds of color. Church opposition in all major denominations takes the form of eloquent statements often pronounced at the Synod level.

The phenomenon that took place in some of the multiracial churches was the emergence of black caucuses. Both the Methodist Church and the Church of the Province have strong black caucuses which have helped challenge the power of whites in those churches.

While remaining in the multiracial church has given black people an opportunity to challenge white Christians in those churches, for being both oppressors and Christians at the same time, it has resulted in a problem of faith for black people. The black church has been denuded of its ability to provide a structured nurturing ambience where the full potential of developing theological training geared to the nature of black faith can be fostered. The inescapable apartheid and racism milieu has at best undermined the bonding that should exist between black faith and black existence. Black Christians are put in a schizophrenic situation by the teaching of a hypocritical and unrealistic faith and the denigration of their life experience and culture. Almost in vain black Christians try to adapt to this 'twoness' of faith by trying to become both Westernised and African Christians simultaneously. Racial domination and cultural denigration are the source of this schizophrenic religious feeling of black Christians.

The black church has been uncertain of its identity. It has not succeeded in attaining for itself an authentic identity. In most cases white control is still very much a reality and that makes it difficult for some black people to identify with the church. White control does not mean only administrative control, but also evokes predominantly white images in black churches - in style, in witness, and in commitment. The structures that black people have inherited are geared to the needs of those who have no sensitivity to the black situation. For this reason the

black church finds it hard to respond meaningfully to black people in need of God's presence in their lives. A precondition for the authentic identity of the black church is its ability to identify with the community it serves. The black church must become part of the black community so that it may understand the joys, sorrows and aspirations of that community. And the black church must not be afraid to identify with the struggle of the people. The struggle in South Africa is not only against an oppressive political and economic system, it is also a struggle for the authenticity of the gospel. The struggle is as much against a pseudo-religious ideology as it is against a political philosophy and practice. To identify with the struggle is to realise that the struggle for liberation and the attainment of black humanity are commensurate with the gospel of Jesus Christ. This does not mean that a Christian must condone and justify the wrongs that happen in the course of the struggle - it means that the Christian must be present in the struggle both as part of it and to speak a prophetic word.

As the struggle became more radicalized, some young people left the church in disappointment and disgust. Others remained with their parents in the church but with a highly sensitised political consciousness and with probing, critical questions about the nature and witness of the church. This new political consciousness and the consciousness of black humanity have brought a new sense of responsibility in the black community. This sense of responsibility and active involvement of the black community in the struggle have taken away almost completely the traditional deference to the church. Church officials are no longer judged by their offices and the authority they represent. Their offices and authority are now measured by their active participation in the struggle for liberation.

There is in existence in the black church two opposing theologies. On the one hand there is a theology of accommodation and acquiescence which engenders an individualistic, other-worldly spirituality that has no interest in the realities of the black situation except to proclaim it as God-ordained. On the other hand there is a theology of refusal - a theology that understands that the church is not the sole custodian of salvation, that the church is only one part of the unfolding chapter of liberation that engulfs the whole of black people. This theology understands that the church exists, that it is called to the service of the people - that the church is not elected to privilege, but to serve in engagement. This theology also understands that the center of the church lies outside itself and that the church lives centrally in the struggle of the people. This theology refuses to accept that God is just another word for the status quo. It affirms that God is not neutral but takes

sides with the oppressed and calls persons to participate in the struggle for liberation. This theology says 'No' to the status quo. This is a theology which the black church must make its own if it is to survive and remain truly a black church. The black church must come to understand that this theology is not a new 'politicized' theology but the very essence of the gospel as it speaks to and for black people. It is a theology that arises out of the gospel that anathemizes white racism and discrimination.

The church has two choices. It can develop a policy of 'realpolitik' and accommodation by proclaiming the faith of acceptance of 'piecemeal concessions' (thereby making it easy for itself), or it can stand firm by proclaiming the faith that challenges the forces of the status quo and accept the risks that come with that faith. The church can continue to be a vehicle for the maintenance of the status quo by denouncing its opportunity (and thus its responsibility) to fill the leadership vacuum prevalent in the townships. Or it can be at the fore of the struggle by promoting justice and by being in solidarity with black people. This is not an easy choice, especially now that all meaningful black organizations have been banned and the black church has become more important than ever before as a vehicle for expressing the legitimate aspirations of black people. The government will concentrate its repressive measures on the church more and more. If the black church is to be true to its calling, it cannot avoid a confrontation with a racist government.

