

Journal of

**BLACK
THEOLOGY**



in South Africa

Vol 3. No. 1

May 1989

JOURNAL OF BLACK THEOLOGY IN SOUTH AFRICA

May 1989

Vol 3. No. 1

EDITORIAL

ARTICLES

- Faith that does Justice
by Prof. S.S. Maimela 1
- The Role of Christ in Jon Sobrino's Liberation Theology:
Its Significance for Black Theology in South Africa
by Dr. Moeahabo P. Moila 15
- The Socio-Cultural dynamics of the struggle for liberation
and the coherence of Black Faith.
by M. Gideon Khabela 23
- BIOGRAPHY:
Blessed Joseph Gerard, O.M.I.
His relevance for the Church in South Africa
by Fr. B.J. Tlhagale O.M.I. 39
- BOOK REVIEWS:
Proclaim Freedom to my People
by Simon Maimela
reviewed by T.A. Mofokeng 48
- God in South Africa
by Albert Nolan
reviewed by S.S. Maimela 50
- On reading Karl Barth in South Africa
by Charles Villa-Vicencio
reviewed by T.A. Mokokeng 53

EDITORIAL

We are always in search of what can nourish the black church and individual black christians in our country, so that they in turn will collectively carry the heavy burden of the struggle for justice. In this volume we are offering you an assortment of articles dealing with issues which we have not touched before, without which we cannot build a strong and resilient black church.

Prof. S.S. Maimela undertakes a deep exploration of the field which many black christians are not so familiar with, even those who have historical links with it. He searches for an answer to the question: what would Martin Luther say if he would find himself in South Africa today: The answer is loud and clear, according to Maimela. Dr. Moeahabo Moila continues the unfinished task of discussing with theologians in other Third World continents. This time he has chosen Jon Sobrino's contribution to Latin American articulation of what it means to confess that Jesus lives, suffers, dies and rises again in their continent today. Having done that, he comes back home to ask for the relevance of that confession for us in our situation.

Gideon Khabela is concerned about the disunity in black christianity and its effects on our communities and communal action. He joins some of our theologians in discussing the difference between mainline and African Independent churches and suggests interesting ways and means of bridging the gap between them.

Fr. Buti Tlhagale takes a look at that historical figure who provided Pope John Paul with a reason for visiting Lesotho last year, Fr. Joseph Gerard, and asks for his relevance for the church. Many readers who heard the name for the first time last year as well as those who had already heard of him will find this article very helpful.

FAITH THAT DOES JUSTICE

Simon S. Maimela

1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Because the topic as it stands is rather pretentious and too broad to be covered in a short paper like this one, I hope I will be forgiven if I take liberties with it by focussing my discussion primarily on *Luther's Doctrine of Justification by faith alone and its relevance for South African situation*. I believe that it should still be possible to touch on those broader issues that are implied in the theme.

Although my focus shall be on Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone, apart from the works of the law, I have deliberately chosen not to: i) go into detailed explication of this doctrine, ii) analyse the various meanings of the term *justitia* during Luther's time or during the intervening period to our present time, iii) try to defend Luther's teachings on this doctrine. As a result I have not burdened the text with a lot of footnotes or proof-texts.

In the light of the above disclaimers then, I need to explain the very modest aim which the paper intends to achieve, namely: to appropriate and interpret Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone for my particular South African situation. To be more precise, the aim of my paper is one of trying to contextualize Luther's teaching for my situation. This will of necessity involve a sort of giant leap to try to bridge the chasm of more than 500 years between the doctrine of justification by faith as propounded by Luther then and as interpreted by me in the present South African context. I hope that my attempt to contextualize Luther's teaching will not distort his views to a point of disturbing the Reformer's sleep in his grave. In any case, I believe that he too did what I intend doing with his writings, when he appropriated the teachings of St. Paul, St. Augustine and other church forebears for his own time.

Let me, in passing, also mention the fact that as a Black Lutheran living in a racially segregated and White dominated society, I do not return to the Reformer's writings, or for that matter to the Bible, for their own sake. Neither do I study them for the sheer pleasure of studying them nor out of curiosity to try to find out what these writings might say on this or that theological issue. Rather I study Luther's writings and other ancient Christian symbols as a Black Christian who is deeply perplexed by the enormity of the evil of White racial oppression

which is perpetrated against all the people of colour, hoping to find in them something of value which might shed some light on the problems confronting us today. Naturally, as I read them, I cannot help but ask the following questions: If Luther were a Black Christian living today under a White dominated political ideology of *Apartheid*, which negates the being and dignity of Black people, what sort of questions and problems would he tackle? How would Luther relate his teaching on the justification by faith alone to the concrete life as lived in White dominated societies? What sort of tentative answers would he give to the problems of colour and concomitant discrimination and deprivation which daily confront Black people as they struggle for freedom and social justice? These and similar questions are asked because, as Hertzog (1980:1035) correctly points out, Luther "would plunge into the concrete church dilemmas, as he did in the 16th century" because "the great reformer was unafraid to tackle the whole range of life among his people".

Because he could speak so decisively to his generation in Church and society, Luther's thoughts had a wider influence even among those people who did not count themselves as his followers.

Therefore, it is from the perspective of being a Black Christian who is also Lutheran that I read and interpret what Luther tries to teach to the Church. This means that I cannot for a moment pretend that I read Luther's theology as a neutral or objective person but as an extremely interested and conditioned Lutheran who hopes to find solutions, however indirect, to the problems that confront us. Indeed, my only reason for not ignoring Luther's writings, or for that matter the Bible, is because I believe that there are resources in Luther's theology which I can use and thereby overcome the problems which I and other discriminated people of colour face in a White racist South Africa. Having then put my cards, as candidly as I can, on the table I now proceed to outline the significance of Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone, apart from the works of the law.

Because the situation in which Luther lived and out of which he operated as a theologian, was marked by a "religious culture", one in which religious activities were not neatly separated from "secular" activities such as the political, economic and socio-cultural concerns - as it is the case in modern times - it is often very difficult for some of us to fully appreciate the relevance of the issues and concerns with which the Reformer was pre-occupied for our contemporary situation.

This is because Luther's language is saturated with a heavy dose of theological rhetoric. However, when one strips Luther's

vocabulary off of its religious cloak, and tries to delve deeper into what the Reformer was trying to say to his generation, one is startled to discover that Luther was wrestling with ordinary issues of *life and death, issues which are not really different in kind from those that concern ordinary people in our own time.* This remains true even though for many people in South Africa Luther's question such as: *Is there a merciful God? is not their primary and first question.*

Instead, it is the questions which have to do with social justice, human freedom, self-determination, political participation and human rights which dominate their thinking.

It is my thesis that Luther developed the doctrine of justification by faith alone in order to make sense of life, to discover its deeper meaning and thus answer the burning questions of life and death which his generation asked. Some of these questions were: In a culture which was saturated with and filled by religious activities and symbolism, yet which appeared unable to save people, how do I as an individual obtain salvation? How can I as a sinful person become justified before the righteous God, so that I might not lose my life here and in the next life? How do I lay my hands, as it were, on those things that make for life? From these and similar questions, it is clear that at the heart of Luther's theological response lies the concern and quest for finding a life which has meaning and is fulfilling for individuals. For where there is forgiveness and justification for the sinner there also one finds life, its meaning and blessings.

2. THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH'S VIEW ON THE SOURCE OF LIFE.

Luther's concern and quest for life was also the concern of the late Medieval Church of which the Reformer was a member and practising Christian. The difference between Luther and the Church of his time, as we shall see, lay primarily in the answers they gave regarding how the sinner could have a blessed and meaningful life in the face of the seemingly overpowering reality of sin even in the life of Christians.

The late Medieval Church argued that the means or the resources that an individual could use to protect oneself against the power of sin and therefore against the possible loss of life resided in the Church. The Church alone, it was argued, had the power to unlock the doors of life through the ordained ministry which Christ had entrusted to it. In consequence, it was maintained, there was no salvation for individuals outside the Church (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*). Put somewhat differently, the late Medieval Church taught that because the Church was the way to God, then it followed that God was

unreachable except through the instrumentality of the ministry of the Church which was entrusted to it by Jesus Christ. The Church was thus understood to stand between God and human beings, and it alone was charged with the responsibility of mediating God to humanity through the sacraments.

The self-understanding of the Church and reasons given to justify its privileged position provided powerful and persuasive argument which sounded fair enough. But its practical import gave the Medieval Church enormous powers over the lives of the ordinary Christians. For by having the monopoly to the keys that lead to God, it was implied that the Church alone had the authority to decide who was qualified or justified to have life, according to the Church's own differentiated scale of moral or spiritual achievement. The Church was thus placed in a position of having the final say concerning who should and who should not have access to the source of eternal life. In order to perform this rather onerous task, it became necessary that the Church should construct the self-help system of earned merits so that it could be able to decide fairly well who is and who is not holy or justified before God.

The problem arose when the Church became aware that so many people were not moral achievers, and therefore could not be declared justified automatically by virtue of their own merits. In consequence, the Church found it useful to devise the system of indulgences so that the gates of heaven could be opened a little wider so that even those who failed to achieve an acceptable moral or spiritual standard would have a chance of getting a meaningful life here and in the life hereafter.

But even under this merciful system of indulgences, it is obvious that the Medieval Church had enormous power over the lives of ordinary men and women. For by maintaining that the Church alone was the way to God because it controlled the treasury of merits earned by the saints or Christian achievers, it claimed that it alone could dispense or withdraw the means of forgiveness of sins. Yet, for the Church to claim that it alone could decide whose sins were forgiven by dispensing merits was to claim too much for any human institution, which is as sinful as the people who constitute it. Not surprisingly, it became a matter of time before the Church and the papacy would be looked upon as an oppressive human institution which had to be opposed. This is what Luther did by declaring that penitent sinners are justified by faith alone, apart from the works of the law.

