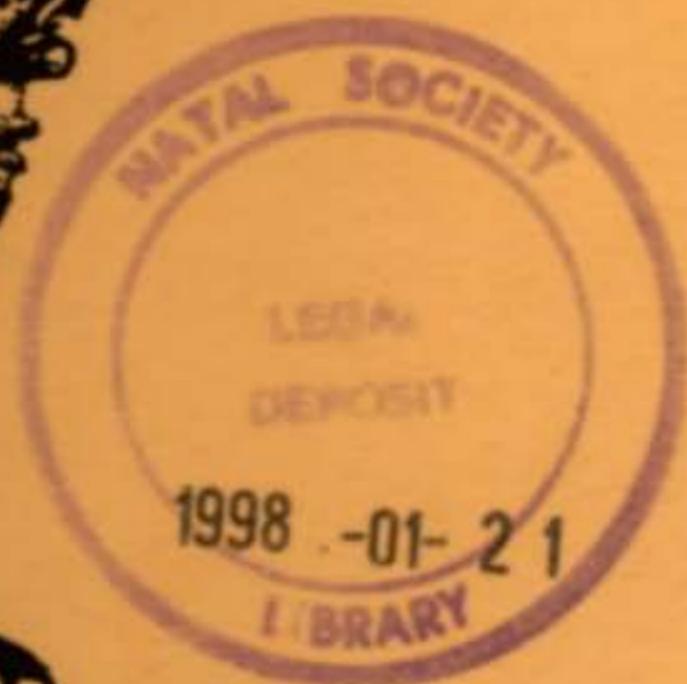


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# *Journal of*

## **BLACK THEOLOGY**



**in South Africa**

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The Editor  
P.O. Box 287  
Atteridgeville  
0008 SOUTH AFRICA

Telephone: 012-429-4302  
(International) -27-12-429-4302  
Fax: 012-373-0369  
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Type-setting

Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, Box 4846 Halfway House 1685. Tel 012 429 4685

## EDITORIAL

In this issue we wish to share with our readers an assortment of very interesting articles. The first two articles, from the hands of James Cone and Takatso Mofokeng, discuss one of the fundamental Christian doctrines - the theology of the cross. Looking at it from American and South African perspectives, the two black theologians explore the meaning of the cross and its significance in the lives of oppressed black people, thereby try to redeem it against the background of the attempted misuses of the theology of the cross by racist white Christians who, in the past, have tried to encourage their black victims to "carry their crosses with dignity and without complaint as Jesus Christ carried the cross."

Buti Tlhagale has made invaluable contribution in the development of the theology of labour. However, in this article entitled "The Right to Employment", Tlhagale raise fundamental questions concerning the adequacy of any theology of labour which has not come to terms with the problem of unemployment which has marginalised and dehumanised millions of people who have no hope of participating meaningfully in the economic system.

The concluding article is the statement which emerged at the Third general Assembly of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) held in Nairobi, Kenya on January 5-16, 1992. Not only did EATWOT review the validity of Liberation Theology at a time in which most people in the Third World are not only facing defeat at the hands of Western capitalism, but also looked for signs of hope for the oppressed poor. It addresses crucial issues which must be openly confronted and dealt with, if theology is going to be both relevant to and liberative for the world's two-thirds majority in the Third World. I recommend it for prayerful study by those who are concerned about doing something about the oppression and injustices to which the majority of the people in the South are subjected to.

# **CROSS AND SUFFERING: A BLACK AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE**

**James H. Cone\***

More than eighty years ago W.E.B. Du Bois wrote in The Souls of Black Folk his classic statement of the paradox of black life in America.

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, -- an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (1)

The "two warring ideals" that Du Bois described in 1903 have been at the centre of black religious thought from its origin to the present day. They are found in the heated debates about "integration" and "nationalism" and in the attempt to name the community--beginning with the word "African" and using at different times such terms as "Coloured", and "Negro", "Afro-American", "Black" and "African-American."

In considering black religious thought in this essay, let us give clearer names to the "two warring ideals"--clearer, that is, from the point of view of religion. I shall call them "African" and "Christian". Black religious thought is not identical with the Christian theology of white Americans. Nor is it identical with traditional African beliefs, past or present. It is both--but reinterpreted for and adapted to the life-situation of black people' struggle for justice in

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\*Dr James Cone is Briggs Distinguished Professor at Union Theological Seminary, New York.

a nation whose social, political and economic structures are dominated by a white racist ideology. It was the "African" side of black religion that helped African-Americans to see beyond the white distortions of the gospel and to discover its true meaning as God's liberation of the oppressed from bondage. It was the "Christian" element in black religion that helped African-Americans to re-orient their African past so that it would become more useful in the struggle to survive with dignity in a society that they did not make.

Although the African and Christian elements have been found throughout the history of black religious thought, the Christian part gradually became dominant. Though less visible, the African element continued to play an important role in defining the core of black religion, thus preventing it from becoming merely an imitation of Protestant or Catholic theologies in the West. Of course, there are many similarities between black religious thought and white Protestant and Catholic reflections on Christian tradition. But the dissimilarities between them are perhaps more important than the similarities. The similarities are found at the point of a common Christian identity, and the dissimilarities can best be understood in light of the differences between African and European cultures in the New World. While whites used their cultural perspective to dominate others, blacks used theirs to affirm their dignity and to empower themselves to struggle for justice. The major reason for the differences between black and white reflections on God is found at the point of the great differences in life. As white theology is largely defined by its response to modern and post-modern societies of Europe and America, usually ignoring the contradictions of slavery and oppression in black life, black religious thought is the thinking of slaves and of marginalized blacks whose understanding of God was shaped by the contradictions that white theologians ignored and regarded as unworthy of serious theological reflection. In this essay, I will analyze black religious thought in the light of Du Bois' "warring ideals" that emerged out of the struggle for justice -- beginning with its origin in slavery and concentrating mainly on its 20th century development in the civil rights and black power movements, culminating with the rise of black theology.

## **Roots of Black Religious Thought: Slavery.**

The tension between the "African" and "Christian" elements acted to reorder traditional theological themes in black religion and to give them different substance when compared to other theologies in Europe and America. Five themes in particular defined the character of black religious thought during slavery and its subsequent development: justice, liberation, hope, love and suffering.

No theme has been more prominent throughout the history of black religious thought than the justice of God. African-Americans have always believed in the living presence of the God who establishes the right by punishing the wicked and liberating their victims from oppression. Everyone will be rewarded and punished according to their deeds, and no one - absolutely no-one can escape the judgement of God, who alone is the sovereign of the universe. Evil-doers may get by for a time, and good people may suffer unjustly under oppression, but "sooner or later, ... we reap as we sow." (2)

The "sooner" referred to contemporary historically observable events: punishment of the oppressors and liberation of the oppressed. The "later" referred to the divine establishment of justice in the "next world" where God "will rain down fire" on the wicked and where the liberated righteous will "walk in Jerusalem just like John." In the religion of African slaves, God's justice was identical with the punishment of the oppressors, and divine liberation was synonymous with the deliverance of the oppressed from the bondage of slavery - if not "now" then in the "not yet". Because whites continued to prosper materially as they increased their victimization of African-Americans, black religious thought spoke more often of the "later" than the "sooner". (3)

The themes of justice and liberation are closely related to the idea of hope. The God who establishes the right and puts down the wrong is the sole basis of the hope that the suffering of the victims will be eliminated. Although African slaves used the term heaven to describe their experience of hope, its primary meaning for them must not be reduced to the "pie-in-the-sky" other-worldly affirmation that often characterized white evangelical

**Protestantism. The idea of heaven was the means by which slaves affirmed their humanity in a world that did not recognize them as human beings. (4) It was their way of saying that they were made for freedom and not slavery.**

**Oh Freedom! Oh Freedom! Oh Freedom, I love thee! And before I'll be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave, And go home to my Lord and be free.**

**Black slaves' hope was based on their faith in God's promise to "protect the needy" and to "defend the poor." Just as God delivered the Hebrew children from Egyptian bondage and raised Jesus from the dead, so God will also deliver African slaves from American slavery and "in due time" will bestow upon them the Gift of eternal life. That was why they sang:**

**Soon-a-will be done with the trouble of the world; Soon-a-will be done with the trouble of the world; Going home to live with God.**

**Black slaves' faith in the coming' of justice of God was the chief reason why they could hold themselves together in servitude and sometimes fight back, even though the odds were against them. The ideas of justice, liberation, and hope should be seen in relation to the important theme of love. Theologically God's love is prior to the other themes. But in order to separate black reflections on love from a similar theme in white theology it is important to emphasize that love in black religious thought is usually linked with God's justice, liberation, and hope. God's love is made known through divine righteousness, liberating the poor for a new future. God's creation of all persons in the divine image bestows sacredness upon human beings and thus makes them the children of God. To violate any person's dignity is to transgress "God's great law of love." (5) We must love the neighbour because God has first loved us. And because slavery and racism are blatant denials of the dignity of the human person, God's justice means that "he will call the oppressors to account." (6)**

**Despite the strength of black faith, belief in God's coming justice and liberation was not easy for African slaves and their descendants. Their suffering created the most serious challenge to their faith. If God is good, why did God permit millions of blacks to be stolen from Africa and enslaved in a strange Land? No black person has been able to escape the existential agony of that question.**

**In their attempt to resolve the theological dilemma that slavery and racism created, African-Americans turned to three texts - the Exodus, Psalms 68:31, and the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. (7) They derived from the Exodus text the belief that God is the liberator of the oppressed. They interpreted Psalms 68:31 as an obscure reference to God's promise to redeem Africa: "Princess shall come out of Egypt, and Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God."**

**The Jesus story was the key text. They were empowered by Jesus' ministry - "King Jesus preaching to the poor," "making the dumb to speak," "the cripple to walk," and "giving the blind his sight." "Jesus," they said, can "do most anything". However, it is the cross of Jesus that attracted the most attention of black people. Oppressed blacks were moved by the Passion story because they too had been rejected, beaten, and shot without a chance to say a word in defense of their humanity. In Jesus' death poor blacks saw themselves, and they unleashed their imagination, describing what they felt and saw.**

**Oh, they whipped him up the hill, and he never said a mumbalin' word, He just hung down his head and cried.**

**They "nailed him to the cross", "pierced him in the side," and "the blood came twinkling down," but "he never said a mumblin' word," "he just hung down his head and he died." The death of Jesus meant that he died on the cross for black slaves. His death was a symbol of their suffering, their trials and tribulations in an unfriendly world. Because black slaves knew of the significance of the pain and shame of Jesus' death on the cross, they found themselves by his side.**

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?  
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?  
Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble  
tremble; Were you there when they crucified my  
Lord?