Religious and racial domination of the black church creates a problem for black faith. It is the black Christians themselves who can create their own freedom of faith by adopting a positive identity with their Blackness. A large number of black people have overcome this problem by creating and engaging in the African Independent churches. By engaging in Black theology, black people are trying to rise above situational forces of oppression that seeks to stymie them by trying to define the faith for them.

AFRICAN INDEPENDENT CHURCHES

Our understanding of the black church is not complete if it excludes the African Independent churches. By the black church in South Africa is meant both the black Mainline churches and African Independent churches together. In 1970, South African official statistics put the membership of Independent churches at 42,2% of all black Christians in South Africa. The difference between the Mainline churches and African Independent churches lies in their understanding of faith. Most of the Independent churches follow a faith-tradition

which is tied-up with African culture, whereas the black Mainline churches emphasize liberation.

African Independent churches are usually classified into two main categories, namely, Ethiopian or Separatist churches, and the Zionist, Spirit, Charismatic or Prophetic churches. Some commentators have proposed a third group, the Messianic group which appears distinct from the other two, though closer to the Zionist type.

The Ethiopian churches are those that broke away from the 'Mission' churches or their off-shoots. There is a variety of these churches in South Africa. In most cases the breakaway from the Mission churches took place because of a misunderstanding between the missionary and a member of the church. Splits frequently do not occur because of a theological difference but because of quarrels of this type hence these churches remain patterned after their parent churches.

The Zionist Movement was founded in 1904 by a white American called Daniel Bryant. Its roots lie in the Christian Apostolic Church in Zion emanating from Zion City, Illinois in North America. However, the Zionists in South Africa managed to incorporate some elements of indigenous African religions together with a rather Pentecostalic-type of Christianity similar to that of 'Store Front Churches' in the USA. (Mosala and Tlhagale 1986). Faith among the Zionists is of paramount importance and it is reinforced by dancing, the use of drums, spirit possession during services, speaking in tongues and testimonies voiced in a humble voice of respect. Hope and Young have described this tone as a 'half singing and half speaking tone'. The uniform of the Zionists is usually white, symbolic of cleanliness and purity, together with other symbolic colours such as green, blue, red or yellow. The Zionists seldom wear a black colour. It is wrong, however, to stress differences between the Zionists and other churches by over-emphasizing differences in colours of their uniforms.

The Messianic churches are those which often point to a cosmic mountain and 'Jerusalem City'. Within this group is found a strong concept of the 'Black Messiah' - a Black Saviour or Prophet often misunderstood by commentators as referring to the leader. The idea of the 'Black Christ' is well described by Emilio de Carvalho of Angola when he cites Chimpa Vita who was among the first to say that Jesus was black and that Jesus's disciples were black. For her, Jesus and his disciples were not only black, they were African and they were Congolese. Jesus could not by any means be white and blue-eyed like the Portuguese. Jesus identified with the victims of Portuguese colonialism. Chimpã Vita declared herself as the

'defendant of the Black One before God. (David 1975). Some of the Independent churches express more openly the sentiments of most black people who reverse the colour-bar in heaven - "Whites will be turned away from the gates, for nobody can rule twice.'

The dichotomization of Independent churches into groups and categories is not a useful undertaking, since the Independent churches overlap both in structure, organization and in worship styles. Ngubane is right when he suggests that:

"The Ethiopian-Zionist dichotomy was, it seems, arrived at for the convenience of dealing with the complex phenomenon of African church Independentism ... we better not insist on classification." (Mosala et.al. 1986-74).

Ngubane suggests that the African Independent churches take different forms that range from a Separatist imitation of a mission church to an original, creative attempt at synthesis of traditional and Christian beliefs, an attempt to establish a new African Christian identity.

Ngubane has pointed out that Independent churches have organized a community based as some center, and at the same time broken-up into closely-knit smaller communities resembling traditional extended families in which every member has a sense of belonging. Often they form small house congregations and they are also not over-institutionalized. He suggests that in these communities social, psychological and physical needs are appropriately met. It is beyond doubt that these small worshipping communities have the potential of the base-communities as seen in Latin America and Asia. What they lack is a socio-political understanding of the situation.

African Independent churches have also adapted models from the Old Testament. They have their own 'Holy Cities', 'Jerusalems', 'Mt. Zions', 'Bethesdas' etc. Shembe's 'Jerusalem' is at Ekuphakameni near Durban and his 'Cosmit Mountain' is Mt. Nhlankakazi north of Durban. Mother Nku's temple of Jerusalem on Mt. Zion is at Evaton and Lekganyane's 'Zion City' at Morija near Pietersburg. Ngubane suggests that at these Holy places salvation is experienced here and now in the context of a salvation dimension (i.e. as experienced) in African traditional ritual systems. Most African Independent churches see the 'Cosmic Mountain experience as essential for spiritual growth.