3. GOD'S GRACE ALONE RECEIVED THROUGH FAITH IS THE SOURCE OF LIFE

Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone was and continues to be revolutionary. It constitutes a real threat to the institutional Church. *For it pulls the rug out from under those powerful human beings who would be tempted to arrogate to themselves the power to decide on the ultimate questions of life and death, something which God alone can do. Why?* Because it declares that life or salvation is a gift which God alone can give. Hence, the Gospel teaches that in and through Jesus Christ human beings can and do encounter a merciful God who freely gives meaningful life, when God accepts the sinner unconditionally in and for the sake of Christ. That is, faith in God's promises embodied in what has happened to and in Christ is sufficient to make the most unworthy and unlovable sinner the child of God. Indeed, the central thrust of the doctrine of justification by faith alone is that resources to life do not reside in human hands. Neither does the gift of life depend on human ability to please God, nor does it depend on our human natural worthiness or background or wealth or achievements. Rather access to life depends on the merciful God who gives it to those who dare to believe in God, the Saviour. It is for this reason that God allowed Jesus Christ to die for us while we were yet sinners and therefore unacceptable on our own merits (Rom. 5:6)

This was a revolutionary teaching by Luther because, in the context of Medieval Church, it meant that now life was no longer open to the few, the successful achievers who could please God. Instead, life was now open to the weak, the poor, the powerless and the unsuccessful classes who felt deprived of dignity and meaningful life because the prevailing religious, socio-political and economic arrangements had declared them unwanted failures or losers. As to be expected, when Luther taught and upheld the dignity and human worth of every individual before God who accepts penitent sinners unconditionally in Christ, many people, especially the underdogs and the downtrodden, enthusiastically embraced his teachings of justification by faith alone. In short, Luther was seen as a friend and liberator by simple men and women, who, despite the Reformer's protests (WA 33, 658-66), believed that his teachings had something to do with human struggle for freedom, human rights and self-fulfillment on this side of the grave.

4. JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH AS A BASIS FOR THE STRUGGLE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN SOUTH AFRICA

When it is realised that the issues about human life and how to live it meaningfully are what were at stake in Luther's teaching of justification by faith alone, it is possible for us to see some relevance, however indirect, to the socio-political problems that confront Black South Africans at present. We too are asking questions about the meaningfulness of human life. And some of our questions are: How can we find a meaningful life, life worth living for in an unjust socio-political structures that were designed to deny the people of colour their humanity and dignity? What conditions must be met or fulfilled in order that every person may live a life in which he/she is granted dignity, justice and human rights? These and similar questions are what most black people are asking in South Africa. For the struggle in our society is also a struggle over those forces that deny life of quality to the oppressed and powerless Black masses, while at the same time these forces give preferential treatment to the powerful and the dominant section of our society.

Before these questions are answered on the basis of Luther's teaching of justification by faith alone, it seems important to highlight the situation as it exists in South Africa. Talking about the concrete life in South Africa's divided land is to talk about what in the Lutheran theological language is commonly known as the sphere of and existence under the life-denying and death-dealing law, whose function is to kill the old Adam in order that the new Adam might arise through the life-giving gospel. In South Africa too people live under the sphere of the law which affects people in different ways. As it is commonly known the law in our country classifies different races in such a way that people find themselves living in a multi-faceted layers of group identities in which the colour of one's skin and social status carry enormous socio-political values, values which determine the fate and the quality of life which is open to each and every person. This is because our legal system enshrined in the Apartheid dispensation places weighty significance on the fact that a person is born either white or black. For it is on the basis of such assigned identities (based on Race Classification Act and Group Areas Act) that a person is declared by law justified or unjustified to belong to a particular community, to attend this or that school, enjoy or prohibited to enjoy certain public amenities such as libraries, swimming pools - all of which imply that different racial groups will have unequal educational, economic and political rights and privileges. In other words, in South Africa where law is not understood as the instrument by which human beings are to order society in such a way that each person is given justice, freedom and human rights, law is

seen not as a gift from God but as a reward of what individuals have earned on the basis of this or that natural worthiness such as one's race, culture, and economic status. The good life of quality is accordingly given to the fittest and racially qualified people who happen to be white. Here we have the best example of the misuse of law and political power when the dominant White minority theologizes politics, thereby confusing the civil and theological uses of law. For here the government uses law to try to save and protect White people both in soul and body. To obtain that objective, human beings have devised a system of self-justification, self-salvation and self-preservation on the basis of which White people are given life in all its fullness while Blacks are condemned to intolerable socio-political existence.

It is against this political system which declares some people justified to live a particular life, and to enjoy certain socio-political and economic privileges on the basis of some inherent worthiness, such as the colour of one's skin, that Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone should be tested for its relevance, however indirect to situations such as in South Africa. For it reminds us that all human beings are unworthy, unacceptable, and sinners before God, and therefore that no race or group of people is any better than another. Rather God in Christ accepts (justifies) sinful people not on account of their merits (racial worthiness) but solely out of sheer divine grace and mercy. Put differently, the relevance of Luther's teachings lies in its insistence that all human beings, especially Christian, are children of God by grace alone because none of them can claim to be acceptable and lovable on their own accord. This is the most important insight which all South Africans ought to learn for their own good, for without exception all people often fall short of the expectations that God and their neighbours have of them. Therefore, that they continue to live and are not destroyed is solely due to the fact that God and their human fellows suffer them, tolerate and accept them despite their sins, despite their insufficiency, and despite their lack of perfection. The theological name for this unconditional acceptance of the unacceptable sinner by God in Christ is what Luther referred to as the *justification by faith alone, apart from the works of the law*.

5. JUSTIFICATION AND CONFESSION OF JUSTICE IN SOCIETY

The central focus of my paper has been the attempt to link Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone and the contemporary human struggle for justice and freedom in South Africa. The question might be asked: Should such a link be

made given the fact that Luther developed his teachings in the 16th century completely unaware of the burning social issues of justice and human rights, especially of the racial injustice and oppression in South Africa, with which we are confronted in our time? Does not the discussion of justification and social justice, faith and ethics lead to the problem of work righteousness from which Luther wanted to free Christians in the first place? These are legitimate questions which must not be ignored. But I believe that Luther's teachings rather than being a hindrance can provide useful insights in answering some of these questions. Also, Luther's theology should be viewed as a resource which can shed some light even on the contemporary discussion on justice and human freedom. In this regard, I align myself with Pannenberg's perceptive observation, when he writes:

The impact of the Reformation on the course of modern culture is far more evident in the perspective opened by the issue of freedom than in entering into the technicalities of the doctrine of justification. And it seems to me that especially the continuing contribution of Lutheran doctrine to the social and political context of our time, as well as to the ecumenical situation of contemporary Christianity, can be more effectively articulated in the language of freedom and liberty than in the traditional language of the doctrine of justification (Pannenberg 1981:288)

Further more, Pannenberg notes that in Luther's perspective the notion of Christian freedom was equivalent to justification by faith (*iustitia = libertas*). In consequence, in 1520 when Luther made his last attempt to communicate the central teachings of the Reformation directly to Pope Leo X, he entitled his booklet *The Freedom of a Christian (De Libertate christiana)*. Therefore, because in Luther's view the notion of Christian freedom is equated with justification, it seems legitimate to discuss and link the doctrine of justification and social justice.

Indeed, even where we might disagree on details regarding the conclusions that Pannenberg has drawn, it remains true that human beings in our time are in need of freedom from various forms of oppressions as much as they were in need of freedom during the time of the Reformation. Luther's teachings on justification by faith alone met that need, thus going a long way toward freeing individual men and women from the bondage to which feudalistic ecclesiastical tyranny had subjected them. In our time, men and women in South Africa are also in need of liberation from the bondage to which the White racial tyranny of that "golden calf" known as Apartheid has subjected them.

As already sufficiently pointed out, the problem both in the

Medieval and contemporary society lies in the attempt by some human institution (religious in one case and political in another case) to arrogate to itself the power to decide on matters of life and death, that is by trying to control and monopolize the resources that make for the life of individuals as well as of the community. In both situations we are confronted with the problem of the justice of God in the face of human suffering at the hands of some human institution which denies resources that make for life. In consequence, human beings are forced to ask: Is God just when there is so much suffering? In what sense is God just? How are we human beings made just when we wrong each other and God so much? In answer to these and similar questions, Luther declared that the just shall live by faith. That is, God as the subject of justice in the Christ-event creates the just person of faith. This faith "seizes us and puts us outside ourselves, lest we rely upon our power, conscience, person and works, and it makes us rely upon that which is outside ourselves, namely upon God's promise" (... *rapit nos a nobis et ponit nos extra nos, ut non nitamur viribus, conscientia, sensu, persona, operibus nostri, sed eo nitamur, quod est extra nos* WA 40/1, 589:25). This justification of the sinner is not merely a dead, "juridical matter" but is a divine transformative act which creates and regenerates the sinner, thus creating a new person with new attitudes and behaviour pattern. As Pannenberg (1981: 29lf) correctly points out, Luther added the notion of trust in his reinterpretation of faith in order to emphasize that:

faith, by way ecstatis, participates in the reality of Christ himself and therefore transforms the faithful into Christ's image ... that the personal center itself changes in the act of trust, because the trusting person surrenders to the one in whom such confidence is entrusted.

Put somewhat differently, by creating a new person of Christ's righteousness within and yet outside us (*extra nos*), God's act of justification sets the individual free to do good works "in the liberty of the spirit" not to obtain salvation but to "serve others freely and out of love". That is, to be united with Christ by faith entails a participation in service to the world, as Luther points out in the second part of *The Freedom of a Christian* (LW 31: 373). Here Luther argues that the persons of faith who are created just in Christ, rather than live in idleness or wickedness thinking that faith frees them from doing good works, are called to the responsible task of doing good works to please God and to serve their human fellows. Over against the Medieval theological basis for doing works in order to attain salvation, Luther proposed the Reformation principle of faith active in love (cf. Forell: 1954). According to Luther, the fruit of faith was not

to run away from society into monasteries but service of God and the neighbour. Therefore Christians must become involved in activities which help our neighbours in their need because it is in society that Christian faith must demonstrate itself through the fruits of love, namely, good works. Thus serving one another in love makes possible for human rights and justice to become the common property of all God's people.