Through the blood of slavery, blacks transcended the limitations of space and time. Jesus' time became their time, and they encountered the theological significance of Jesus' death: through the crucifixion, Jesus makes an unqualified identification with the poor and the helpless and takes their pain upon himself.

Jesus was not alone in his suffering. Blacks were not alone in their oppression in the United States. Jesus was with them! He was God's Black Slave who has come to put an end to oppression. Herein lies the meaning of Jesus' resurrection. It means that the cross was not the end of God's drama of salvation. Despite African-Americans' assurance that oppression was not the last word regarding their humanity, the contradictions remained between oppression and their faith.

### **Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement**

No thinker has made a greater impact upon black religious thought than Martin Luther King, Jr. A product of the black church tradition; its faith determined the essence of his theology. (9) From the beginning of his role as the leader of the Montgomery bus boycott to his tragic death in Memphis, Tennessee, the heart of his beliefs revolved around the ideas of black religious thought - love, justice, liberation, hope and redemptive suffering. The meaning of each is mutually dependent on the others. Though love may be appropriately placed at the centre of his thought, he interpreted it in the light of justice for the poor, liberation for all, and the certain hope that God has not left this world in the hands of evil men.

Martin King took the American democratic tradition of Freedom and combined it with the biblical tradition of justice for the poor, liberation for all, and the certain hope that God has not left this world in the hands of evil men.

**Martin King took the American democratic tradition of freedom and combined it with the biblical tradition of justice and liberation as found in the Exodus and the prophets. Then he integrated both traditions with the New Testaments idea of love and suffering as disclosed in Jesus' cross and from all three, King developed a theology that was effective in challenging all Americans to create the beloved community in which all persons are equal. While it was the Gandhian method of nonviolence that provided the strategy for achieving justice, it was, as King said, the black church faith that empowered him to struggle. As a Christian whose faith was derived from the cross of Jesus, Martin King believed that there could be no true liberation without suffering. Through nonviolent suffering, he contended blacks would not only liberate themselves from the necessity of bitterness and feeling of inferiority toward whites, but would also prick the conscience of whites and liberate them from a feeling of superiority. The mutual liberation of blacks and whites lays the foundation for both to work together toward the creation of an entirely new world.**

**It was the faith of the black church that empowered King to take a stand against the war in Vietnam. Because the civil Rights Act (1964) and the Voting Rights Bill (1965) did not affect significantly the life-chances of the poor, and because of the failure of President Johnson's War on Poverty, King became convinced that his dream of 1963 had been turned into a nightmare. (10) Gradually he began to see the connections between the failure of the war on poverty and the expenditures for the war in Vietnam. In the tradition of the Old Testament prophets and against the advice of many of his closest associates in black and white communities, King stood before a capacity crowd at Riverside Church and condemned America as "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today." (11) He proclaimed God's judgement against America and insisted that God would break the backbone of U.S. power if this nation did not bring justice to the poor and peace to the world. Vicious criticisms came from blacks and whites in government, civil rights groups, media and the nation generally as he proclaimed God's righteous indignation against the three great evils of our time - war racism and poverty.**

**During the severe crises of 1966-68, King turned to the faith of his own religious heritage. It was the eschatological hope, derived from his slave grandparents and mediated through the black church, that sustained him in the midst of grief and disappointment. This hope also empowered him to "master [his] fears" of death and to "stand by the best in an evil time." (12) In a sermon, preached at Ebenezer Baptist Church, he addressed the problem of violence at home and abroad.**

**I've decided what I'm going to do; I aint going to kill nobody ... in Mississippi ... and... in Vietnam, and I ain't going to study war no more. And you know what? I don' care who doesn't like what I say about it. I don't care who criticizes me in editorial; I don't care what white person or Negro criticizes me. I'm going to stick with the best ... Every now and then we sing about it: 'If you are right, God will fight your battle.' I'm going to stick by the best during these evil times. (13)**

**It was not easy for King to "stand by the best", because he often stood alone. But he firmly believed that the God of black faith had said to him: "Martin Luther, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And lo, I will be with you, even until the end of the world." (14)**

**Martin King combined the exodus-liberation and cross-love themes with the message of hope found in the resurrection of Jesus. Hope for him was derived from his belief in the righteousness of God as defined by his reading of the Bible through the eyes of his slave fore-parents. The result was the most powerful expression in black history of the essential themes of black religious thought from the integrationist viewpoint.**

**Centuries ago Jeremiah raised a question, 'Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician?' He said it because he saw the good people suffering so often and the evil people prospering. Centuries later our slave fore-parents came along and they too saw the injustices of life and had nothing to look forward to, morning after**

morning, but the rawhide whip of the overseer, long rows of cotton and the sizzling heat; but they did an amazing thing. They looked back across the centuries, and they took Jeremiah's question mark and straightened it into an exclamation point. And they could sing, 'There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole. there is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.' (15)

## **Black Power and Black Theology**

From the time of its origin in slavery to the present, black religious thought has been faced with the question of whether to advocate integration into American society or separation from it. The majority of the participants in the black churches and the civil rights movement have promoted integration, and they have interpreted justice, liberation, love suffering and hope in light of the goal of creating a society in which blacks and whites can live together in a "beloved community".

While integrationists have emphasized the American side of the double consciousness of African-Americans, there have also been nationalists who rejected any association with the U.S. and instead have turned toward Africa. Nationalists contend that blacks will never be accepted as equals in a white racist church and society. (16). The nationalist perspective on the black struggle for freedom is deeply embedded in the history of black religious thought. Some of its prominent advocates include: Bishop Henry McNeal Turner of the A.M.E. Church; Marcus Garvey, the founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association; and Malcolm X of the religion of Islam. Black nationalism is centred on blackness, a repudiation of any value in white culture and religion. Nationalists reversed the values of the dominant society by attributing to black history and culture what whites had said about theirs. For example, Bishop Turner claimed that "We have as much right biblically and otherwise to believe that God is a fine looking symmetrical and ornamented white man." (17) Marcus Garvey held a similar view:

**If the white man has the idea of a white God, let him worship his God as he desires -- We negroes believe in the God of Ethiopia, the everlasting God -- God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost, the one God of all ages. (18)**

**The most persuasive interpreter of black nationalism during the 1960s was Malcolm X who proclaimed a challenging critique of Martin King's philosophy of integration, nonviolence, and love. Malcolm X who advocated black unity instead of the "beloved community," self-defense in lieu of nonviolence, and self-love in place of turning the other cheek to whites. (19)**

**Like Turner and Garvey, Malcolm X asserted that God is black, but unlike them he rejected Christianity as the white man's religion. He became a convert initially to Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam and later to the world-wide Islamic community. His critique of Christianity and of American society as white was so persuasive that many blacks followed him into the religion of Islam, and others accepted his criticisms even though they did not become Muslims. Malcolm pushed civil rights activists to the left and caused many black Christians to re-evaluate their interpretation of Christianity.**

**Brothers and sisters, the white man has brainwashed us black people to fasten our gaze upon a blond-haired, blue-eyed Jesus! We're worshipping a Jesus that doesn't even look like us. Now, just think of this. The blond-haired, blue-eyed white mass has taught you and me to worship a white Jesus, and to shout and sing and pray to this God that's his God, the white man's God. The white man has taught us to shout and sing and pray until we die to wait until death, for some dreamy heaven-in-the-hereafter, when we're dead, while this white man has his milk and honey in the streets paved with golden dollars right here on this earth (20)**

During the first-half of the 1960's, Martin King's interpretation of justice as equality with whites, liberation as integration, and love as non-violence dominated the thinking of the black religious community. However after the riot in Watts (Los Angeles), August 1965, some black clergy began to take another look at Malcolm's philosophy, especially in regard to his criticisms of Christianity and American society. Malcolm X's contention that America was a nightmare and not a dream began to ring true to many black clergy as they watched their communities go up in flames as young blacks shouted in Jubilation, "burn, baby, burn."

It was during the James Meredith "march against fear" in Mississippi (June 1966, after Malcolm's assassination, February 1965) that some black clergy began to question openly Martin King's philosophy of love, integration, and nonviolence. When Stokely Carmichael proclaimed "black power", it sounded like the voice of Malcolm X. Though committed to the Christian gospel, black clergy found themselves moving slowly from integration to separation, from Martin King to Malcolm X.

The rise of black power created a decisive turning point in black religious thought. Black power forced black clergy to raise the theological question about the relation between black faith and white religion. Although blacks have always recognized the ethical heresy of white christians, they have not always extended it to Euro-American theology. With its accent on the cultural heritage of Africa and political liberation "by any means necessary" black power shook black clergy out of their theological complacency.

Separating themselves from Martin Luther King's absolute commitment to nonviolence, a small group of black clergy, mostly from the North, addressed the black power movement positively and critically. Like King and unlike black power advocates, black clergy were determined to remain within the Christian community. This was their dilemma: How could they reconcile Christianity and black power, Martin King and Malcolm X.

Under the influence of Malcolm X and the political philosophy of black power, many black theologians began to advocate the necessity for the development of a black theology, and they rejected the dominant theologies of Europe and North America as heretical. For the first time in the history of black religious thought, black clergy and theologians began to recognize the need for a completely new starting point in theology, and they insisted that it must be defined by people at the bottom and not at the top of the socio-economic ladder. To accomplish this task, black theologians focussed on god's liberation of the poor as the central message of the gospel. (21)

To explicate the theological significance of the liberation motif, black theologians began to re-read the Bible through the eyes of their slave grandparents and started to speak of God's solidarity with the wretched of the earth. As the political liberation of the poor emerged as the dominant motif, justice suffering, love and hope were re-interpreted in its light. For the biblical meaning of liberation, black theologians turned to the Exodus, while the message of the prophets provided the theological content for the theme of justice. The gospel story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus served as the biblical foundation for a re-interpretation of love, suffering, and hope in the context of the black struggle for liberation and justice.

As black theologians have re-read the Bible in the light of the struggle of the oppressed, the idea of the "suffering God" has become important in our theological perspective. Our theological imagination has been stirred by Jurgen Moltmann's writings about the "Crucified God" as well as Luther's distinction between the "theology of glory" and the "theology of the Cross". But it has been the actual suffering of the oppressed in black and other Third World communities that has been decisive in our reflections on the cross of Jesus Christ. As Gustavo Gutierrez has said: "We cannot speak of the death of Jesus until we speak of the real death of people." For in the deaths of the poor of the world is found the suffering and even the death of God. The political implications of Luther's insight on this point seemed to have been greatly distorted with his unfortunate emphasis on the two kingdoms.