However, we must understand that the African Independent churches often do not realize that the Old Testament Israelite model of 'High Places' is a model for spiritual growth born in the struggle for liberation, when Israel was fighting for freedom

to be a people in the midst of oppression and threats of subjugation and enslavement. The Israelite model of worship is a model for spiritual growth and the model for the struggle for liberation at the same time. The problem with Independent churches as principal proponents of Blackness and Africanness is that besides being torn apart by petty divisions and although they have retained the emphasis on African culture, most of them have lost the sense of liberation which would give black people a greater purpose and direction in their struggle for liberation. In most African Independent churches the power of black religious experience to clarify the condition of black people and inspire them to transcend the imponderables and contradictions of existence is waived, and the emphasis is laid upon the less risky theme of culture, which may indeed be of equal importance, but powerless without the liberation ethos.

The potential for liberation has always been expressed through the black Mainline churches, although the cultural aspect has often been suppressed. If the emphasis upon liberation is taken away (as in the Independent churches) and similarly, if the cultural vocation of black people is taken away (as in the black Mainline churches), the black religious experience is falsified and betrayed. Black theology attempts to hold both these together in a logical system of belief and praxis predicated upon the struggle for liberation.

Ngubane has argued that Black Theology concentrates more on the horizontal dimension of one's relationship with God (vis-a-vis human relationships), while Independent churches concentrate more on the vertical dimension (vis-a-vis an individual conception of one's relationship with God). In the view of Ngubane, Black Theology should link up with the vertical dimension of the Independent churches. Perhaps Ngubane is here pointing to a reason for the inactivity of most Independent churches in relation to the struggle for liberation in South Africa. While the Independent churches have been vertically active, they have been horizontally passive when black people have been socially and politically engaged. The balancing of the horizontal and the vertical dimensions will lead to the coherence of the black religious experience. Ngubane believes that the need for Black Theology without true contextualization of Independent churches will end when the situation of racial discrimination stops. He writes:

"The greatest challenge offered Black Theology by these churches, I think, is the need for Black Theology's self-examination and self-definition. If Black Theology is situational it has no lasting home among us, for if the situation changes, what then?" (Mosala et al. 1986:88-89).

This view of Ngubane is hard to accept. His thesis is based on the assumption that Black Theology must stress love and reconciliation which is practiced in the Independent churches. His concern is that the democratization of oppressive systems should be sought in the spirit of love and there should be no reversal of positions with the oppressed treating their oppressors in the same way as they were treated. Obviously, Ngubane's argument arises out of the old assumption that Black Theology must advocate a reconciliation between whites and blacks in priority to a reconciliation between blacks and blacks and blacks with black humanity.

The quest for Black Theology has always included the search for continuity with African indigenous religions as a wish to reconcile black communities first. Some commentators have predicted that Black Theology will eventually lead the Mainline churches and the Independent churches to meet to become a new force with political potential.

Political awareness in the Independent churches has been growing albeit slowly. In the early 1970's, Steve Biko and other SASO leaders began to prod the African Independent Church Association (AICA) and the Interdenominational African Minister's Association (IDAMASA) which includes Independent church ministers, to stimulate Black Consciousness among their followers.

Independent churches are thought to number over 4,500, serving some 4 million blacks. Some 900 of these are in Soweto alone. After the Soweto uprising in 1976, students, some of whom were children of Independent church members, began to challenge their parents. In 1977, Mashwabada Mayatula, an Independent church minister and former member of the Christian Institute became a member of the Soweto Committee of Ten. After the banning of the Christian Institute which had helped form the AICA and finance its Bible College at Sweetwaters, the South African Council of Churches (then largely controlled by blacks) took over the task of developing a greater sense of organization and fostering Black Consciousness among the Independent churches.

The Pan Africanist Congress, shortly before it was banned, perceived the possibility of linking the theology of 'separatism' in the Independent churches to political goals.

CLASSISIM IN THE BLACK CHURCH

The difference between the Mainline churches and the Independent churches is not only a theological one, it is an economic one as well. Independent churches are religious

institutions virtually without formal buildings, stock holdings, estates, rectories or even full-time salaries for their clergy. They are churches virtually without money. They are so poor that they lie outside the capitalist system and are so decentralised that although each congregation is organised, there is no umbrella bureaucratic power structure like in the Mainline churches. Hope and Young are right when they suggest that the reason for the Independent churches to show little interest in political change is that the great majority of their members are illiterate or have had little formal education. Another reason is poverty. Most members of the Independent churches rise early in the morning to do miserable jobs and return home late at night. Also women members who form the majority fear involvement in politics.