In the same vein, already in 1591 in his sermon entitled *The Two Kinds of Righteousness*, Luther discusses good works which, as the fruits of faith active in love, Christians are called upon to perform as fellow servants on one "another in accordance with the example of Christ" who came not to be served but to serve (LW 31:302). Applying, with deep insight, the doctrine of justification by faith to the everyday living, Luther, distinguishes between Christ's righteousness by means of which God justifies, sanctifies, and redeems the sinner, and the social righteousness of the believing Christian which manifests itself in good works. Here, in a persuasive manner, Luther shows how the righteousness of God in Christ is received and is related to the life of the Christian, and writes:

There are two kinds of Christian righteousness, just as man's sin is of two kinds. The first is alien righteousness, that is the righteousness of another, instilled from without. This is the righteousness of Christ by which he justifies through faith ... The second kind of righteousness is our proper righteousness not because we alone work it, but because we work with that first and alien righteousness. This is that manner of life spent profitably in good works ... slaying the flesh and crucifying the desires with respect to the self This righteousness consists in love to the neighbour ... is the product of the first type, actually its consequence ... This righteousness follows the example of Christ in this respect and is transformed into his likeness. It is precisely this what Christ requires. Just as he himself did all things for us, not seeking his own good but ours only - and in this he was most obedient to God - so he desires that we also should set same example for our neighbours (LW 31:299-300)

Underscoring the vital link between justification and social justice, Luther argues that the fruits of our justification, whose very existence depends on faith in Christ, makes it possible for Christians to seek the good of their fellows, to engage voluntarily in works of love, to deal justly with the neighbour, and thus live devoutly toward God (LW 31:300). As they serve one another in love, Christians thus provide God's masks or covers in and through which God preserves other lives, shows mercy to the poor and comforts the afflicted (LW 33:234).

Luther makes it clear that while the alien righteousness of faith before God (*coram deo*) is freely through the preaching of the gospel, this social righteousness, our proper righteousness before our fellow humans (*coram hominibus*) must be attained by Christians so that they might be made “good and righteous in the eyes of the world” (LW 46:99f). Furthermore, Luther points out that this social righteousness is not less holy work than the faith righteousness because in and through the human good work God distributes temporal blessings to other human beings. Also, because this social righteousness is not an entirely human work but is attained when God works in concert with and under the “cover” or “guise” of human work, Luther holds that this righteousness is the Creator’s righteousness. For when God’s own way of acting and loving towards finite creatures is embodied and radiated through the good works of the justified person of faith, God’s honour is at stake even though human agents too get rewarded by maintaining their virtue, integrity, honesty and clean conscience before their human fellows (LW 51:260-274,299). To underscore the fact that both the righteousness of faith and civil righteousness are holy and divine work, Luther reminds us that “God himself is the founder, lord, master, protector and rewarder of both kinds of righteousness. There is no human ordinance or authority in either, but each is a divine thing entirely (LW 46:100).

Given the fact that the link between justification and social justice is made by Luther himself, we must point that Christians, as new persons who have been created just in Christ’s righteousness, must understand justification as having a real transformative power in their lives, thereby making it possible for individual Christians free for mutual acceptance and to work for justice in the society such as South Africa. Indeed, as created just person of faith, Christians should not tolerate a situation where individual men and women piously attend Church services in order to “make everything right with God and then in their daily life continue to hate, exploit, and tear apart” their fellow human beings solely on the basis of the different colour of the person’s skin (Mays 1964:35). Because the salvation which Christ has procured for humanity aims at overcoming the sin of alienation between God and human beings and its consequent social alienations among humans themselves, Christians who merely want to be “assured of the benefits of the saving death of Christ bereft of its power to transform” their lives and their social, interpersonal relationships should be reminded that justification which does not lead to sanctification, that is, human subjective response to the divine gift of freedom which in working for liberation and justice for other humans, is not genuine. For as Cone (1975:234)

aptly puts it:

Because God's act for man involves man's liberation from bondage, man's response to God's grace of liberation is an act for his oppressed brothers and sisters. There can be no reconciliation with God unless the hungry are fed, the sick are healed, and justice is given to the poor. The justified sinner is at once the sanctified person, one who knows that his freedom is inseparable from the liberation of the weak and the helpless.

In view of the above, it would follow that Christians in South Africa will feel themselves called upon to become involved in the struggle against racial injustice and oppression so that liberation and freedom might be accorded to all. In so doing, they will be underscoring the basic fact that there exists an intrinsic relationship between God's act of justification and human struggle for justice in society. For the claim of the gospel is that God in Jesus Christ has succeeded in breaking up the power of that fundamental sin of the breach of fellowship between God and humans as well as its social consequences, characterized by human hostility, racial injustice, exploitation and oppression. Therefore, by breaking down the wall of hostilities between God and humans and between human beings themselves, the Christ-event has ushered in the real possibility of genuine life of fellowship and acceptance among human beings. It is for this reason that justification by faith alone, and confession of and struggle for social justice must be understood as inseparably linked, as it were two sides of the same coin. One cannot hope to have one side without the other.

Thus unconditional acceptance of us by God in Christ is alone the basis on which Christians should build a sound ethnic on which they might begin working towards reaching one another in love, thus manifesting the fruits of faith which is active in love. In so doing, they will be working for creation of new social structures in order to make humans more human and their social world more just, livable and humane, thus overcoming the divisions based on law which, like the situation rejected by St. Paul (Gal 3:23-29, Col. 3:1-11), threatens to tear them apart. The discussion as well as the linking of justification and social justice is particularly relevant to the South African situation, because here people pride themselves of being a "Christian nation," by virtue of the fact that statistics show that more than 75% of the population claim to be Christian. It is therefore deliberate that we do not want to discuss the problem of social justice, human rights, good works and the civil uses of law under the first Article of the Creed, as I have done elsewhere (Cf Maimela 1984, and Maimela 1987:121-132). I am persuaded that to continue to discuss the human struggle for freedom and

justice in relation to the doctrine of creation and law is correct. But in a situation in which the majority of people are Christians, we should not ask for minimum good works and virtues which even non-Christians can do. Rather Christians, as created just persons of faith through the justifying act of God in Christ, and who are called to follow the example of Christ into whose image they are being transformed, must be challenged to do far more good works and deal justly with their fellows in society. In so doing, Christians will be manifesting their faith which active in love, does not seek its own but seeks the good, justice and well being of the neighbour. Indeed, to fail to challenge Christians in the so-called Christian country to show more fruits of their faith will be to forget that there exists an indissoluble link between justification and sanctification, a link which does not allow us to offer people a cheap form of "the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner...grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living incarnate" (Bonhoeffer 1967:46-47). Costly grace is the opposite: it recognizes that justification of the sinner is intrinsically linked to repentance, to personal transformation, and to the creation of a new person with new attitudes who voluntarily does far more good works than what the law commands (LW 31:349-350, 358-367, 371-373).

This unconditional acceptance of the sinner by God in Christ which gives birth to a new person of faith in response to God's free gift of freedom to all people should be the basis for Christian interpersonal relations in South Africa. It provides a vision of the good person and just society and challenges Christians to want to transform themselves and their society in accordance with the ethos of the Kingdom of God. This insight which Luther, in re-reading the gospel, rediscovered for the Church is one which ought to be preached loudly to people who live under the law of separation. This perspective, grounded as it is in the gospel, is one which Christians ought to embody in word and deed in their relationship with their fellows, so that those white people who hate themselves as well as their black neighbours might come to know and experience the liberating love of God in Christ, the Saviour. This is the gospel which all fearful South Africans need to hear so that they might be liberated from their fears and therefore be liberated from the need to separate themselves from their racially different neighbours - as if they need to defend and save their lives at all costs.

Should most people come to experience this unconditional acceptance by God in Christ, there is no need why Christians in South Africa should not take the lead in showing tolerance toward their racially and culturally different neighbours. In so

doing, they will be demonstrating that it is possible for Christians to accept other people on the basis of their unconditional acceptance by God. And should some bigotted Christians still find it difficult to come together and accept their fellow Christians on the basis of their professed justification by God through grace alone, they ought to be asked what right do they have for expecting perfection, purity, worthiness and acceptability from their fellow human beings, when God has accepted them despite their imperfections. Indeed, they ought to be asked: What right do they have for setting a higher standard of acceptability than the one which God has set for accepting the unworthy and the ungodly? What right do they have for rejecting and disassociating themselves from their fellow Christians who God has already accepted and loved in Jesus Christ? For if God has already accepted our unworthy fellow human beings, is it really possible for us to reject our fellow Christians without also cutting ourselves off from God and God's actions of reconciliation between God and human beings and consequently between human beings themselves?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Bonhoeffer, D. 1967. *The Cost of Discipleship*, New York: The Macmillan Company.
2. Cone, J.H. 1975. *God of the Oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press.
3. Hertzog, F. 1980 "Luther and Liberation" in *the Christian Century* 97:34
4. Maimela S.S. 1984. *God's Creative Activity through the Law*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
5. Maimela, S.S. 1987 *Proclaim Freedom to My People*. Braamfontein, Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers
6. Mays, Benjamin 1964. *Seeking to be Christians in Race Relations*. New York: Friendship Press.
7. *D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Weimar*, 1983 - Cited here as WA.
8. *Luther's Works, American Edition*, ed. Jaroslav J. Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955 - Cited here as LW
9. Pannenberg W, 1981. "Freedom and the Lutheran Reformation" in *Theology Today* 38:3
10. Forell G.W. 1954. *Faith Active in Love*. New York: American Press.