Many modern-day Lutheran scholars are often even worse, because they turn the cross of Jesus into a theological idea completely unrelated to the concrete historical struggles of the oppressed for freedom. For many Lutheran scholars, the theology of the cross is a theological concept to be contrasted with philosophical and metaphysical speculations. It is a way of making a distinction, between faith and reason, justification by faith through grace and justification by the works of reason. But when the poor of the North American and Third World read the passion story of the cross, they do not view it as a theological idea but as God's suffering solidarity with the victims of the world. Jesus' cross is God's solidarity with the poor, experiencing their pain and suffering. Black slaves expressed this theological point in the song:

They nail my Jesus down, They put him on the  
crown of thorns, O see my Jesus hangin' high! He  
look so pale an' bleed so free: O don't you think  
it was a shame, He hung three hours in dreadful  
pain?

Modern-day black theologians make a similar point when they say that "God is back" and that "Jesus is the Oppressed One." Our rejection of European metaphysical speculations and our acceptance of an apparently crude anthropomorphic way of speaking of God are black theologians' way of concretizing Paul's saying that "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even the things that are not, to bring together to nothing the things that are" (I Cor. 1:27-28 RSV).

Another characteristic of black theology is its de-emphasis, though not complete rejection, of the western theological tradition and its affirmation of black history and culture. If the suffering of God is revealed in the suffering of the oppressed, then it follows that theology cannot achieve its Christian identity apart from a systematic and critical reflection upon the history and culture of the victims of oppression. When this theological insight impressed itself upon our consciousness, we black theologians began to

realize that we have been miseducated. In fact, European and North American theologians have stifled the indigenous development of the theological perspectives of blacks by teaching us that our own cultural traditions are not appropriate sources for an interpretation of the christian gospel. Europeans and white North Americans taught us that the western theological tradition as defined by Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin and Schleiermacher is the essential source for a knowledge of the Christian past. But when black theologians began to concentrate on black culture and history, we realized that our own historical and cultural traditions are far more important for an analysis of the gospel in the struggle of freedom than are the western traditions which participated in our enslavement. We now know that the people responsible for or indifferent to the oppression of blacks are not likely to provide the theological resources for our liberation. If oppressed peoples are to be liberated, they must themselves create the means for it to happen.

The focus on black culture in the light of the black liberation struggle has led to an emphasis upon praxis as the context out of which Christian theology develops. To know the truth is to do the truth, that is, to make happen in history what is confessed in church. People are not poor by divine decree or by historical accident. They are made poor by the rich and powerful few. This means that to do black liberation theology, one must make a commitment, an option for the poor and against those who are responsible for their poverty.

Because black theology is to be created only in the struggles of the poor, we have adopted social analysis, especially of racism, and more recently of classism and sexism, as a critical component of its methodology. How can we participate in the liberation of the poor from poverty if we do not know who the poor are and why they live in poverty? Social analysis is a tool that helps us to know why the social, economic and political orders are arranged as they are. It enables us to know not only who benefits from the present status quo, but what must be done to change it.

In our struggle to make a new start in theology, we discovered to our surprise and much satisfaction, that theologians in Asia, Africa,

and Latin America were making similar efforts in their contexts. (22) The same was true among other ethnic minorities in the U.S. and among women in all groups. (23) Black theology has been challenged to address the issues of sexism (24) and classism in a global context, and we have challenged them, especially Latin Americans and feminist theologians of the dominant culture, to address racism. The focus on liberation has been reinforced and deepened. What many of us now know is that a turning point has been made in the theologies of black and Third World communities as radical as were Luther, Schleiermacher, and Barth in the 16th 19th and 20th centuries in Europe. Let us hope that the revolution in liberation theology will change not only how we think about God, but more importantly what we do in this world so that the victims might make a future that is defined by freedom and justice and not slavery and oppression.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. W.E.B. Du Bois, The souls of Black Folk (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Premier Book, 1968), pp. 16-17. Originally published 1903.
2. A concise statement of the major themes in black religious thought, during and following slavery, is found in a 1902 sermon of an ex-slave and Princeton Theological Seminary graduate, Francis J. Grimke: "God is not dead, -- nor is he an indifferent onlooker at what is going on in this world. One day He will make restitution for blood; He will call the oppressors to account. Justice may sleep, but it never dies. The individual, race, or nation which does wrong, which sets at defiance God's great law, especially God's great law of love, of brotherhood, will be sure, sooner or later, to pay the penalty. We reap as we sow. With that measure we mete, it shall be measured to us again". (See C.G. Woodson (ed.), The Works of Francis J Grime, I (1942), p. 354) Grimke's statement was undoubtedly influenced by the slave song, "You shall reap yes what you sow."
3. For an interpretation of the slaves' idea of justice and liberation, see my The Spirituals and the Blues (New York: Seabury, 1972). See also Albert J. Raboteau, Slave Religion (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Vincent Harding, There is A River (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981); and Gayraud S. Wilmore, Black Religion and Black Radicalism (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis

Books, rev. 1983).

4. For a fuller discussion of the idea of heaven in slave religion, see my The Spirituals and the Blues, chapter 5. See also John Lovell, Jr Black Song (New York: MacMillan, 1972), especially pp. 310-312, 315-374.

5. Works of Grimke, p. 354.

6. Ibid.

7. For an interpretation of these texts see Albert J. Raboteau, "Ethiopia Shall Soon Stretch Forth Her Hands': Black Destiny in Nineteenth-Century America," The University Lecture in Religion at Arizona State University (January 27, 1983); The Spirituals and the Blues, chapter 3.

8. Adam C. Powell Jr., Marching Blacks (New York: Dial Press, 1945; rev. 1973), p. 194.

9. The importance of the black religious tradition for King's theology has not received the attention that it deserves of scholars. See my "Martin Luther King, Jr., Black Theology - Black Church," Theology Today, January 1984. See also the important essay of Lewis V Baldwin, "Martin Luther King, Jr., The Black Church and the Black Messianic Vision," Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Centre (forthcoming). David Garrow's definitive biography on Martin King is soon to be published under the title of Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership conference, 1955-1958. It will show the important role of the black church tradition in his life and thought.

10. On many occasions, Martin King talked about his dream of 1963 being turned into a nightmare. The most informative reference in this regard is his "Christmas Sermon on Peace," delivered in Ebenezer Baptist Church at Atlanta, December 24, 1956. In that sermon, he said: "In 1963 ... in Washington, D.C ... I tried to talk to the nation about a dream that I had had, and I must confess ... that not long after talking about that dream I started seeing it turn into a nightmare, just a few weeks after I had talked about it. It was when four beautiful ... Negro girls were murdered in a church in Birmingham, Alabama. I watched that dream turn into a nightmare as I moved through the ghettos of the nation and saw my black brothers and sisters perishing on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity, and saw the nation doing nothing to grapple with the Negroes' problem of poverty. I saw that dream turn into a

nightmare as I watched my black brothers and sisters in the midst of anger and understandable outrage ... turn to misguided riots to try to solve that problem. I saw that dream turn into a nightmare as I watched the war in Vietnam escalating, and as I saw so-called military advisers, 16,000 strong, turn into fighting soldiers until today over 500,000 American boys are fighting on Asian soil. Yes, I am personally the victim of deferred dreams, of blasted hopes..." (See King, The Trumpet of Conscience (New York: Harper, 1967), pp. 75-76) See also similar comments at an Operation Breadbasket Meeting, Chicago Theological Seminary (March 25, 1967) and also during his appearance on Arlene Francis Show (June 19, 1967). (King Centre Archives)

11. See Martin Luther King Jr., "Beyond Vietnam". a pamphlet published by Clergy and Laity Concerned, 1982 reprint of his April 4, 1967 speech at Riverside Church in New York City, p. 2.

12. The most reliable sources for Martin King's theology are the unpublished sermons at the King Centre Archives. They include: "A Knock at midnight," All Saints Community Church, Los Angeles, Ca. (June 25, 1967); "Standing By The Best In An Evil Time", Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, Ga. (Aug. 6, 1967); "Thou Fool," Mount Pisgah Baptist Church, Chicago, Ill. (Aug. 27, 1967); "Mastering our Fears," Ebenezer (Sept 10, 1967).

13. "Standing By The Best In An Evil Time," p.7.

14. "Thou Fool," p. 14. This quotation is taken from King's account of his "conversion experience", that is, his existential appropriation of the faith he was taught during his childhood. There is no doubt that the "kitchen experience," as it might be called, was the turning point in King theological development. During the early stages of the Montgomery bus boycott, the constant threats of death to him and his family (about 40 telephone calls per day) eventually caused him to admit that he was "weak,... faltering, (and) ... losing (his) courage." In that crisis moment when the fear of death engulfed him, he said: "I pulled back on the theology and philosophy that I had just studied in the universities, trying to give philosophical and theological reasons for the existence and reality of sin and evil, but the answer didn't quite come there" (p.13). The answer came in his dependence on the God of black faith. "Don't be a fool," he said in his climactic conclusion to this sermon. "Recognize your dependence on God. As the days become dark, and the nights become dreary, realize that there is a God, who rules above. And

- so I'm not worried about tomorrow. I get weary every now and then, the future looks difficult and dim, but I'm not worried ultimately because I have faith in God." (p. 14).
15. This is an often used conclusion of many of King's sermons. This quotation is taken from "Thou Fool."
16. For an excellent introduction to black nationalism, see Alphonso Pinkey, Red, Black, and Green: Black Nationalism in the United States (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976). See also John H. Bracy, Jr., August Meier, and Elliot Rudwick (eds.) Black Nationalism in America (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970).
17. Edwin S. Redkey (ed.), Respect Black: The Writings and Speeches of Henry McNeal Turner (New York: Arno Press, 1971), p. 176.
18. Amy Jacques-Garvey (ed.) Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey, Two Volumes in One (New York: Arno Press, 1968), p.44
19. The best introduction to Malcolm X's philosophy is still The Autobiography of Malcolm X, with the assistance of Alex Haley (New York: Grove Press, 1965).
20. Ibid, p. 222.
21. For an account of the origin of black theology, see my For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984). See also Gayraud S. Wilmore and James H. Cone (eds.) Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979 (Maryknoll NY: Orbis 1979). The best narrative history of black theology by one of its creators is Gayraud S. Wilmore, Black Religion and Black Radicalism (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, rev. 1983). My Black Theology And Black Power (New York: Seabury, 1969) and A Black Theology of Liberation (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970) were the earliest published books on black theology. They were followed by J. Deotis Roberts, Liberation and reconciliation: A Black Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) and Major Jones, Black Awareness: A Theology of Hope. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971).
22. For an account of black theologians' dialogue with theologians in Africa via and Latin America, see Black Theology: A Documentary History, pp. 445-608; For My People, pp. 140-156. See also my essays in the volumes that have been published from the conferences of the ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians: "A Black American Perspective on the Future of

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23. The Dialogue between black theology and other ethnic theologies in the U.S. has taken place in the context of the Theology in the Americas. For an interpretation of this dialogue, see For My People, chapter vii; see also Sergio Torres and John Eagleson (eds.), Theology in the Americas (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976) and Cornel West, Caridad Guidote, and Margaret Oakley (eds.) Theology in the Americas: Detroit II Conference Papers (Maryknoll NY: Orbis-Probe, 1982).