Independent churches do not just speak to the needs of the poor, uneducated black people. The Charismatic Movement, which is a common phenomenon among white churches, incorporate somewhat similar emotional elements, especially in relation to healing and testimonies. According to Isaac Mokoene, some members of the Mainline churches who have been attending their own services by day come furtively to the Independent churches by night for special secret prayers of healing. Even whites, to the displeasure of the authorities, have attended and some have even taken leading parts in the services. Bishop Mokoena relates how he himself had prayed four times for a dying white woman at her home until she was cured.

The obliteration of the distinction between the Mainline churches and the African Independent churches requires that much more thought be given to the relationship between faith, culture and struggle on one hand and social and economic structure on the other. How does each of these affect another? To what extent does a particular system of faith help in defining particular forms of faith as prestigious? To what extent does it help in creating a religious system geared to divide the black community by imposing a 'religious tribalism' that is foreign to black people. All this is complex and cannot be disentangled at will by the church.

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Most Mainline churches or congregations may be somewhat more formal and may lack some of the ardor of the Zionist or the Shembe church, but the black congregations of the Mainline churches as a whole are a constituent part of what we may call the black church. Traditionally they cannot be separated from such churches. It is true that the clergy in the Mainline

churches show a higher level of formal education than their counterparts in the Independent churches. This difference creates the impression that the Mainline churches are 'better' than and more 'high class' than Independent churches. There is a broad myth of exclusivity among some members of the Mainline churches.

The argument is therefore that while black congregations of the Mainline churches share much of the African traditional orientation of the Independent churches, they are cut-off from the historic tradition of African Independent Christianity. Because of that they stand in a more critical situation. In preaching, music, liturgy, polity, patterns of congregational participation and styles of individual and group behaviour, they are not exactly Black and African and not exactly white. They are somewhere inbetween. But, the fact is that most black Christians in the Mainline churches are perfectly at home in this situation because they are not sufficiently aware of the deprivation of identity to be troubled by this 'twoness'. Some black clergy remain in the black Mainline churches because they wish to cling to the paternalistic benefits and prestige they receive from their often wealthy white counterparts. In doing so these black church leaders have bought into an unreflective, white middle-class religiosity in which the semblance of commitment too often becomes a substitute for substance. The result is that the church becomes a parenthesis between eleven and twelve o'clock on Sunday mornings. The black cultural experience becomes segmental, rather than integrated by a meaningful religious faith - where theological and ideological questions such as, 'What does it mean to be Black and African in the concrete situation of being human under a dehumanizing system of the racism of white people?; and 'What does it mean to be black and Christian in South Africa? are not raised. With the exception of few church leaders, the majority of the black clergy have no answer.

The ideal for the black church may be put in these terms: How can black Christians use history, culture and experience of their historic struggle to enhance the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the manifestation of his power to unite the black church and the black community? It is precisely black christians who have the experience of the reconciling love of God who have the capability to call the black community together. But, the best utilization of that capability and the faithful discharge of that responsibility will have to wait upon the re-definition of the church within the context of the struggle for liberation and African culture. African culture and the experience of the liberation struggle are a source for unity for black people because the potential for unity is always present

in the black community.

Religious faith and cultural heritage must be emphasised because the ordinary ideals of liberation, no matter how noble, lack the emotional depth and compelling motivation necessary to grasp the totality of our being and turn us to faith, without which it is not possible to experience integrity and peace. The alienation and hatred that divide and sicken our land cannot be overcome by secular ideologies alone but also by faith in a God who has kept us in the last 300 years when the cruelty and savagery of white people were unleashed upon our land.

The South African Council of Churches (SACC) is an example of how much power black Christians have - black people have made their presence felt in the SACC. They form 85% of the membership and 90% of the observer churches. Blacks have gradually moved to occupy senior positions in the council. By the end of 1975, seven out of thirteen full-time directors were black including the president and soon later the general secretary was black.