THE ROLE OF CHRIST IN JON SOBRINO'S LIBERATION THEOLOGY: ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR BLACK THEOLOGY IN SOUTH AFRICA

By: Dr. Moeahabo P. Moila

Christology is a historical problem. The problem is as old as the Christian faith itself. Both New Testament and church history present to us a variety of interpretations of Jesus as saviour. Thus the history of christological controversies is long and complex. In other words there is no one normative christology but various christologies.

The source of this problem is twofold: Whereas all these christologies want to defend the truth of Christ, they differ radically in their interpretations of Jesus as saviour and in their perception of the human predicament or lostness. For instance the notion of Jesus as saviour means the word of judgement and forgiveness for Barth, Thielicke and Frei; the end of history for Pannenberg; a New Being who overcomes estrangement for Tillich and Gilkey; a new creation in whom all creatures are restored for Cobb, Knitter, Wingren; liberator of the oppressed for Sobrino, Schüssler, Fiorenza, Ruether, and Metz; and God's way of ruling in the world: king for Schillebeeckx

Further, theologians differ in their interpretation of the human predicament. It means unbelief, separation from transcendence for Barth, Thielicke and Frei; hopelessness, loss of historical faith for Pannenberg; alienation, estrangement, rebellion for Tillich and Gilkey; chaos, disorder, ecological distress for Cobb, Knitter and Wingren; oppression, inequality, bondage for Sobrino, Schüssler, Fiorenza, Ruether, Metz; isolation, the non-person, social breakdown for Schillebeeckx.

This article focuses on a christology which interprets Jesus as the liberator of the oppressed and on the view which perceives the human predicament as oppression, inequality and bondage. This kind of christology is more appropriate for our situation in South Africa and has enormous implications for Black Theology.

SOBRINO'S PERCEPTION OF THE HUMAN PREDICAMENT

Sobrino explains the human predicament in terms of the political problems of freedom and equality. In his view political oppression, social dislocation, systematic injustice and economic alienation underline the human predicament. All these factors, he says, constitute sin. Thus he writes:

Justice concerns itself not only with separation but also with the relationship that arises among human beings as they divide into ruler and ruled, oppressor and oppressed. This type of relationship is formally sin, indeed sin par excellence, since it means the usurpation by a human being of that which is the prerogative of God alone. The consequences of this sin ...

unlike sins that are found in other types of human groupings ... is very clearly death. Injustice kills human beings, albeit slowly and through structures. Injustice reveals the full extent of the evil that is sin, for it repeats in the children of God what was done to the Son of God who was slain by injustice. (1984:77)

In his view, therefore, at stake is the death and life of human beings. He maintains that the poor are made in the image and likeness of God and that it is sin to dim or defile this likeness. God loves the poor and will defend them independently of their moral or personal condition. Hence he argues that "any ecclesial solidarity in the faith must of necessity pass through solidarity with the poor". (1985:37-38)

Sobrino's perception of the human predicament calls for the identification of theology with revolutionary action, albeit critically. For him orthopraxy takes precedence over orthodoxy, and theology is an effort to articulate the action of faith. In other words he does not perceive theology as primarily an effort to give a correct understanding of God's attributes or actions.

By calling for solidarity in faith and solidarity with the poor, Sobrino articulates his concern about the task of the church in the world. He believes that political involvement and specific commitments to working for the transformation of society are inescapable for all serious Christians. Thus he insists that Christians must hold to their faith in participating in the struggle for justice. In this way he equates the cause of Jesus Christ with the cause of social and political revolution. Human response to Christ for him is realized in the concrete arena of history with its economic, political and ideological options. He, therefore, perceives faith as a dynamic and a motivating invitation.

Christian faith for him should always relate to the context in which it lives by using the thought-forms of that particular culture.

SOBRINO'S CHRISTOLOGICAL METHOD

Sobrino's christological method can be understood only as it is studied in relations to his basic theological thinking. In other words it can be shown only by its congruity with his total outlook. His theological method is purely historical in that it reflects on the reality and faith of the church, the historical Jesus, and Jesus in relation to the father and his kingdom. Sobrino thus writes:

... theological thinking about the church must take as its objective starting point the present reality of the church insofar

as it is Christian, that is, insofar as it is a present manifestation of God. ... on the subjective side reflection must take as its starting point the ecclesial faith as it is practiced, or in other words, the concrete response given to the God who continually manifests itself. (1985:1-2).

In his view, "God's manifestation, at least in Latin America, is his scandalous and partisan love for the poor and his intention that these poor should receive life and thus inaugurate his kingdom". Thus he regards "the proper way of being conformed to God" as "to be concerned actively with the justice of the kingdom of God and with making the poor the basis of this concern". He regards this as "the great 'sign of the times', a sign which is a fact." (1985:2).

With this starting point Sobrino then tries to integrate everything that tradition has rightly developed concerning the church (e.g. christological statements made by the church). For him this starting point is essential both from historical and theological standpoints. The fact that we accept that the Spirit of God continually acts in history and in the church is for him the reason why we should "search continually for the manifestation of God in our times" and why the manifestation will take on new forms during new times. He perceives the history of the church as part of the being of the church which must play a part in theological reflection on the church. Thus he writes:

The history of the church is intrinsic to reflection on the nature of the church. The essence of the church does not exist unless it take historical form. This means that if the historical dimension is neglected ecclesiological thinking will not only be idealistic and triumphalistic on the one hand, and run a serious risk of irrelevance on the other, but it will also not even be theological. A church that lacks a history cannot be the object of a Christian ecclesiology. Consequently, whatever happens in the church ... predictably or unpredictably ... can and must a priori be a source of theological understanding". (1985:3),

It is, therefore, his contention that it is "fidelity to the signs of the times" which "has produced in the church a mission of evangelization that is directed to and centred on the poor". In turn this produced "cruel and systematic persecution, engendered hope against hope, courage in persecution, and faith in God, the father of Jesus, as the ultimate unshakable rock". (1985:4). This novelty, Sobrino argues has brought a recovery by the church of the memory of Jesus; it has made the church like Jesus. (1985:4). Hence he maintains that the source of the novelty is in the Spirit of Jesus. (1985). He perceives this

as "the ultimate justification for taking the reality of the church as the starting point for reflection on the church". As he writes: *In this church God is continually manifesting himself, not only doctrinally, not only on the basis of his word in the past, but here and now through the word that is now being spoken*". (1985):

For this reason Sobrino believes that theology must be responsible in that it responds to the real world; be practical "because its motivating concern is not pure thought nor even pure truth but rather the building of the kingdom of God and of the church that will be at the service of this kingdom", and be "done with pleasure in the Good News and with joy that there is salvation for the poor". (1985:5). In short he defines theology as "a response of 'gratitude' because its starting point is the primordial christian experience that 'something has been given to us', viz. the mystery of God present in Jesus and in a church that is poor and is of the poor. (1985).

Given all this we can then say that in Sobrino's basic theological thinking Jesus functions as both the source of the church's power of renewal and as the one in whom the mystery of God is present in both Jesus who suffered and in a church that is poor and is of the poor. This point brings out very clearly Sobrino's christological method in line with his total theological outlook. So, for him, christology is central to Christian faith in Jesus as saviour. In conformity with his basic theological thinking, the method of his christology is historical because Jesus is historical.

He articulates what he means by the historical Jesus by reflecting critically on the praxis of Jesus rather than on Jesus's teachings or on the New Testament theologies of Jesus' praxis. The traits of Jesus on which he reflects are the coming of God's kingdom, Jesus' faith, prayer, cross and resurrection. He regards all these as the characteristic features and events of Jesus' life. His christology follows their chronological order in order to evaluate them "properly as historical realities." (1978:354)

He thus defines the historical Jesus as the one who lived in the concrete context of history preaching the coming kingdom, denouncing injustice, realizing that kingdom in real life (i.e. the combat of a sinful world, conflict-ridden situation, a society divided into classes, and the cries of the oppressed.) He compares this situation of the historical Jesus with the present-day situation and this is the core of his christological methodology. Jesus for him is the way to liberation and because of this he says liberation theology is concentrated

in christology. In his view christology begins “from below rather than from above”. (1978:104)

On the other hand, however, he insists that christology must also be considered from the standpoint of dogma. (1978:311) He argues that it is essential to show that his christology purports to have an ecclesial significance, to point out the pastoral use of dogma and to show that dogmatic formulations are a historical necessity for a church composed of human beings. (1978:309) However, he maintains that the most urgent task of christology is not to re-interpret christological dogma directly, but to reposition the path and course of believers so that their lives can be a continuing, advancing discipleship, a following of Jesus, and a process of concrete filiation. (1978:342)

Sobrino’s christological methodology places much emphasis on the partiality of Jesus for the poor. The method starts from the lowly and aims at turning people into the children of God. As such for him the praxis of Jesus saves, and discipleship always means following Jesus. Jesus for him sides with the poor and the oppressed. For him, therefore, following on the historical Jesus is the precondition for reaching Jesus. Sobrino suggests a Christian lifestyle which commits itself to historical tasks, social militancy, the “praxis” of liberation, in the sense of integral, evangelical liberation that implies an overthrow of social, economic and political subservience.