24. See especially Black Theology: A Documentary history, pp. 363-442, J. Cone, My Soul Looks Back (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982); My People, chapter vi.

# **THE CRUCIFIED AND PERMANENT CROSSBEARING: a Christology for Comprehensive Liberation**

**Takatso Mofokeng\***

## **The Hermeneutical Horizon and Task**

Karl Barth, in an effort to advocate and motivate the necessity of a continual search for the theological truth, once said "In each age and by each responsible theologian the best definitions, combinations and conclusions must always be sought and found afresh in dogmatics with a continually new desire for obedience: 1) In accepting and carrying out that daunting challenge, we observe that this noble task can only be carried out responsibly if and when each theologian observes his/her given hermeneutical horizon or, to be more exact, that of the christian community of which he/she is in an organic relationship and on whose behalf he/she theologises, because as J.Sobrino once said "each hermeneutical firmament is characterized by its own stars". 2) It is therefore incumbent upon each theologian who is firmly grounded within a christian community and committed to its historical project to start that theological task by interrogating his/her concrete situation comprehensively and rigorously, while armed with an open ear to hear the distinctive questions and challenges that emerge from it. This is the approach that will ensure that our theology becomes and remains relevant, effective and operational. 3)

In our South African case, what distinguishes our situation fundamentally from other situations and dictates that our theologians operate with a heightened sense of ideological suspicion in theology and spurs them on to continually deepen their theological search and be as rigorous as possible is the incomprehensible. Yet true contradiction and antogonism that has been running through the heart of the Christian community in our

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\*Dr Takatso Mofokeng teaches Theological Ethics at the University of South Africa.

country from the beginning of the propagation of the Christian message up until now. That contradiction is that white Christians are oppressing and exploiting black Christians, doing it in the name of Christianity and using the sacred scriptures to justify that oppression and exploitation. 4) And, as you and I know this contradiction that is becoming more and more apparent in the entire Europe that was fuelled from the very fountain head of the Christian faith, has not only resulted in a deformed picture of that Christian message but also caused untold misery, suffering and death. 5)

In the late 1960's young black christians responded with a profoundly deep critique to this situation about which Oliver Tambo remarked and said ... "the history of the church in South Africa is the history of a faith betrayed" 6). They asked seriously whether the decolonization of Africa should not be accompanied by a de-Christianization of the continent. 7) We want to know what Jesus is doing among us today. 9) This area, which we believe, is the operational sphere of the Holy Spirit that enables us to talk in a trinitarian way about Christian being and existence, cannot be left out of the hermeneutic circle if we wish to save our Christological discourse from empty idealism and contemporary Christian practice from interiorisation that will alienate it from the rigours of social life. Instead of exclusion from theologization it should become the starting point, context and destination of our christological discussions because that is also the area where the crucified and resurrected Christ undertakes in our time.

As Karl Barth once said, his "journey from Jordan to Calvary again and again" and in which the power of his resurrection is manifestly, visibly and effectively at work.10) When we follow their path we shall also be following the path of the crucified Christ among them. Regrettably, it is exactly on the issue of this context of grace that the problem arises for many theologians. 11) It arises due to the fact that as we have said, these cross-bearers live and walk, not only ahead but also among the people, in the deepest identity imaginable with those who are crucified without trial. This identity and distinction, this convergence and divergence constitutes a problem because in one sense this situation is fruitful but in another sense barren; it is a situation of grace but also for

disgrace. While we appreciate the problem, for our part and in our situation, we would contend the impossibility and inadvisability of drawing the line between the footprints of God among the cross-bearers on the one hand, and the footprints of the same God among the crucified people, on the other. We are satisfied that the *gracious God does not abandon His/Her people in agony and need.* 12) And if God does not abandon them in human need we cannot abandon them in our common theological need. 13)

Now that we have discussed the place and role of the suffering people in the hermeneutical circle, we shall proceed to discuss our theme which shall be broken down in the following manner: the anthropological, christological and theological dimensions. 14)

### **The anthropological significance of the crucified people.**

Whatever the theological qualms some of us may have about the distinction or lack of it between those who consciously and deliberately bear the cross and those who are nailed on it by the lack of human compassion that is deeply rooted in our contemporary societies, reality is that those people who are nailed on that cross of inhumanity have an identity with a revelation and evangelizing character. 15) They are a community with a subversive historical memory, a living culture and a dynamic land consciousness.

### **The subversive historical memory of the oppressed**

The classical European missionary approach to the colonised people to whom they brought the "gospel" was that they did not have a history that was worth considering as a basis upon which to ground the story of salvation. Instead, the story of salvation was put either in conflict with that of oppressed people or presented as a substitute to it, implying that no traces of the presence of God can be found in it. It was sometimes brought forward as a purifier of the history of the oppressed and almost never as a supplement to it. This was done as an implicit denial of the inherent liberating trend that was recognised and celebrated by the makers of that story. All these tendencies constituted to a smaller or greater degree a denial of the presence of God in the African past as well

as in the memory of our journey of survival and resistance that is so highly cherished but suppressed by the history of subjugation that dominates our society and which is forced into our memory and our consciousness. This, as a matter of fact, is not how the oppressed view and understand their history. To them, it is a history with a liberating undercurrent that has kept black people alive through hard times. When they hear the story of Jesus of Nazareth, the latter pulls up their own story from the hidden depths of an oppressed consciousness to the surface and exposes its liberating elements. They can clearly attest to the presence of God of all creation in their African past and understand that it was through grace of such a God that they survived and progressed as a people. It is due to the presence of God in African people's past that there are human figures who are remembered because of their sacrifice for them. They throw light on the story of Jesus in the same way in which his enlighten theirs. Such a history can therefore not be left behind nor trampled upon when christological reflection is done. It continues to be informed and transformed by but also interrogates the written text of Scripture and the life of the contemporary christian community. It can consequently not be left out when we think and talk about Jesus Christ among the oppressed today.

### **The culture of the oppressed**

The survival of Black history is tantamount to the survival of Black culture because the history we talked about above also tells the story of the culture of survival and resistance of black victims of white supremacy. According to Magubane, no colonial process is complete before the culture of the victims of colonisation is destroyed and substituted by that of the new colonial masters. It has to be destroyed because it is an expression of the autonomous being, personality and creativity of the victims. It also harbours subversive elements that will continue to de-legitimise and resist the imposed foreign domination. He further argues that in spite of all attempts to destroy it, that culture is never totally destroyed. Some less important elements will be neutralised and bastardised. The fundamental elements that form the basis of the survival of the victims as a self conscious and self-creating people are never destroyed. When suppressed, they go underground and continue to

serve as a fountain that sustains the social cohesion, the political and religious memory and the economic structures and practices of the victims in order that they will survive. When the story of Jesus of Nazareth is told, black culture provides the background against which that story is heard. This may lead to co-optation of the story of Jesus and its subsequent weakening or even paralysis. For people who are anxious for their liberation and are constantly searching for resources that can liberate them, the liberating dynamic in the story of God's intervention in the world in the life, praxis, death and resurrection of Jesus, can never elude them. They are quick to hear and recognize the voice of the Messiah through the filter of their culture and follow him in their own peculiar way even in their christological reflection as we have already seen in the case of the African Independent Churches.

It is with this comprehensive identity that the oppressed black people of South Africa are a crucified people. They, with their unprovoked and unsolicited suffering, expose the vicious but also desperate nature of humankind and of society. They present the word with a mirror through which we can see the consequences of unbridled economic exploitation that increases the gulf between the rich and poor, the economically powerful and the economically powerless. In our country today, all economists of substance are already saying, long before the search for a just and peaceful solution to the problems of our country is completed, that the present generation of black people is doomed and condemned to remain permanently in poverty, ignorance and squalor and that nothing can be done to save them from that condition. They will remain nailed forever on the cross of poverty in the midst of glittering gold because bringing them from the cross will entail radical conversion to God and their black neighbour (accepting the humanity of black people) as well as cross-bearing (reduction in the standard of living) for white people, and an accompanying radical structural change. Theologically speaking, we can say that human and structural resistance to God's righteousness and justice for the oppressed has condemned them to the state of a crucified people. Consequently, their hanging on the cross will continue to be a silent but visible indictment of humankind for lack of solidarity.

**Their powerlessness is manifested in their inability to call a stop to their social degradation. In their emaciated bodies that are devoid of form or beauty is boldly written the story of sickness, hunger poverty and squalor that surrounds and engulfs their social life. Their scarred bodies also witness to their long history of cross-bearing at the end of which they are told that there is and will be no place for them in the household of God. In this area again, those people who experience a long Good Friday indict their fellow human beings who cause, perpetuate and benefit from the tears and pain of crucified people. Humankind is accused of denial of the humanity of fellow human beings. Their condition also exposes the real state of humankind. 16) Human beings are denying their humanity by denying the humanity of other human beings because humanity in Christ is indivisible. If your neighbour in Christ does not have it, you do not have it either. Through this condition, they also protest the absence of god of grace and compassion in their hour of desperate need.**

**The above objective state of those who are nailed on the cross of society is not all that we can say about the oppressed and the poor. As we stated positively above, their world and situation is one in which the Spirit of God is also actively at work to create active bearers of the cross of suffering for world transformation. All their concrete activities for which they are vilified, harassed, tortured and killed, are a protest against the inhumanity of a society that is dominated by white racism. They denounce that inhumanity as a self-rejection, a self relegation to a state of sub-humanity because in their being and protest our real state and being are revealed. They hold a mirror to us. 17)**

### **A Spirituality of Liberation**

**We also pointed out that African traditional religiosity is one of the important elements that form contemporary black christian spirituality. It enables those who linger in a situation of physical and psychological torture to survive and still celebrate the gratuitousness of life. It further enables present-day christian followers of the Messiah to travel back in time and follow Jesus of Nazareth in his time and place. In that following, they take the entire materiality of their existence, their history with its liberating**

undercurrent, culture and present experiences of subjugation and exploitation in song, prayer and witness. Their understanding of Jesus and his work of liberation for today is gained in this atmosphere of fervent prayer, witness and song.