The representation of blacks in the SACC includes the African Independent churches. In the SACC, blacks felt freer to vent their frustrations and there were some traumatic moments of black/white confrontation. In 1975, the SACC commended a statement by black ministers which read:

"We offer ourselves to the white man as bridge-builders into the future ... We do not judge whites, knowing that for both of us there is a new commandment that we love one another no matter what the past injury, hurt, misunderstanding and oppression. (SACC Report 1975)

Since the beginning of an active leadership of the black clergy in the Mainline churches, some of the black Mainline churches have expressed a wish for the Africanization of the church. At the 1980 seminar on the Africanization of the church held by the Methodist Black Consultation (BMC) (a black caucus within the Methodist church), the Rev. Stanley Mogoba (chairman) emphasized that many members especially in the rural areas believe both in Christianity and their own traditional rituals and reverence for ancestors. He urged the church to accept African customs and orientate them in relation to the gospel. Mogoba has also interpreted the resolution of the BMC that the blacks would not leave the Methodist church by declaring that the white as a minority may break away from the Methodist Church of South Africa if they find it necessary. Mogoba's declaration calls attention to the fact that the spirit of black church unity is always present in the multiracial churches.

BLACK FAITH

The term 'black faith' is often used to refer to the Christian

religion as practised by all peoples of African descent in Africa and the African diaspora. In the South African context black faith means that particular appropriation in which black people made of the religion which was first delivered to them by European missionaries. This faith is the same, yet different from Christianity as practised by most white people, in that it continues to reflect quite visibly African indigenous religion and cultural heritage that was looked down upon by white missionaries.

Black faith also reflects the historic struggle against racism and oppression that black people have experienced and attempted to understand through the preaching of the gospel. The determination to be free from white domination is at its core, and is expressed in many ways: in music, modes of worship, dancing, styles of preaching and prayer, ethical commitments, ideas about social justice and what mainly black people believe about God and the immediacy of God to creation. Black faith is characterized by a deep spirituality, highly personal and emotional and also by a pragmatic approach to reality that is strongly communal and political in its orientation. The cultural aspect of black faith in South Africa, is mostly pronounced in the Independent churches, but it is also strongly present in the black congregations of the Mainline churches. Combining black faith with the cold, unornamented duty-bound European religion is not common, the result is that the 11.00 o'clock Sunday morning service is very much European and restricted whereas the evening services (imvuselelo) are open, free and express black faith more explicitly.

Black faith is highly Christocentric. For the black church, Jesus Christ is Emmanuel (God with us) - He is God empowering us for struggle moment by moment - He is the One who enables black people to 'Keep on, keeepin' on' (as the black Americans say). The loyalty and obedience of black people are to him alone. In South Africa, the allegiance of black people is not to the racist state but to the commands of the living God. The criteria for black people are the demands of the kingdom. Black Christians have learnt not to be dictated to by the status quo. Faith in Christ and His liberating gospel forms the basis upon which black people offer themselves as humble servants of God in our land.

Black faith believes in the reconciling love of God. It believes that in God's reconciling love, there is an option for black people. Black people believe that there can be no reconciliation between whites and blacks as long as apartheid reigns tall. Black people also believe that reconciliation between blacks and whites is not possible until there is reconciliatoin between

blacks and blacks and blacks with black humanity. True reconciliation is coming to grips with the evil powers that seek to divide and to set black people against black people and alienate black people from black self. Far too often, reconciliation for black people means death and suffering, giving up oneself for the sake of the other.

Black faith believes in Peace. One is not at peace with God and one's neighbour because one has succeeded in closing one's eyes to the realities of evil. Peace is not a situation where terrorism of black people is acceptable because it is done under the guise of the law. Peace is not simply the absence of war or suppressed anger in the townships - peace is the active presence of justice, the well-being of all.

Black faith believes in Christian love. In the South African situation, Christian love between blacks and whites is understood in terms of political, social and economic justice. Christian love challenges the black preacher to address the crucial question whether the gospel is indeed the gospel of liberation and not merely a tool for the oppression of black people. Christian love challenges the black Christian to participate meaningfully in the liberation struggle.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, let me point-out that, while Black Theology's understanding of the dynamics involved in uniting black people may still be tentative, it does raise anew questions about the unity of the church in South Africa on the grounds of African culture and struggle for liberation. In South Africa, as in much of the western world, churches are divided on denominational lines. The division is based on the formula of old quarrels, sectarianism and tribalism of the West which were imposed on us. The black Mainline churches are made to support the status quo of the dominant western churches. This sectarianism and tribalism once questioned, can be seen to be doomed since its formative capacity is to a great extent based on the assumed prestige of these churches of the west.

Since the advent of Black Theology, the tendency has been to challenge the current system of theology for being Eurocentric and elitist. What South Africa needs is a united black church and ultimately a united black community. Working towards these goals of uniting the black church and community, will strike the right balance between black faith and black humanity. The crisis of black faith is the result of the overall framework of the mission churches which to a great extent is an aspect and a consequence of a more comprehensive and general political situation.

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