SOBRINO’S INTERPRETATION OF JESUS AS SAVIOUR (SOTERIOLOGY)

Though Sobrino acknowledges that soteriology is a decisive factor for christology, he rejects the idea of using it as a starting point for christology. Thus the concept soteriology is not central in his christology. Instead he grounds soteriology in the two poles of the historical Jesus and the concrete historical context of the christian disciple (follower of Jesus). For him christology implies the soteriology of Jesus as active, praxis reality then and there in the life of Jesus and here and now in the life of the christian (the follower of Jesus). Jesus’s path is normative for the present-day praxis of His followers. As Sobrino writes:

Faith is always directed to the absolute of God and his kingdom. Faith in Jesus means accepting the fact that in him has been revealed the Son ... which is to say, the way to God. That can be done in orthodox confessions and cultic acclamations. But faith in Jesus attains its maximum radicality when we accept his path as a normative and traverse it. The most radical and most orthodox affirmation of faith in Jesus is

affirming that the faith of Jesus is the correct way to draw nearer to God and realize his kingdom, and then acting accordingly. (1978:108)

In Sobrino, therefore, ethical action is itself soteriological living today, and the only way one can have access to the saving value of Jesus Christ. Thus he writes:

So now we see that the fundamental moral value for the follower of Jesus is bringing about the kingdom of God, which means doing the work of re-creative justice and achieving brotherhood. It is through this effort that the follower of Jesus simultaneously becomes a just person and a child of God. (1989:173)

Sobrino's christology defines the nature of the quandary from which we need to be saved (sin, justice, oppression, and death) and the nature of God (love). The role of the Jews in Sobrino's christology is, therefore very important. They provided a social context for Jesus's praxis. Jesus preached the kingdom of God in this context which according to Sobrino was a sinful world which wanted nothing to do with the kingdom of God as Jesus proclaimed it. For Sobrino the Jews were a society divided into classes in conflict with one another. It was a conflict-ridden situation, that is, a historical situation riddled with conflict. Hence Sobrino perceives sin as the unwillingness to offer one's security to God, as that which manifests itself in using one's power for injustice, oppression, and putting others to death. In other words, for him, the Jews provided a situation in which Jesus had to fight injustice. As he writes:

To take an example from the life of Jesus that is pertinent here, we can certainly say that his "love" for people was universal in intent. But that love was translated into different concrete forms when he sought to make it a reality in the context of a historical situation riddled with conflict. In Jesus' case, his universal love was translated into a decision to be "with" the oppressed and to be "against" the oppressors, precisely so that his love could be "for" all of them. (1978:125)

Sobrino perceives faith as following Jesus and proclaiming of the kingdom of God. For him faith and service are inseparable just as personal sin does not exist without the social dimension. Thus he argues: "our filiation vis-à-vis God is necessarily mediated through brotherhood between human beings. Without the brotherhood, the filiation is wholly and purely idealistic." (1978:357)

The cross of Jesus is for Sobrino the solution to the problem of theodicy. Jesus' cross is also the cross of God. In it God suffered and died in solidarity with the oppressed which most christologies bypass. He insists that in order for christology

and soteriology to be radically historical and concrete, the cross of Jesus must not be bypassed.

He, therefore, argues that "it is in the praxis of love for neighbour that we experience the transcendence of the Christian God". (1978:173) "Without the praxis of love people cannot experience the God of Jesus, and hence they cannot pray to the God of Jesus". In short, for Sobrino Jesus' praxis has soteriological significance. For him "life according to the spirit of Jesus is the authentic Christian way of acting that makes us sons and daughters in and through the Son". (1978:XXV)

It is Sobrino's contention that the resurrection is the event that reveals God. (1978:240) Hence for him, "knowing the resurrection of Jesus is not something that is given once and for all. We keep creating our horizon of understanding, and we must keep alive our hope and praxis of love at every moment". (1978:257)

In short Sobrino's christology demands that faith be more concrete and effective and that it must transmit its efficacy to the oppressed. As he writes:

To know the truth is to do the truth, to know Jesus is to follow Jesus, to know sin is to take on the burden of sin, to know suffering is to free the world from suffering, to know God is to go to God in justice". (Hennelly 1979:35)

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SOBRINO'S CHRISTOLOGY FOR BLACK THEOLOGY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Sobrino deals with a situation where people are divided into the powerful who live in luxury, and the suffering and oppressed. This is the fundamental problem with which Black theology in South Africa is trying to wrestle. In accordance with Sobrino's christology Black theology can deal with this problem effectively by reflecting on the praxis of the church in the historical situation of South Africa from a biblical perspective and by choosing to side with those who are suffering and oppressed in this country.

Sobrino's christology is by nature militant. It calls for the identification of theology with revolutionary action, albeit critically. Theology in this sense could be perceived as an effort to articulate the action of faith. This is what Black theology in South Africa is trying to do. In Black Theology orthopraxy should take precedence over orthodoxy. Here theology is not primarily an effort to give a correct understanding of God's attributes or actions.

Sobrino's christology is concerned with the task of the church in the world. It calls for solidarity in faith and solidarity with the poor in fighting misery, oppression and injustice. This affirms Black Theology's position which calls for both Black solidarity and the solidarity of the churches.

Sobrino's christology maintains that political involvement and specific commitments to working for the transformation of society are inescapable for all serious Christians. It insists that Christians must hold to their faith in participating in the struggle for justice. It equates the cause of Jesus Christ with the cause of social and political revolution. For it's human response to Christ is realized in the concrete arena of history with its economic, political and ideological options. It perceives faith as a dynamic power which is in dialogue or conflict with all unjust peoples or social structures. Thus Black Theology is a theology which protests against the oppression of blacks in South Africa.

Like Sobrino's christological methodology, Black Theology places much emphasis on the partiality of Jesus, it starts from the lowly and aims at turning people into God's children. In other words according to Black Theology the praxis of Jesus saves, and discipleship always means following Jesus through the struggle for justice in South Africa. It is of utmost importance for Black Theology to understand the oppressed and to fight for the transformation of South African society.

Sobrino's christology is significant for Black Theology in that it demands that faith be more concrete and effective and that it must transmit its efficacy to the oppressed. This means that the task of Black Theology is to make Christians conscious of their Christian responsibility in our South African society. South African black Christians need a spiritual and political exodus out of the situation of oppression toward a situation of liberation. (Boesak:137)

Following Christ means willingness to exploit the power of the gospel of liberation. This means willingness to challenge one's own oppressors, i.e. South African whites. Political involvement and specific commitments to working for the transformation of South African society are inescapable for all serious black Christians.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Jon Sobrino, S.J., *The True Church and the Poor*. (New York: Orbis Books, 1984)
Jon Sobrino, S.J. and Juan Hernandez Pico. *Theology of Christian Solidarity*. (New York: Orbis Books, 1985)
Jon Sobrino, S.J., *Christology at the Crossroads*. (New York: Orbis Books, 1978)
Hennelly, *At Theologies in Conflict* (New York: Orbis Books, 1979)
Cf.A. Boesak, *Liberation Theology in South Africa*, in *African Theology en Route*, ed. K. Appiah-Kubi and S. Torres (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books)

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

by M. Gideon Khabela

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. Nhlangakazi 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.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Villa-Vilencio Charles - *'The Church: Discordant and Divided'*, Africa Report, July/August. 1983
2. Hope M. and Young J. - *The South African Churches in a Revolutionary Situation*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York. 1983
3. Chikane F. - 'Church Struggle and Political Responsibility' *Theology for Justice in South Africa*, Published by: Theology in Global Context Association - Foundation for Peace and Justice, 475 Riverside Drive, Room 861, New York, NY.10115 (Occasional Bulletin No. 2)
4. Boesak A. - *Black and Reformed*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York. 1986
5. South Africa, *Official Yearbook of the Republic of South Africa*. 1982
6. de Carvalho Emilio - 'Who do Africans say Christ is? (s.a.)
7. Mosala J. and Thlahale B. (ed.) - *The Unquestionable Right to be Free*, New York, Maryknoll, Orbis Books. 1986
8. Thomas David - *Councils in the Ecumenical Movement; South Africa 1904 - 1905* - Johannesburg, SACC, 1979

BLESSED JOSEPH GERARD

HIS RELEVANCE FOR THE CHURCH IN SOUTH AFRICA

Fr. B.J. Tlhagale O.M.I.

BACKGROUND

Joseph Gérard is at a century's remove; and yet there is a deep-seated desire to undertake a spiritual journey, cutting through time, in order to reach the village of Ma Jesu at Roma where he laid the foundations of the Christian faith.

Such a journey is fraught with a number of difficulties. First there is the problem of overcoming the temporal distance between Joseph Gérard's life experience, his missionary endeavours and the South Africa of today. Secondly the journey purports to be a political reading of the apostolic life of Joseph Gerard, an attempt at "rescuing" the socio-political message of his writings in order to demonstrate his relevance for the South Africa of today, to draw inspiration and garner strength from his own commitment, to make our own that which has become estranged over the last 100 years.

The third difficulty is to read into the text something that was neither intended by the author nor by the text he left behind - principally his diary and letters. His teaching revolved around the Church's doctrine, personal conversion and personal faith in God and in the Saviour, Jesus Christ. Joseph Gérard is silent on the social implications of the christian message.

There is also a deafening silence on the social conditions prevalent at the time. There is, however, an abundance of reference to the cultural aspects of life of the Basotho, namely the rites of passage, divination, polygamy, ancestor cult. etc. It is inconceivable that the social fabric of the mountain kingdom that created privileges through a system of chieftainship where positions are ascribed by virtue of blood-relationships, irrespective of personal ability would have been devoid of social evils. This system, in some cases, generated instances of violations of justice. Rampant deviations, especially with regard to land distribution, the use of labour and contributions to the chiefs - were not uncommon. On these issues the writings of Joseph Gérard remain silent. This is also the case with regard to the violent relationships brought about either by the skirmishes between the Boers and the Basotho as a result of cattle rustling or land expropriation. (Saunders 1975:ch. 16).

The fourth drawback at attempting to make a political reading of Joseph Gérard revolves around the fact that the Catholic church of his time was very much caught up in the traditional perception of its role in society. The role of influencing the economic and social orders of society in the light of the Gospel message did not loom large.

The advent of the “aggiornamento” (new awareness) church came some forty years after the death of Joseph Gérard. The modern world had brought along with it new forms of oppression which demanded new orientations and responses. The social teachings of the church took a new turn with the impact of Pope John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris*. These encyclicals and the documents of Vatican II emphasised the aspiration to equality and participation. They highlighted the dignity and freedom of the human person. (See Curran 1985:ch. 1).

The church of Joseph Gérard's time had not yet been preoccupied with the new concerns and yet he upheld and propagated truths whose significance resounds even in the South Africa of today.