The implications of the comprehensive identity of these crucified people as interlocutors of Christology are obvious. One of them is that Jesus of Nazareth is understood and followed in the entire materiality of his existence in the first century Palestine. He is approached within the broad context that includes his history of the Old Testament, culture, land and spirituality as a human son of Mary only in that way, as the Son of God who is with them in their time and space. This leads Black Christology to begin its reflection on the historical place where God becomes the Jew: Jesus of Nazareth. This prevents reflection from drifting into an abstract exercise that has fuelled the internalisation of salvation.

### **The Cross-bearers and Jesus Christ**

We have just been discussing the anthropological dimension in which the objective and subjective situation and condition of these victims of human society pose an anthropodicy question. Their entire condition is asking: Where do we find a humane, human being who is also Christ-like? This does not, however, express all that has to be said about the activities of the Spirit in this area, Jesus expressed the didactic work of the Spirit and said: The Spirit will teach you the truth about me. (John 15:26) This means that these people, as those who live from grace only, point beyond themselves to Jesus of Nazareth, the divine victim who undertakes the journey from Jordan to Calvary again and again, addressing all the dimensions of human existence--economic, political, social and religious when they are infused with and moved by the Spirit. (We cannot separate the religious and the concrete.) In their being as objects of human neglect, segregation and aggression, they point to him. In their active cross bearing, they point to God's active divine Subject who takes the cross upon himself to confront and overcome the ultimate limits of human resistance to righteousness. In their creative acts they point to the renewal of all things that happens through His work and death on the cross.

When they point to Jesus Christ they point to Him who is beyond them. When their activities point to His activities, they point to activities that are beyond the best and most effective of theirs. When they point to His suffering and death, they are pointing to those events that are beyond theirs but have a relevance to them. They point to the divine person and the divine sphere where all that is human is revealed in its entire fullness and emptiness, its potential and weakness where it is also sanctified and transformed. The cross of the oppressed is transformed into an instrument of liberation. But that does not mean that they cease to be human. They perform that function of pointing towards Jesus Christ as human beings and do that humanly. They do not claim to say everything that can and has to be said about the Messiah at all historical times and to all people. Theirs is an incomplete and provisional but true pointing to Jesus Christ in spite of the fact that they cannot penetrate the depth of Christ.

We should state here that even though they point to Jesus Christ, this is not an act that they choose to do nor are proud of doing or derive pleasure from doing. Who can derive pleasure from or glorify suffering, individual or even national suffering? It is imposed on them from outside, hence the theodicy question that is posed by their condition.

### **Crucified people and the theological discourse.**

When we discussed the objective situation and the subjective response of the oppressed, we mentioned two mutually exclusive realities. We said that the objective suffering of the oppressed protests the absence of the God of grace and compassion. The issue of the absence of God is a reality that haunts those who live in constant pain and humiliation. We also said that their re-emergence on the stage of history as active subjects of their "coming off the cross" is a living witness to the presence of God among them. 19) Consequently, it is imperative for us to discuss these two related statements that characterize our concrete reality and from the daily cry of those who bear the cross of shame and experience its excruciating pain. Our discussion of a relevant Christology for our time will not be complete without, at least, an attempt to give content and meaning to this situation of a cry of

despair and a welcome relief as well as a sign of hope. It is especially important because in these two, a cry of despair and a statement of relief, in the most powerful way, also point beyond themselves and their condition of Jesus' condition on the cross in the most powerful way, thereby enabling us to reach the deepest point in our christological reflection. In the same way in which, as we said above, that their cry points beyond itself, to the cry of Jesus, we believe that His cry will point beyond itself to the pain and triumph of God that lies hidden beyond the cross of the oppressed (Mark 15:33,34).

The questions that comes very pertinently to us are the following: Has the God of the Exodus and the covenant abandoned his/her solemn promises that sustain his/her people during moments of *despair and suffering*? Why abandon them after such a long period of bearing the cross patiently with endurance and hope of victory? We have said elsewhere that these cries cannot be ignored or muffled even with a pious song because the reality from which they come and which they give expression to, continues to widen and deepen throughout the world. 20) We said above that their cry points to the cry of Jesus beyond themselves, to that event wherein we see more than at any other occasion that God hears and comprehends their cry fully, hence the cry of the divine Son, God, in a unique and incomprehensible act of love gives his/her Son fully and completely to finally confront and break the power of the last and most formidable weapon of the enemy of liberation. That this last weapon was broken and overcome by God is evidenced by the resurrection of Jesus who now lives never to die again and in the raising from the grave of defeat of a community that loves and suffers with Him in his journey from Jordan to Golgotha again and again throughout the world and its history. Through his resurrection he raises a community that will be prepared to "take that ultimate action like him, to endure torturing and crucifixion for justice and fraternity and triumph as he has triumphed ...: 20) This is a reality which we see and experience every day when those people, who are trampled upon and crushed by the power of the oppressor, rise up again and again to resume their suffering for justice. They cannot be deceived and cheated for ever as history has shown because God of the oppressed will not abandon them.

This is the point at which, in the light of the widening experience of human crucifixion that is presently engulfing the entire globe and the growing community of faith that wants to commit itself to struggle for justice, we have to add an element which we neglected in the past and that has become very significant in our time. We neglected to say that through that resurrection, the Son of God also raises a community of solidarity that will be outraged by the innocent cry of those who are crucified without trail and without guilt and will make it their cry and the struggle for justice theirs. Only such a solidarity will lead to the achievement of a comprehensive and all embracing liberation in the world.

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3. Ibid. p. 33.
4. See Biko, S. "Black Consciousness and the Quest for true Humanity" in Black Theology: The South African Voice", edited by B Moore (London: Hurst and Co.) 1973. See also Boesak A.A. 1976: Farewell to Innocence. J H Kok, Kampen. p. 9-13.
5. See Gollwitzer H: Why Black Theology in Black Theology - A Documentary History, 1966-1979. (eds.) by J.H. Cone and G.S. Wilmore. Orbis Books, Maryknoll 1979.
6. Tambo, O. 1980. 'Church and our struggle' in Sechaba (Nov. 1980) p. 22.
7. Ibid. p. 45ff.
8. See I.J. Mosala 1989: Biblical Hermeneutics and theology in South Africa (Grand Rapids, W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.), p.13-42. See also Goba B. 1988. An Agenda for Black theology-Hermeneutics for Social Change. Johannesburg: Skotaville Pub. p.3-6.
9. In my book 'The Crucified among the Crossbearers - Towards a Black Christology' Kok: Kampen 1983, I used the concept 'crossbearers' without saying whether I made a distinction between the black community in general and black Christians. That absence of a distinction led to confusion and some questions. Some theologians argued that not all oppressed people could be

crossbearers, that is, people who consciously go beyond the objective situation of crucifixion by the oppressors and choose subjectively to take up the cross and turn it into an instrument of liberation. We acknowledge that confusion. Following I. Ellacuria as quoted by Jon Sobrino in his article entitled "The Crucified People" in Voices of the Third World, Vol. XIV No. 1 June 1991, we have now chosen to adopt the concept "crucified people" with reference to the oppression of black people in South Africa. For those who are bearing the cross and using it as an instrument of liberation, we shall use the concept 'crossbearers' in this article.

10. Barth, K. 1961: Church Dogmatics Vol. IV. p.341, 313.

11. See Mofokeng, T. 1983: The Crucified among the Crossbearers. Towards a Black Christology. chapter 3.

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13. See The Crucified among the Crossbearers - Towards a Black Christology p. 186-200.

14. See Sobrino, J: Christology at the Crossroads. Preface on p. XX111 and Mofokeng's The Crucified among the Crossbearers - Towards a Black Christology. p.242.

15. See Sobrino, J: The Crucified People p. 88-92.

16. Ibid. p.93, 94.

17. Buthelezi, M. 'Violence and the Cross in South Africa' in Journal of Theology for Southern Africa (Dec 1979) p. 52,53.

18. Ibid. p.85.

19. Mofokeng, T.A. p.263.

20. We will acknowledge that the situation in the world is such that the plight of the poor, refugees, landless people and politically powerless is worsening almost everywhere on the globe today. More and more people are thrown into desperate situation in the Third, Second as well as the First World. In many instances, our modern societies are structured in such a way that these people are trapped and cannot be helped without restructuring our societies.

21. Mofokeng, T: The Crucified among the Crossbearers, p.263.

# **THE RIGHT TO EMPLOYMENT**

## **- A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

**Buti Tlhagale**

### **BACKGROUND**

During the past three decades, the theology of work has evolved significantly. The discussions moved from concerns about work as drudgery, as an enslavement, as the fruit of human sinfulness and as a means of liberation (Chenu 1963:10). The critique covered at once the discussions on the dignity of human work and the debasing forms of human work. The critique attacked the excessive exploitation of labour by capital, extolled the collective awakening of the worker movement and advocated the humanization of both work and the workplace.

There was much emphasis on the purpose of work as going beyond production and individual sustenance. The purpose of work was to serve humanity. Serious attempts have also been made to give theological grounding to the mission of human work. Concerns with exploitation, excessive profits, the debating aspects of labour etc. have regrettably ignored to the large extent the plight of those who are not engaged in work.

Theology of work has revolved around those who work, those who have ironically become privileged, the labour aristocrat, given the reality of the 7 million unemployed in South Africa. The unemployed are voiceless, unorganized, marginalized and are often seen as a threat to organized labour. They are the poor of the poor and for all that theology of work professes to be, it appears that its concern should include a serious consideration of those who have been thrown out or debarred from participating in the economic system.

## **THEOLOGY OF WORK**

In order to conduct a theological reflection on the right to employment, we need to examine our presupposed theology of work. In making a presentation of the theology of work we will equally present a theological reflection on the right to employment. Attempts at creating a theology of work, have traditionally been based on biblical texts that refer to work. This method has not always been satisfactory precisely because there are few texts that refer to work. Besides, our understanding of work has evolved significantly since the writing of the biblical texts. A suggestion for a new approach has been made by Misolav Volf in his book entitled the Work in Spirit towards a Theological Work. He suggests a theological framework which would determine the meaning of individual biblical texts on work (Volk 1991: 68-87). The proposed theological framework that will serve as the basis of a theology of work is the concept of the new creation. Christian life, argues Volf, is life in the Spirit of the new creation. God's Spirit informs and determines both spiritual and secular activities of Christians. This includes human work.

At the core of the concept of the new creation is the belief in the intrinsic value of all creation and the belief that the world will be eschatologically transformed rather than apocalyptically destroyed. If continuity between this world and the next is assumed, then "the results of the cumulative work of human beings have intrinsic value and gain ultimaded significance, for they are related to the eschatological new creation" (Volf 1991:91). The noble products of human work will be "cleansed from impurity, perfected and transfigured to become part of God's new creation". Continuity between the present world and the future world, argues Volf, is an inspiration, an incentive to become involved in a contribution to the human project, a contribution, albeit broken, to God's new creation. Volf argues strongly that the significance of human work and therefore the basis of a theology of work depends on the New Testament eschatology. The meaning of work is rooted in the intrinsic value of creation which will be eschatologically transformed.