THE FREEDOM OF THE TEXT: BASIS FOR A NEW INTERPRETATION

The next point of departure has been inspired by Paul Ricoeur's *Interpretation Theory*. He writes that “with the written discourse, however, the author's intention and meaning of the text cease to coincide. The text is freed as it were from the “captivity” of its author: the text's career escapes the finite horizon lived by its author. What the text means now matters more than what the author meant when he wrote it. (Ricoeur 1976:30)

It is this semantic autonomy, this uncoupling of the diary and letters from the person of Joseph Gérard, without denying his authorship, which allows for an exploration of the meaning of his writings for the contemporary South African situation. The text has been liberated from the dialogical situation of Joseph Gérard and the Basotho of his time. The interpretation of his diary gives new meaning to what he has written. But the new meaning does not derive from the diary of Father Gérard alone. His text shares the common meaning embedded in both the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the tradition of Eugene de Mazenod.

“PAUPERIBUS MISIT ME”

Today the expression “option for the poor” has gained much currency. But this has been so because of the ever-increasing complexity of social relations brought about by industrial development and the consequent new forms of social violence. Increasing repression in both the economic and political fields brought about a new awareness of human dignity and freedom. The church has increasingly become involved in the defence of the rights of the voiceless - particularly since Leo XII's **Rerum Novarum**, through the second Vatican Council, right up to Pope John Paul's **Laborem Exercens** and **Rei Socialis**.

The belief or conviction to opt for the poor had already been crystallised in the Oblate motto of: “Evangelizare Pauperibus Misit Me”. *Pauperes Evangelizantur*”. The mission of Joseph Gérard was to translate this motto into living reality. His directive from the founder of the Oblate Missionary Society, Eugene de Mazenod, was to work among the natives of South Africa. It was a radical choice, inspired by the gospel that exalted service to the least of the brothers (Mt.25:40) Once the choice was made, like Ruth of the Old Testament, Joseph Gérard never looked back. His became a life commitment to the Basotho. He was a

remarkable pioneer who blazed a trail, walked into dead-end paths such as the Natal mission, but never turned back.

Joseph Gérard chartered a new course for the Basotho people. Though he severely criticised their 'wicked customs' (which was not out of malice - but because they were in conflict with his own beliefs) he was completely integrated and at home in a totally alien cultural environment. He had eventually become a Mosotho who advocated new ethical choices rather than the passive acceptance of traditional customary life patterns.

NEW LIFESTYLE - NEW ETHIC

Joseph Gérard preached a radical exodus from an ethnic moulded by the native culture to an ethnic profoundly informed by the teachings of Christianity. His presence and teaching were a source of deep provocation to the Basotho who were challenged to abandon their "freedom" to engage in polygamous unions, discard their belief in the myths of divination and to embrace a new sense of justice in human relationships. He preached liberation from the compulsions of tradition, freedom from the oppression of customary expectations hitherto uncritically accepted by the Basotho. In so doing he introduced and even heightened the awareness of the freedom and dignity of the individual vis-a-vis the oppressive community bond of traditional life; the good news of the Gospel subverted the "carceral" environment traditionally reinforced by endless reenactments of rituals. In this sense he championed the cause of the ignorant, the poor and the oppressed against diviners and against the dominant, mercenary menfolk.

The thrust of the tireless missionary labours of Joseph Gérard were doubly aimed at the formation of a new Christian conscience and also at the raising of a new consciousness. He irrevocably dethroned the Basotho ancestors as the authors of the moral code and replaced them with Christ as the way, the truth and the life. Joseph Gérard engaged in a liberation catechesis of sorts. Those who accepted his message of redemption and the possibility of a new life-style had to make a fundamental choice. South Africa has yet to see a fearless and uncompromising church that has radically taken sides with the poor and the politically oppressed people after the fashion of Joseph Gérard. Taking sides with the poor and the oppressed necessarily entails a stance against the exploiters and the oppressors. Such a stance inculcates a deep sense of closeness and identity with the aspirations of the oppressed. The possibility of a just future and democratic socio-political order must be demonstrated and anticipated in the active rejection and opposition to the apartheid system.

The outright rejection of the apartheid system includes not only condemnatory press statements but also advocacy of a variety of pressures such as economic sanctions and the total isolation of the oppressive regime. There are those among the oppressed who have opted for the use of violence as the last resort in order to destroy apartheid. Compromise and patience can only create a breathing space for the evil regime. And such patience can only be advocated by those who hardly feel the pain of discrimination or who enjoy the benefits

of the racial domination. The 'wicked customs' of the apartheid system, namely the denial of citizenship rights to the black people, segregated residential areas, arbitrary detentions, denial of freedom of speech and freedom of association, etc - must be uncompromisingly opposed: not only in the way in which Joseph Gérard opposed 'wicked customs' of the Basotho, but with more harshness especially in the light of the fact that there is a worldwide rejection of the apartheid political system.

THE CHURCH IN SOUTH AFRICA AND ITS OPTION FOR THE POOR

Judging by the church's statements, its long track-record of the rejection of government discriminatory policies, its commitment to non-racial education, its work among the dislocated people, the detainees and their families etc. there is no doubt that the church leadership on the whole desires and works for an alternative kind of society. And yet there are disturbing factors with the nature of the church's commitment to the poor and the politically oppressed.

- * The Church's commitment seems to be conditioned by its concern for the white community which is equally under the church's pastoral care. The church goes to great lengths not to seem to condemn the privileged white community in its condemnation of the apartheid regime. The approach of the church is extremely conciliatory thus undermining - in the process - its very commitment to the politically disadvantaged. There is a fear of losing the loyalty and support of the white Christians. The avoidance of extreme positions, the shunning of condemning whites whose votes perpetuate the unjust socio-political order - is compatible with the semblance of unity within the Church. The truth is that the church is as deeply torn apart as the apartheid society is. The suspicions and tensions prevalent in society in general equally permeate the church community. Option for the poor therefore not only means the championing of the cause of the oppressed but also demands a head-on confrontation with the white Christians who uphold the discriminatory and exploitative socio-economic system.
- * Historically it is with extreme difficulty that the Church's clear option for the politically oppressed can be demonstrated. It is much easier to show how the Church conformed to the racial patterns of the society even though missionary activities have always been carried out amongst the poor and the oppressed black people. It is therefore hardly strange that the Church headquarters have invariably been located in exclusively white areas. The Cathedrals, those majestic, towering symbols of the presence of Christianity and the seat of church leadership - are firmly built in the cities of privileged classes of people appearing as it were, as massive symbolic signatures of "Christian civilisation". And yet apartheid society by definition and practice stands for the denial of Christian values and the defiance of the beliefs of the entire civilised world.
- * The headquarters of religious societies - including those who embrace the religious vow of radical poverty are to be found in the suburbs of the materially wealthy white people where the blacks are excluded by law, save those blacks who are employed to ensure the comfort of the rich. For years the religious who worked among

the poor have operated from the suburbs using the Group Areas Act as an excuse for not pitching up their tents amongst their native converts after the fashion of Joseph Gérard.

- * Equally disturbing is the church's commitment to the army which now includes people of colour. The role of the military is to protect the 'Christian civilisation' which essentially places the poor and oppressed beyond its reach. The army is essentially deployed to curb the activities of those who seek to bring about the downfall of the apartheid regime. In the black townships the army's role is to act as a deterrent or to prevent any resistance on the part of the oppressed. It is indeed tragically bizarre for the church to be interested in the spiritual needs of soldiers whose function is to uphold the unjust political order, while at the same time ignoring the violence perpetrated by the army. For the church that does not believe in violence, its seemingly spiritual association with the military arm of a virtually totalitarian state remains a massive scandal for those without citizenship rights.
- * Furthermore the church acts as a restraining force in its rejection of radical solutions, such as economic sanctions, or even the consideration of the use of violence as a last resort. There is no indication that the Government envisages a one man one vote system of government. Advocating perseverance and patience can degenerate into the acceptance of the status quo.

The above points raise questions about the fundamental choice made by the Church in favour of the poor and the politically oppressed. Thus option for the poor appears as an attitude of mind rather than a practical commitment to undo the mischief of apartheid once and for all. A more critical and radical stance is called for - especially in the light of the ever increasing repressive measures taken by the state in order to retain power over the voteless black majority.

CONSENT AND EQUALITY

Joseph Gérard was forthright in his relationship with the Basotho. He was guided by the internalised christian values and principles which he sought to impart to the Basotho people. His attitude towards marriage custom and belief is a case in point. Whereas he saw nothing wrong with the custom of giving cattle on the occasion of marriage to the girl's family, he nonetheless firmly believed that it would be sinful to treat the girl as mere property to be sold to the highest bidder. The girl needed to be consulted about her love for the person who wishes to marry her and that it was indeed imperative that she gives her consent. Acceptance of a marriage partner out of fear or compulsion or desire to please one's parents was a violation of one's freedom of choice and therefore unacceptable. (Gerard 1978:44-45)

Such a message had a strong emancipatory effect in a patriarchal society where male domination entrenched itself by means of custom and tradition, where reverence for custom and tradition had become identical with religious practice, where secularisation or the stripping off of the religious aura of the customs would have been anathema.

But then, such was the freedom-charged message of the good news disseminated by the intrepid French pioneer. At the core of Joseph Gérard's argument were the principles of consent and equality. These principles were later to be unambiguously enunciated by "Gaudium et Spes". Marriage is to be seen as a life-long partnership of one man and one woman. Marriage is "rooted in the contract of its partners, that is, in their irrevocable personal consent. (Gaudium et Spes No. 48) It is a union of equal partners based on the equal personal dignity of man and woman. (See Charles 1982:115).

It is against this background of monogomy and the inherent right of consent and the principle of equality that one grasps the total opposition to polygamy by Joseph Gérard.

Joseph Gérard's discourse on consent, human dignity of women and their equity to men is in reference to the bond of marriage. The intention here is to free the text from the "tutelage" of the author and also to free it from the situational reference. The attempt is to "rescue" the principles at stake and to put them in a new closeness to the contemporary South African situation:

EQUALITY AND PARTICIPATION

The church took an inordinately long time before it acknowledged and taught with the power of its authority the principles of equality, responsible decision making and participation. It was long after Joseph Gérard had left the scene that the socio-political implications of the message of Jesus of Nazareth began to dawn on the church community. The socio-economic conditions of society had become more complex and therefore demanded fresh responses. In 1971 Pope Paul IV in his **Octogesima Adveniens** stated that "two aspirations persistently make themselves felt in these new contexts and they grow stronger to the extent that people become better informed and educated; the aspiration to **equality** and the aspiration to **participation**, two forms of man's dignity and freedom. (Paul VI:496)

These fundamental aspirations continue to be denied by the South African state. The state moves from one crises to another. Attempts are made to overcome the acute problem of the state's illegitimacy in the eyes of the black majority. These attempts are in the form of participation at the third tier of government even though the structures continue to be segregated. Cooptation of black participation is intended to consolidate the power base of the ruling white dominant groups. Protection of the individual rights continues to be flatly denied and, opposition to government is virtually outlawed by the regulations of the state of emergency which has been declared since 1985.

Though human rights issues loom large in the social teachings of the church since Vatican II, the teachings remain by and large a body of information and knowledge with little visible impact on the church community. There is no compelling authority behind the teaching even though "every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, colour, social condition, language or religion is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent (Gaudium et Spes No. 9)

There is a profoundly disturbing “festina lente” approach on the part of the South African church, a failure to grasp the impatience and anger of the oppressed as shown in intermittent acts of violence and total opposition to the state and to the supporters of the state apparatus.

The challenge to the church is unmistakable. There is need to oppose the denial of equality and participation publicly. But then such an opposition, if it is truly fundamental, ought to be an integral part of the liturgical rights of the church's practice. Liturgical practice, where the essential doctrines of the church are repetitively rehearsed, ought to be the “locus classicus” of the denial of the evil in its generic form but also in its particular form of apartheid. Not only should faith in God the Father be reaffirmed but also in the consequences of faith - the belief and commitment to the equality of God's children and that this belief is politically understood in terms of one man one vote within a non-racial unitary democratic society. At present the liturgy remains “privatistic” and overspiritualised. The local church is enslaved by the universal practice. Particularly our national experiences are completely ignored in favour of a universal application. Thus the liturgy remains politically irrelevant, for it fails to embody the aspirations, fears and concerns embedded in particular histories of given situations. The harshness of the apartheid system has indeed encouraged the oppressed to abandon traditional liturgies and to create new symbols, new songs, new rituals, in order to confront their own experiences. These new vibrant liturgies can be observed at “political” night vigils and at funerals, at the meetings of trade unions and political gatherings and at commemoration services. Traditional liturgies are non-confrontational. They speak the same language to both the oppressed and the oppressor. They intentionally blur the boundaries of conflict situations and are excessively preoccupied with man cut-off from his socio-cultural and historical experiences.

Apartheid, in its old or new guise, remains the embodiment of the contemporary form of paganism. Its devastating impact is felt on a daily basis. Its renunciation and exorcism must necessarily be part of the daily liturgical celebration. The gap that exists between the social teaching of the Church, the pastoral ministry and its liturgical practice ought to be eliminated so that the full impact of the church's social teaching increasingly becomes a daily experience inexorably aimed at the destruction of the unjust socio-economic order.

EVANGELISATION OF CULTURE

There is also need to learn from what Joseph Gérard failed to do - the evangelisation of the local culture. He lived during the time of Pope Leo XIII who identified European culture with the western civilisation. In his *Inscrutabili* (1878), Pope Leo wrote:

In every truth it is the glory of the supreme Pontiffs that they steadfastly set themselves up as a wall and bulwark to save society from falling back into its former superstition and barbarism. (Leo VIII 1985:17).

Joseph Gérard saw the Basotho as a superstitious barbaric people who embraced “wicked customs”, such as circumcision, polygamy and divination. Father Gérard failed to grasp how transcendence was symbolised in the culture of the Basotho, how their “pagan” spirituality

was an integral part of their "wicked customs", how their customs acted as a mechanism of social control and how the dignity of the person - however limited - evolved within the specific cultural world in spite of the serious shortcomings which have been shown up by Christianity.

Like any other non-christian but religious people, the Basotho revered the Holy who dwelt in their hearts, whose love is revealed in men and in one's neighbours. (See Heiler 1959:132-160) But his was apparently missed by Father Gérard. John Colenso, a contemporary of Joseph Gérard had a totally different attitude. He believed that missionaries "should meet the heathen halfway as it were, upon the ground of our common humanity instead of seeking to uproot altogether their old religion, scoffing at the things which they hold most sacred". (Grey 1983:45)

Local cultures are to be allowed to grow and flourish rather than to be compelled into a subterranean existence. Culture is an expression of a people's pride and sense of achievement, hence also an expression of their dignity. On the other hand, culture should not be abused as has been done by the South African regime. The government seized upon the cultural differences among the oppressed people in order to create ethnic units and declare these units as separate "nationalities" for purposes of political domination.

Secondly, the concept of culture has shifted from the classicist definition that understood culture as a standardised behaviour or as forms of traditional behaviour. The concept of culture entails development - economic growth and participation. The challenge in South Africa is to encourage and to create opportunities for productive participation in the economy and in the political processes of the land. Training and education must be made accessible to the black majority. In the process of destroying the apartheid system there is also the challenge to create common national symbols as distinct from ethnic cultural symbols. In the absence of "shared aspirations and identifications" a new South Africa will not emerge" (see Greenberg 1987:6-9). It is against this background that the African National Congress in its new constitutional Guide Lines states that "it shall be state policy to promote the growth of a single national identity and loyalty binding on all South Africans. At the same time the state shall recognise the linguistic and cultural diversity of the people ... (Weekly Mail 1988:7).

The challenge in this context is particularly directed toward the Church so abundantly endowed with the symbolisms of unity. The church must truly become the light even to those who are outside the church. She "shines forth" as an example of "a people made one with unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (Lumen Gentium 4) Not only is the church a sign of unity of all mankind but she is also an instrument for the achievement of such a union and unity" (Lumen Gentium No. 1). It is this image and instrumental function of the Church that should increasingly loom large in the deeply divided South African society.

Granted that at present the church serves different groups but this need not deter the church from "shining forth" as a "home" for all and as a compelling example that mankind can and does share common

convictions and identifications.

CONCLUSION

Today, not only is Joseph Gérard the founding father of faith in Lesotho, but he is also now a permanent living symbol of faith. Blessed! The pilgrimage was not in vain. Through him we inhabited the alien past not just for the sake of doing so but in order to retrieve, to rescue the message he had for the Basotho and then translate and appropriate that message for our present situation. Through him we have sought to rediscover the prophetic power of the Gospel so as to experience anew the freshness of the original impetus of the Good Tidings.

The reading of Father Gérard defies ethical neutrality. It invites the reader to take sides - to be on the side of the poor, on the side of those who oppose injustice passionately. The "wicked customs" of his time have been replaced by the more "wicked customs" of modern times. Today's evil apartheid customs deserve a harsher treatment. For out of the debris of apartheid edifice, a new homeland, a new nation must emerge. This then is the challenge that faces not only those who are haunted by the memory of the extraordinary Oblate pioneer but also those who claim the fatherhood of God.

REFERENCES

- Saunders P. *Moshoeshoe Chief of the Sotho* David Phillip Cape Town 1975:Ch.16
See Curran C. *Direction in Catholic Social Ethics* Notre Dame, 1985:Ch.1
Gremillion J. *The Gospel of Peace & Justice* Orlis 1975 Ch.1.
Ricoeur P. *Interpretation Theory: Discourse & The Surplus of Meaning*: Texas University Press 1976.
Gerard J. *Diary of Fr. J. Gérard* at Roma Mission, Lesotho Documents, Roma 1978
see Charles R. *The Social Teaching of Vatican II* Plater Publications, 1982.
Paul VI. *Octogesima Adveniens* No. 22 in J. Gremillion
Gaudium et Spes. No. 9
Leo XIII *Inscrutabili* 1878 quoted in *The Church and Culture Since Vatican II*: Edited by J. Gremillion Notre Dame 1985.
see Heiler F. *The History of Religion as a Preparation for the Cooperation of Religions*: in Eliade MX Kitagawa J (eds) *The History of Religions* University of Chicago Press 1959.
Grey J. *The Heritic. A study of the Life of J.W. Colenso 1814 - 1883* Ravan Press, Johannesburg 1983.
Golubovic Z. *Culture as a Bridge Between Utopia and Reality* in Markovic M. and Petrovic G. (eds) *Praxis* Vol. 134 D. Reidal Publishing Co.
see Greenberg S. *Legitimizing the Illegitimate State, markets and Resistance in South Africa*, University of California Press 1987.
Weekly Mail October 7 - 13, 1988 (Johannesburg Weekly Newspaper)

BOOK REVIEWS

Maimela, Simon: Proclaim Freedom to my People: Essays on Religion and Politics.

Braamfontein: Skotaville Publishers, 1988.152pp.R12.95 (paper)
T.A. Mofokeng, University of South Africa, Pretoria.

Professor S.S. Maimela, a deep thinker, writer and publisher of two books and several very important theological articles, has again come up with a very good book which addresses pressing issues which are haunting many concerned christians in South Africa today.

His book that is written in his typical flowing and simple style and with very little verbosity is divided into three sections:

The first part which is fairly long does a socio-theological analysis of the churches, their theological and church-political activity. In this regard the author argues very forcefully and convincingly against the well known hypocritical tendencies of comfortable christians who want to separate theology and politics, worship and political activity. According to the author such separation is unbiblical and unrealistic. In this way Maimela opens the way for the reader to follow him as he systematically discusses the failure of the English and Afrikaans speaking churches to develop a theology that can combat racism and exploitation in our country.