## **THE SPIRIT AS ENABLER TO WORK**

The new creation is brought about by the work of God's Spirit. It is also the spirit that endows all human beings with gifts. These gifts (charisma) are related to specific functions to which God calls each and every Christian. The theology of charisma therefore becomes the basis for theology of work. The meaning of charismatic, according to Volf, should include both the extraordinary (spectacular) and the ordinary. It is the Spirit of God that "calls, endows and empowers Christians to work in their various vocations" (Volf 1991:131). All work that embodies the new creation is inspired by God's Spirit. The Spirit inspires all work. Volf argues that "people work, not primarily because it is their duty to work, but because they experience the inspiration and enabling of God's Spirit and can do God's will from the heart" (Volf 1991:125). Volf's argument sounds a bit far-fetched. People do not always work because of inspiration. They also feel a sense of obligation, of duty and therefore a responsibility for the welfare of their fellow human beings.

## **UNEMPLOYMENT: A SUPPRESSION OF TALENTS**

Using Volf's theology as our point of departure, human beings are enabled by the Spirit to work and consequently to contribute towards the new creation. Acquisition of new charisma of their development is for most people made possible through employment. Employment therefore offers space where charisma flourish, where the gifts of the Spirit become evident. Through employment, human beings contribute towards their own advancement and toward human progress.

Unemployment on the other hand is the denial or absence of space for most people, where they can develop new talents. Their contribution towards their own growth and to the advancement of the human project is drastically curtailed. Since the unemployed do not work, they are unable to make a significant contribution (through work) towards the new creation. The contribution, if any at all, remains minimal. They are unable to create products that can satisfy their own needs and the need of others. It is this activity of creating products, though not exclusively, that constitutes the

"building blocks" of the new creation. Denial of work or the right to employment, contradicts the outpouring of the Spirit and effectively negates the creation of a new earth.

Employment facilitates a free play between human beings and the Spirit of God. While employment is not the only arena where the Spirit manifests itself, our logic compels us to argue that ultimately the very role of the Spirit becomes suppressed (but not denied) when the space or environment where talents, given by the Spirit are denied growth.

## **WORK AS COOPERATION WITH GOD**

Employment offers human beings the opportunity to cooperate with God; God's Spirit calls people to carry out certain tasks which ultimately contribute towards the new creation. Human beings are therefore partners with God in the accomplishment of the human project and in the building of an ecologically sound environment. It is this partnership that constitutes a right to work. The unemployed are by and large denied this partnership and consequently the right to work. They are reduced to inactive observers rather than active participants. Their inactivity denies them the role of active collaborators with God. When people are employed and, therefore work, God's Spirit is manifested in them either fully or partly. God works through them. When they are unemployed, and also not engaged in any other form of work, the work of God through them is barely visible. Through earthly work, human beings cooperate with God. The denial of earthly work, of a productive activity, negates cooperation or reduces it to a minimum. It is therefore clear that work and therefore employment is central to Christian life. The unemployed are inexonerably pushed to the margins of Christian life and of society in being denied the opportunity to live a Christian life that shows an abundance of the gifts of the spirit and a close cooperation with God through employment.

## **UNEMPLOYMENT: TARNISHING GOD'S IMAGE**

Men and women have been created in God's image. God created them in his image so that they can have dominion over nature and subdue the earth. Created in god's image therefore human beings are God's dialogue - partners (Mc Fadyen 1990:19). They are also co-creators with God. Human beings fulfil God's intention through work and therefore largely through employment. Through their work, men and women "correspond to the creative God" (Moltmann 1984:51). It is clear from this text that work, therefore employment, is a fundamental aspect of human beings and it reflects God's image. The right to work is engraved in God's plan for human beings. The more men and women are engaged in human activity, in work, in making a contribution towards their own growth and development and the advance of the human race, the more the contours of God's image are reflected on human beings. Kleinsig in his Valuing Life, writes that it was Clement of Alexandria who interpreted the image of God as "a capacity for rational and moral virtue, which, if appropriately exercised, would result in an increasing likeness to God" (Kleinsig 1991:127). We would argue that this increasing likeness to God is enhanced through the work of human beings.

The second Vatican council in its document, Gaudim et Spes 34 has this to say: "Individual and collective activity, that monumental effort of man through the centuries to improve the circumstances of the world, presents no problem to Christian considered in itself, it corresponds to God's plan ... all this holds good for our daily work. When men and women provide for themselves and their families in such a way as to be of service to the community as well, they can rightly look upon their work as a prolongation of the work of the Creator, a service to their fellowmen, and their personal contribution to the fulfilment in history of the divine plan" (Illanes 1980:12). Long period of unemployment means that men and women are unable to fulfil God's intention. They are unable to harness nature; they are unable to fulfil God's plan in human history. They are ultimately hampered from creatively extending the work of the Creator. Since it is through work that God's image lights up on the faces of human beings and engraves itself on the nature of human beings, long stretches of unemployment

obfuscates God's image and distorts human nature. Unemployment largely constitutes a denial of God's image and negation of God's plan. The contribution of human beings in the ongoing work of creation is simply slowed down through inactivity, or denial of work. God has chosen human partners in the unfolding of his work. It is this choice that endows human beings with the right to perfect and advance God's work. Human beings enjoy the "unique characteristic of likeness to God". This further enhances their right to participation through employment.

## **THE CO-NATURALITY OF RIGHT TO WORK**

Pope John Paul in his encyclical Laborem Exercens, states that "Man must work both because the Creator has commanded it and because of his own humanity, which requires work in order to be maintained and developed" (Laborem Exercens 1981 no. 16). Man must work for his family and for his community. The right to work is seen as being conatural with human beings. Human beings, argues John Paul further, are heirs to the work of generations and share in the building of the future for those who will succeed them. "All this constitutes the moral obligation to work" (Laborem Exercens no. 16). Human beings therefore, have a right to work, to employment, in order to fulfil their obligation, their duty. Through work, human beings respond to God's command and to their own sense of responsibility.

## **WORK AS A BLESSING AND NOT A CURSE**

The majority of the million unemployed black people inhabit the squalid squatter camps on the peripheries of the South African cities. They are unwanted people who are seen as a threat to the standards of living of their white neighbours and indeed of their more settled black neighbours. South Africa is reaping the fruits of the apartheid system that considered the unemployed people as redundant and prevented them from seeking employment in the urban areas and simply curtailed their movements to the rural areas where employment was unavailable. For the unemployed, in the seamless squatter camps, work is not a curse. It may be drudgery. It may be toil. For them it is certainly a blessing for which they deeply yearn. These are people who are in need of the

**basic necessities of life - food, medicine shelter and clothing.**

**To the unemployed, the community of the poor amongst the poor, work is not a necessary evil but a desirable means in order to exist. The meaning of work, writes Haughey, "resides in workers' interpretation of their work" (Haughey 1989:14). For the jobless, work redeems, work liberates, work gives life. Unemployment threatens their very existence. For them work "is a basic aspect of the purpose of life itself" (Volf 1991:197). To put it differently, human creativity "belongs to the essence of the human being..." (Cochrane and West 1991:29). The lack of employment creates for the jobless a sub-human existence. Work gives them dignity and self respect. It affords them an opportunity to develop their personalities and to become subjects of their own history. Human beings have a right to live as human beings and not as sub-human beings. Access to employment enables them to realize the gift of the Spirit. The right to life therefore goes by and large hand in hand with the right to employment. The right to employment, for those who have been persecuted by the myriad of the apartheid laws - that virtually denied them a normal human existence, is fundamental. For job-seekers, the right to employment is the cornerstone of all the other human rights. The right to vote and the freedom of movement do not mean much when one's children go hungry to bed. Human rights compliment one another, but for the unemployed, the right to employment remains fundamental.**

## **NEED TO FOCUS ON THE UNEMPLOYED**

**Theology of work has hitherto been preoccupied with the right of the workers to a virtual exclusion of the unemployed. There has been perhaps an inordinate emphasis on unionization and collective bargaining. The formation and evolution of unions and their federations have dominated the labour scene since the days of the Riekert and Wiehahn commissions. So too the campaigns for the rights of union members. Unions have been concerned with co-policy making and questions of co-ownership. They have equally been concerned about the political rights of the majority of the people in South Africa and indeed vigorously advocated for the dissolution of the apartheid system, the creation of a constituent assembly and the drafting of a new constitution. But the rights of**

the unemployed have never dominated their agendas. There are cases where the unemployed have attempted to gain employment when workers were on strike. This has in some cases led to the hostility between the workers and the unemployed. In the recent past, for example, newspapers had headlines such as "6 000 strikers sacked at Toyota's Durban plants" (Star 7/7/92) or "Transvaal Provincial Administration sacks 5 000 workers" (Star 1/7/92). This generates envy among the unemployed. They are prevented by the "dismissed workers" from replacing them in order to compel management to accede to the demands of the striking workers. This naturally creates a conflict situation among the employed and the unemployed. The employed do not wish to lose their jobs and therefore see the place of employment as their "protected territory" against the hordes of the unemployed who seek employment irrespective of the squabbles about wage increase or conditions of service. As the economy worsens, in the face of threats of industrial actions, mass boycotts, the spiralling costs of consumer goods, the unemployed have increasingly become desperate and alienated from the values of a society that has turned its back on them.

The physical division between the "squatter camps" and the township houses exacerbates the already existing deep divisions within the South African society. Though the unemployed cut across the "two communities", the former community represent a community of people whose mobility was formerly restricted by the vagrancy laws. The division between the employed and the jobless has had the effect of further battering the myth that the black people are a homogeneous group. (Ideological divisions and the resultant violence within the black community have already shown that the divisions are real). Among the employed and the unemployed, there is a cultural distance. There is a further division among the jobless. There are those who desperately seek employment and those with strong parasitical tendencies who are really not interested in exerting themselves. Leo Howe describes this as the double aspect of cultural distancing: "individuals attempt to create distance and difference between themselves and others deemed lower in the moral hierarchy with whom they fear being confused, at the same time they seek to nullify a presumed moral gap between themselves and a different set of others considered

morally superior and with whom they want to be associated" (Howe 1990:17). This cultural distancing is brought about precisely because it is "through work ... that a man earns his living and thereby claims reciprocity in relation to society and independence in relation to his peers ... a status in relation to his family, community, the economy and the policy.... Because of its positive values the work role tends towards a kind of a moral imperative. Work becomes something one should do, something that is morally praiseworthy because of costs involved" (Howe 1990:17).