Dealing with these groups of churches one after the other, he shows why and how the English speaking churches privatized religion and banished God from the social sphere as well as how the Afrikaans churches co-opted calvinist christianity and turned it into their tribal religion. In this situation it became imperative for Black churches to search for a new theology that could avoid the above mentioned pitfalls and contribute resources for the eradication of racism and exploitation of Black people in South Africa. Black Theology emerged as the theology. It criticizes the above theologies and unashamedly affirms God's liberative intervention in human history.

In its critical function, Black Theology criticizes the manner in which the concept of Israel has been appropriated in White Theology and politics. It also criticizes white theological anthropology that tends to inhibit the growth of maturity and acceptance of responsibility for the daunting task of changing society.

The second part, which is the heart of Maimela's work, deals with the history, definition of Black Theology and its connection to Black Consciousness and Black Power. Here, God is believed and worshipped as the God of the Oppressed who intervenes in concrete struggles of the Oppressed. Methodo-

logical changes and innovations which became necessary for Black Theology to break loose from the domination of White Theology and chart a new path are discussed. Here too, some concepts that are central to christian faith are discussed from the black theological perspective, resulting in their concretization. Jesus Christ is historicized by emphasizing on his actions, words and their impact on the affairs of people of his time in Palestine. Traditional understanding of atonement is criticized and corrected by a redefinition of sin. Sin is something concrete and social. Hence, salvation is inevitably also concrete and social.

The last part of this very interesting book deals with appropriate christian action under the banner of Jesus Christ the life of the world. In short, in this section, Maimela motivates transformative action on the grounds of God's victory over the power of evil as it has been achieved through the death of Jesus and manifested as well as confirmed in his resurrection. Christians are empowered and given wisdom in their struggle against evil attitudes of their oppressors, structures of oppression and exploitation. They are called to engage in this task by God who is on the side of those who suffer.

Reading this book, I could not but ask myself whether black theologians should still redefine traditional theological concepts. Doing that still keeps Black Theology within the orbit of the theologies it is criticizing. What I think should be done is for black theologians to read the bible with their own eyes and relate the message in their own way and using symbols and metaphors that are indigenous to the black community.

Proclaim Freedom to my People still remains a powerful book, a must, not only for theologians but also for every christian who is serious about the liberation of theology and the oppressed.

God in South Africa

NOLAN, Albert

Cape Town: David Philip. 1988. vii + 241 pp. R14.85 (bp.)

Prof. S.S. Maimela, Dept. of Systematic Theology, University of South Africa, Pretoria.

In this very courageous and almost prophetic book, Albert Nolan sets out to construct a relevant and highly contextualized understanding of the gospel in South Africa. With deep insight, Nolan analyses what he perceives to be God's actions in this polarized and conflict-ridden land in order to demonstrate that what God is at present doing is genuinely the good news for the poor and oppressed.

Apart from the short introduction, the book comprises of ten lucidly written chapters which are perceptive and make for an interesting reading. In chapters 1-5 Nolan defines the meaning of the gospel and attempts to show the sense in which the gospel could become good news to the poor. He then proceeds to discuss the biblical understanding of sin and to relate that understanding to the suffering which the majority of Blacks suffer under the apartheid system. This suffering has so angered God that God has in turn decided to take a preferential option for the poor and oppressed who are sinned against. This is followed by an indepth social analysis in order to lay bare the mechanism of oppression and control employed by the apartheid system. Nolan then returns to a detailed discussion of sin in the context of the South African situation.

In chapters 6-11, Nolan examines the theme of salvation as outlined in the Bible, and tries to demonstrate how salvation properly understood creates and is the source of hope for those who struggle for justice and freedom. In so doing it becomes the good news to the poor and oppressed. Also salvation not only gives hope but also challenges people to repentance and to confront sin in all its manifestation without ethical compromises. More importantly, salvation bestows a new life which enables the oppressed to risk their lives and face death at the hands of the oppressor, knowing that it is Easter, not Good Friday, but which has the last word over them. Nolan concludes his book by mapping out what sort of actions the church must be engaged in if it wants to become a partner in God's liberative mission in South Africa, thereby becoming the preacher of the gospel as the good news to the poor and oppressed.

Being a fellow student of liberation theology, I find myself agreeing with almost everything that Nolan says in this book. But being a Black theologian I feel constrained to make several critical remarks, not about what Nolan says but, about what he omits to say in his book. Firstly, Nolan is obviously committed

to the ideology of united South Africa "that is thoroughly non-racial, democratic at every level, liberated from political oppression" (p.220). While I share this ideal, I am uncomfortable about Nolan's unwillingness to accept the fact the oppression he is describing in South Africa is not colourless but a racial one. Not everybody is oppressed the same way, for it is the white minority government that oppresses the black majority. Consequently, until Nolan is prepared to look seriously at South Africa from this perspective, he will be unable to confront and help his fellow dominant Whites to confess their sin of racial oppression.

Secondly, as a Black theologian I believe that a serious defect in Nolan's theology lies in his attempt to silence the voice of Black theology of liberation while promoting a laudable but distant Latin American theology of liberation. This can be seen from the fact that even though there are hundreds of articles, chapters and significant books on Black theology, Nolan has quoted only a few Black theologians while the book is replete with quotations from Latin American theologians. This leads me to wonder whether his non-racial ideology has blinded him to the existence of Black theology. If this should turn out to be the case, then a serious question is raised about Nolan's own **locus** in society in relation to the Black struggle for liberation, especially because the church in South Africa is largely black in membership. I am persuaded that any relevant theology which lays a claim to being genuinely committed to the struggle and liberation of black masses from their white oppressors necessarily discredits itself if it is unwilling to come to terms with Black theology of liberation in and through which the agenda and perimeters of authentic liberation of oppressed Blacks is articulated by Blacks themselves.

May I mention that even the Latin American theologians whom Nolan quotes approvingly have had to be called to order and forced to confess their sin of omission of the problem of racial oppression in Latin America at the General Assembly of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians in Oaxtepec, Mexico (1986). As a result programmes are afoot in Brazil and other countries to try to challenge any attempted denial that there exist in Latin America the sin of racial pride which must be brought to the surface, confronted and overcome alongside problems of class and male sexist domination. Albert Nolan would be well advised to take his cue from his Latin American counterparts who have realized that no liberation theologian worth his/her salt can afford to hide his face in the sand and not make the sin of white racial oppression an important part of his/her theological agenda.

Thirdly, without sounding racist, one needs to point out that Nolan, as a white person, should have been more humble and not try to speak on behalf of Blacks. In his repeated use of the phrase "the people" (pp.158-166), Nolan gives the impression that the Black struggle for freedom which he eloquently discusses is one which he himself is a part as a black person. To be sure, being in solidarity with oppressed Blacks is welcome but pretense that one is one of them is unacceptable distortion of facts. As a white theologian coming from a white middle-class background and having had a privileged first rate education means that Nolan, like most Whites, has options which are not open to the black masses. Among others, he can choose to be in solidarity with the oppressed black masses, live with and share meals with them to a very limited extent. But then he can always slip back into the white suburbia where he can have a nice shower, better food and enjoy the leisure of being an erudite theologian who reads books, reflects on profound issues of the day and writes theology. Therefore because of these privileges it is not acceptable that he should try to present himself as if he is one of the so-called people who are really on the cutting-edge of the black struggle for liberation from white racial oppression.

Furthermore, because Nolan does not wish to talk about the racial nature of our conflictual situation between Whites and Blacks he also gives the wrong impression that many Whites are involved in the Trade Unions, students revolts, consumer boycotts et cetera to bring about an end of white racial domination. Indeed one is tempted to ask him: How many Whites is he talking about who dance to and sing liberation songs, risk their jobs, are detained, tortured and killed for black liberation (pp.158-160)? Nolan needs to answer this question because if it were true that many Whites were genuinely involved in the liberation struggle the so-called racial problem in South Africa would have long been brought to an end. In reality, the contrary is true, because as he knows so well in election after election white voters have given explicit support to the minority white government which perpetuates racial domination and oppression against which the black majority are struggling to free themselves.

The above critical comments notwithstanding I commend this book to this otherwise readable and thought provoking book.

Villa-Vincencio, C. (ed.): On reading Karl Barth in South Africa.
Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans
Pub. Co. 1988. XII + 172pp. R30.00 (paper)

T.A. Mofokeng, University of South Africa, Pretoria

Charles Villa-Vicencio, a prolific writer especially on theological themes which are socially very relevant, has again collected good essays by several reputable activists, thinkers and writers and put together a book that is important for all theologians in South Africa, especially today.

At a time when many christians are eager to debate and gain understanding, clarity and direction on many issues ranging from Church state relations, the legitimacy of the South African state, the use of force to bring about political change, to socialism as a socio-economic option for a liberated South Africa, this book has come very timely.

In a country in which the reformed tradition is very dominant in that it is Calvinists who forced us into the present mass and who have a difficulty getting us out, it was wise for Villa-Vicencio and the other writers to look at this tradition again, especially as it is interpreted by Karl Barth. As Villa-Vicencio contends, christians who are committed to change cannot leave this tradition in the hands of conservative christians who would want the status quo to be perpetually underpinned by it. The progressive resources of this tradition have to be reclaimed and utilized for changing the consciousness of christians in South Africa.

Reading these essays, one gains knowledge on whether there is a relationship between theology and socialism, on why the Dutch Reformed Churches chose Kuyper, a Dutch theologian who was very influential in Holland, to be the guiding force in the 1930s up until the 1950s, at the expense of Karl Barth who opposed nazism very forcefully in Germany. Those who wish to bring Barth in from the cold, so to speak, will gain valuable arguments on how to interpret Romans 13, as well as see the Belhar Confession in a new light and understand it better.

It is common knowledge that it is extremely difficult to evaluate a collection of articles and express an all-embracing opinion about them. On Villa-Vicencio's present collection, one dares to say that every reader who will lay his/her hands on this book will find it almost impossible to isolate one article that is not worth reading.

This book is highly commendable to theologians, serious students of theology and lay people.