Chronic unemployment militates against the Christian values of community and self respect. It gnaws away at the very foundations of family and society. Long term unemployment is in conflict with the Pauline injunction that in the Christian community there is neither male nor female, neither freeman nor slave. It erodes the belief in the outpouring of the Spirit that creates and sustains community. It negates in human beings the unique characteristic of likeness to God, the very basis of the right to employment. The right to a livelihood, to family and to community presupposes the right to employment. Unemployment puts human existence at stake and yet human beings have "a primary duty to opt for being", for life and not death (Jonas 1984:38). Work and therefore employment is instrumental in bonding a family community and society.

## **EMPLOYMENT, THE BASIS OF PEACE AND STABILITY**

The negative effects of unemployment equally point to the moral imperative of work. Unemployment destroys families. It exposes people to abject poverty and psychological distress, to feelings of guilt and shame (Grint 1991:41). It isolates the jobless and bars them from social participation. It undermines their feelings of self-worth (Nolan 1988:52-56). It denies them the right to contribute to culture and to civilization. Finally, it exposes them to crime. The current spiral of violence with the black community in South Africa cannot be attributable exclusively to political divisions between the Inkatha Freedom Party and the African National Congress nor is it exclusively attributable to the warring taxi industry; it is also due to the fact that thousands have nowhere to turn to in order to survive but to crime in order to meet their physical human needs.

**Crime and socio-political instability are abetted by the absence of employment. The new government will not be in position to restore peace and stability unless the question of unemployment is addressed as a matter of urgency. Peace and stability therefore will depend to a large extent, not only on the new constitution nor on the broadening of democracy, but also on ensuring that the right work is equally enshrined in the constitution and implemented accordingly.**

## **IMPLEMENTING THE RIGHT TO EMPLOYMENT**

**Within the Catholic tradition, the right to work has been underlined by various church document e.g. Gaudium et Spes of Vatican 11 (no 67) "supports every person's duty to labour faithfully and also his right to work" and John Paul indirectly in his Laborem Exercens (no 16) states that "while work is an obligation ... it is also a source of rights on the part of the worker". It is one thing to make a moral proclamation, or even enshrine the right to employment in a document of the Bill of Rights, it is another to implement the right to employment. It is equally not sufficient to say that ultimately it is the responsibility of the state to implement the right to employment.**

**David Hollenbach points out that the right to food, housing, health care et cetera is in contrast to the civil political rights such as freedom of religion, freedom of expression, due processes of law et cetera. With regard to the latter rights, judicial action can be taken to prevent people from interfering with the right of others. With regard to the former it is complex because "the implementing institutions are not so fully developed" and because we do not have clear and convincing ideas on "how to bring them into existence in fully functional form" (Houck and Williams 1984:120). Hollenbach refers to the U.S. context. But their dilemma equally holds true for South Africa.**

**Some human rights advocates assert that "the idea of rights implies entitlement on the part of the holder ... to be translated into and confirmed as a legal entitlement in the legal order of a political society" (Villa-Vicencio 1992:157). The right to work, we submit, should also be a claim, an entitlement. It should not be subsumed**

under the right to life but ought to be highlighted in its own right. The dilemma still remains whether the socio-economic rights (including the right to work) should be legally enforceable as is the case with the political rights. Most arguments favour non-legal enforcement of socio-economic rights. Such an enforcement would depend on the adequacy of resources. But such resources, it is argued, are simply not enough. Human rights, it is suggested, should be restricted to those that are legally enforceable; otherwise enforcing unrealistic human rights would only serve to undermine all rights (Villa-Vicencio 1992: 187-192).

The fact of the matter is that political rights are transgressed daily in spite of their entrenchment in the statute books. South Africa has had a sordid record of human rights violations under the Nationalist Party rule. This record has worsened enormously on the eve of the birth of a new South Africa, with violence claiming peoples lives almost daily and the culprits are in most cases never brought to court (Amnesty International 1992:2). There ought to be a willingness to entrench the right to work in the statute books so that government, the private sector, the unions and other public institutions begin to understand their responsibilities differently in the light of the socio-economic rights. To label socio-economic rights as mere "moral imperatives" or "ideal directives" without any obligation on the part of government and other relevant institutions makes any discussion on human rights a dangerously misleading exercise at the expense of the poor (Villa-Vicencio 1992:188). Society must take responsibility for its citizens. It must endeavour to enable them to participate fully in the human project. Legislation is likely to assist in encouraging those responsible to set up implementing mechanism and incentives.

## **WORK AND JUSTICE**

The Pastoral letter of the American Bishops on "Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy", has this to say: "We must make it possible as a nation for everyone who is seeking a job to find employment within reasonable amount of time. Our emphasis in this goal is based on the conviction that human work has a special dignity and is a key to achieving justice in society". They further declare that employment is "a basic right which protects the

freedom of all to participate in the economic life of society" (Pastoral letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy nos 136,137). The principle of justice requires that all persons should be enabled to participate in the life of their community. Employment contributes to the participation of persons in the life of society and in ensuring its well-being by generating wealth. Furthermore, justice demands respect for the dignity of the jobless. Employment therefore contributes to the dignity of the persons and their recognition and participation in society. In order for justice to be seen to be done, it is critical to set up institutions that will implement both socio-economic, civil and political rights.

The responsibility of implementing justice in the context of the right to employment ought to fall on both the state and the private sector. John Paul in his Laborem Exercens states that capital "is the result of the heritage of human labour" (no 12). Capital is united to labour. Capital must therefore be used to serve the unemployed by creating not only employment but institutional mechanisms that ensures the creation of employment. Capital accumulated by unions could also be utilized to include the creation of new employment opportunities. On a long term basis, unless the issues of literacy, career orientated education, the provision of skills, training and retraining of personnel are also addressed in relation to the question of employment, structural unemployment is likely to persist. These issues must be jointly addressed by the private sector, manpower departments and the unions (Howe & Le Roux 1992:129, Everett D and Sisulu S 1992:63). On the other hand the economy is not likely to flourish given the current political stalemate between the government and the African National Congress. Unemployment is not a problem that belongs to the jobless individuals. It is a problem of society and needs primarily to be addressed at that level.

The problem of unemployment is obviously a complex issue. But from a theological perspective the jobless have a right to work. This is consistent with God' intention for human beings. Simple justice demands that they too participate in work so that they be able to fulfil their basic physical needs and be part of society. As it is, the texture of the South African society is paper thin. It tears away at the slightest pressure. Employment for most people would

ensure the prospect of peace and development. Theologies of work, human rights and liberation must address the plight of the 7 million unemployed in the context of the changing South Africa. After all these theologies are intended to be at the service of the poor. The unemployment in South Africa today, constitute the "poorest of the poor".

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# **A CRY FOR LIFE: THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE THIRD WORLD\***

## **Cry, Cry, Cry for Life**

For the living, for the dead  
For the desert, for the sea  
Poisoned fish, birds with broken wings  
Poets with no words  
Singers without a song

Cry, cry, cry for life  
For the little children, fighting in the streets  
Playing with toys, guns and grenades  
For Afro-Amerindian mothers, weeping out of sorrow  
Wondering about their children's fate

Cry, cry, cry for life  
For South Africans, robbed of motherland  
Fighting apartheid, denied of liberty  
For Korean people, ridden with hunger  
Yearning to be united, for half a century

Cry, cry, cry for life  
For Natives in the Americas, guardians of wisdom  
Staring at the sun, not allowed to dance  
For Jamaican youths, captives in Babylon  
Wanting to return, but no promised land

Cry, cry, cry for life  
For the Indian Dalits, outcasts in their own land  
From day to day, burying hundreds who die  
For the refugees, exiled in diaspora  
On the willow tree, hanging their harps and sigh

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\*This is a statement from the Third General Assembly of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, January 5-16, 1992, Nairobi, Kenya.

**Cry, cry, cry for life  
For the peasants who produce our food  
But go to bed with empty stomach  
For workers who keep the wheel turning  
But carry heavy burdens on their backs**

**Cry, cry, cry for life  
For the courage, for the hope  
For the forest, for the stream  
Bodies may die, spirit never dies  
In our struggle, we burst in songs  
As a new day dawns, we will shout in joy**

## **Introduction**

**The Third Assembly of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) met at the Methodist Conference Centre in Nairobi, Kenya, from 6 to 13 January 1992.**

**For EATWOT members, friends and observers, it was a historic occasion. EATWOT was conceived here in Nairobi in 1975, and inaugurated at the University of Dar Es Salaam a year later. It is gratifying that, after fifteen years of steady growth in membership and programmes, EATWOT has again come to Africa.**

**The Assembly meets at a time when the Third World in general and Africa in particular are going through unprecedented changes. The poor and the marginalised groups have discovered their collective power, and the impact of their corporate cry for life is opening up avenues for their participation in decision-making and processes. Signs of hope are clearly discernible all over the African continent from Cape to Cairo; encouraging changes have taken place and continue to take place in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Angola and Kenya.**

**These signs of hope, however, are countered by new problems and the frustrations they give rise to: ethnic consequent exodus of refugees and displaced people. Foreign interference in local affairs, deteriorating economic situation, population explosion, the growing incidence of AIDS, deforestation, the growing gap between the rich North and the poor South on the one hand and between the third-world politicians who siphon off national resources into foreign banks and cling to power and the worsening poverty of the people.**

**While African theologians have been reflecting on these problems, the gathering on the African continent of EATWOT members from Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, Native American and minority people in the USA, together with EATWOT's long-time friends and observers from other countries has been a source of great encouragement. This has given the African theologians on the continent strength to be more determined and cry much louder - a cry for life, life in all its fullness.**

**The cry of the Third World is not a passive cry of resignation to the realities of death. It is a strident witness to the persistence of life. The cry for life is not a cry of despair, sorrow, hopelessness or grief. It is a cry that denies victory to torture, detainment, starvation and military might. It is a cry for bread, rice, water, land, housing, jobs, health care.**

**The cry of the Third World is indeed raised from the midst of misery and from within situations in which the forces of death are rampant; in which children die by the thousands from diseases related to malnutrition while elsewhere food is wasted, milk and grain are destroyed, and resources are hijacked from life's needs to a life of luxury and to the production of weapons of annihilation. The cry of the Third World is from the midst of the politics of the powerful who rule by torture, assassination and the contriving of the disappearance of women and men, and who commit aggression through proxy wars. The cry raised from the midst of structures designed for our subjugation, marginalisation and extinction, through distorted priorities, skewed agricultural policies, unjust trade arrangements and inhuman economic manipulations and pressure tactics - all practised and imposed in brutal and subtle**

ways by neo-colonialism and the international imperialism of money built up through the atrocities, cruelties and robberies during the era of military colonialism. The cry is from places where people are killed everyday for maintaining that the poor have a right to live and for believing that children must be given food, and justice must be practised. The cry comes from within situations in which domination is transnational, and counts on allies in our own midst.

The third-world cry for life is *one, Multi-tonal* cry. It reflects the various ways oppression assaults third-world life. It carries the cries of countries protesting economic indenture to IMF and the World Bank. It contains the cries of nature against technological devastation. It contains the cries of religious cultures oppressed by the dominant ones. It carries the cries of the innocent massacred by the bombs of the sophisticated technology of war. It carries the cries of indigenous, tribal and Aboriginal peoples of land, civil rights, autonomy and cultural respect. It carries the cries of refugees, children, displaced people and those afflicted with AIDS, cries against the discrimination of homosexuals, those who suffer from economic oppression, women forced into prostitution, victims of drug abuse and the unjust politics of health care. It carries the cries of Blacks against apartheid. It carries the cries of the dalits against the apartheid of caste oppression. It carries the cries of women against patriarchal dominance and sexual violence.

The urgency of the third-world cry for life drew EATWOT to Nairobi. We gathered to listen to the challenges posed by that cry. What does the cry mean for our spirituality? What does the cry say about Jesus? What does the cry do to our commitment? EATWOT assembled in Nairobi to boldly proclaim that even in the midst of the "New World Order", or racism, sexism and capitalism, God has not disappeared. God has not failed the third-world people. God IS PRESENT in the third-world cry for life?

## **Structures of Oppression**

Structures of oppression are global and local, external and internal. We are faced with a new global coalition that controls world economy, world politics and world information and communication systems. These evolve an international security system into which the internal security of every third-world country is annexed. We are under the grip of a market economy that is being directly controlled by the financial institutions of the powerful countries. It is a foregone conclusion that under such a kind of economic arrangement the condition of the poor and socially disabled will not become better. While increasing globalization of market economy would seem inevitable, what should be the safeguards that can prevent its catastrophic aspects on the poor and the marginalised?

Developments in the last few years make us wonder whether such safeguards are possible at all. Global institutions are intimately connected with the political process. The disappearance of cold war and the break-up of the socialist system in Europe have left us in a situation where world politics tends to be under the increasing control of a single power maintained by aggressive militarism targeted primarily at the Third World. In the new military and political configurations the poor in the Third World are expendable. It is this reality that compels us to believe that the emerging new world order is anti-people and anti-life. Meeting in 1992, the year that marks the 500th anniversary of the colonial conquest, we are painfully aware that the tentacles of power are still colonial in one form or another.

The collapse of the historical expressions of socialism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union raises with urgency questions about alternative ways for Third World development. It is now clear that the major causes for the failure of historical socialism are non-democratic forms of government, the imposition of a centralized economy, the denial of people's participation and their ethnic and cultural identity and of freedom for the spiritual development of the people. The present crisis was brought out by people asserting and fighting for their rights and freedom in a context where imperialist frameworks persisted.

The collapse of this historical model of socialism does not mean the demise of the values, goals and utopias of socialism. However ambiguous historical socialism might have been, some of its achievements cannot be ignored, as for example advances in economic democracy and towards the elimination of absolute poverty, and towards education and health for all, full employment and the development of sciences and sports. One would hope these gains will be preserved in the changing circumstances.

Our analysis of the global context is incomplete if we do not address ourselves to the growing divisions among our own people in the Third World and the violence committed on one another. To a large extent they are the result of a process of internalizing the aggressive values of dominant societies. Our elites perpetuate their dominance over the majority, increasing the misery of the poor. Among our religious institutions there are churches in most places which tend to be elitist, racist and sexist. By and large these churches have lost the moral credibility to respond to the cry of the world for life.

### **Emerging Currents**

Yet our situation is not completely dismal and hopeless. We hear the stirring of people, we see their resistance to oppression. There are movements which assert their hope and life. They provide inspiration and vision for a new way of living.

### **The Irruption of Women: A Cry for Life**

For many decades, women of the Third World have been active participants in struggles for justice, for human rights, for economic and political freedom and in movements for the integrity of creation. Around the 70s there was a fresh wave of activism when women of Asia, Africa and Latin America and the US minorities started identifying themselves as women and naming the specific forms of violence and marginalisation they experience, while continuing their active solidarity within and critical support for the struggles of other oppressed groups in their societies. The need for some measure of autonomous existence and an agenda of action focusing on women arose out of their disillusionment with

political processes and movements that did not recognize the gender-specific forms of oppression women experience.

Out of such experiences, women have articulated new paradigms of political and social analysis as they discovered that traditional ways of understanding society were far from adequate. They have also provided a strong critique of the Euro-centred development paradigm, and the untold levels of suffering it causes, particularly to women and children. They search for a new anthropology - a new way of understanding what it means to be human. Patriarchy, as a system of graded subjugation, has been identified and its pernicious roots, that weave into other structures of oppression, have been exposed and targeted for concerted action. Patriarchal structures have legitimized scandalous forms of dehumanization of women and men, and women's right to self-identity and dignity has been violated.

The violence that women experience can be overt and even brutal - rape, incest, battery in the domestic sphere, prostitution especially related to tourism and the rest and recreation industry for defence personnel, and violence related to certain religious and cultural practices. This overt form of violence against women can be extended to the abuse of women's bodies by medical technologies, particularly reproductive technologies, and the rampant use made of third-world women for testing new pharmaceutical formulations. There have been forced and sometimes surreptitious and massive sterilization of third-world women.

The subtle forms of violence women experience cannot so easily be articulated but have for centuries been eating into the psyche of women, eroding their self-esteem. This takes various forms - denying to women their right to self-expression out of their own wisdom, which expresses a perspective different from the dominant mode, or rendering women invisible. The oppression of women by patriarchal religion, including Christianity, and the androcentric language and interpretation of scriptures are other expressions of this. The marginalisation women experience in the church is indeed another form of violence against them.

**But hope lies in the fact that women affirm that they will not be silenced as they reclaim their own history and heritage and celebrate their own religious and spiritual resources. Hope lies in their affirmation that a holistic and creation-centred theological feminist and womanist paradigms are important for the empowering of the communities in which they live and for the healing of the broken relationship between humanity and creation. Hope lies in the solidarity of women around the world in opposition to any structure or system that threatens their rights.**

### **Movements of Black Peoples**

**The Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s were the resistance movements against white racism in the United States of America. The Black poor came out to assert their dignity and to fight until freedom comes. The source of their resistance is their spirituality and their hope is found in the power to say "no" to death and "yes" to life.**

**In South Africa the anti-apartheid struggle gave birth to the Black Consciousness movement. Blacks in South Africa have set foot on the path to being autonomous subjects of their history. The current movement of liberal democracy in Africa is not seen as life-saving. The poor will be even more powerless. They will be alienated from their land and get deeper and deeper into the culture of violence. In this situation we witness young people's anger and resistance against marginalisation.**

**Black women have begun to articulate the multi-dimensional nature of black oppression. For them it is not just an issue of RACE, or CLASS, but also an issue of gender. Black women are saying "no" to racist, classist, patriarchal oppression and "yes" to freedom for all Black people. Black women and men throughout the diaspora are saying "Yes" to the richness of Black cultural heritage.**

**Out of the development of Black Consciousness throughout the diaspora, emerged Black theologies, particularly in the USA and South Africa. Black liberation theology (USA) today is continuing to articulate the empowering message of the Gospel of Jesus in the struggles of Black and other oppressed peoples throughout the Third World. The Black poor believe in the God of life who affirms their dignity and empowers them to fight against the forces of death.**

**In South Africa, in the first ten years during which Black Theology concentrated on enabling Black people to re-discover their God-given humanity which was denied by white people, white Christians and white theologians, they faced an uphill task. The Black theology (S. Africa) has been challenged to respond to other concerns and issues as well. They have come up with radical perspectives on Christology and ecclesiology while anti-apartheid and anti-racism commitments remain the context of their theology. Recognizing the invisibility of their experience within the Black Theology movement, Black women are developing their own distinctive theologies. They are attempting to articulate the meaning of God, Christ, the church and culture from their own perspectives. The womanist Theology (USA) and women in Theology in Africa are significant manifestations of this movement.**

### **Indigenous Movements and Religions**

**Those who have been the most oppressed and dispossessed for the last 500 years are today emerging as a great source of new life and energy. The autochthonous peoples of our Third World, called Indios or Indigenous in the American continent, are coming forth with new proposals for life which question radically our modern societies, churches and theologies. Even though these peoples have been consistently exploited, and excluded from the economic structures of society, they possess a life-giving force which is unlimited. Their demands for their traditional rights for the land and for their religious-cultural identities constitute a great reserve of life and offer new hope for all the peoples of the world, especially for the poor.**

**In the face of the social models imposed by the First World on the**

peoples of the periphery, the indigenous people cry out to be seen and recognized not through the images of western mirrors, but through their own proper mirrors so that others might see them as they really are and want to be. The indigenous peoples have always been deeply spiritual and lived in communion with God. As their old cultures re-look at Christianity through their own traditions and struggles for life and survival, they can provide the churches and their theologies with possibilities of great enrichment and profound renewal. This offers opportunities of discovering and manifesting other faces of God that throughout the ages have been known by the native peoples but not known or appreciated by the Western Churches. These insights will greatly enrich other religious traditions of the world. As western civilization continues to self-destruct through avarice, moral depravity, individualism and the over-all ethic of death, indigenous peoples can offer new hope for life for these dying peoples. The ancestral rites, traditions, myths and utopias of the indigenous people constitute an important source of spiritual energy. This energy has kept the indigenous peoples alive, and sustained them with hope amidst the most adverse circumstances of their long and painful historical journey throughout many generations. In today's very fragile new world order which is desperately looking for alternatives for survival, especially the survival of the poor and starving peoples of the world, the ways of life and beliefs of the indigenous peoples offer an important humanizing force and thus an important saving force for the very survival of our common humanity.

### **The Hispanic struggle in the United States**

In spite of being considered for many years as pilgrims, migrants, strangers, foreigners, temporary and transitional communities, today the Hispanic/Latino people in the United States feel moved to personal and collective recuperation that includes both their spiritual strength and their transforming energies by the growing self-awareness of being a people with its own characteristics, its own ways of reading, communicating, celebrating and sharing life. So far, in spite of being around 20 million in the U.S., the dominant structures have designated the "minority" category to address this people, thus affecting not only its self-understanding as a people but its experience of God as well. Therefore, in

addition to suffering the consequence of the unjust present order, this people has been forced to develop an inferiority complex that leads to the personal and collective perpetuation of an attitude of servility to benefit the dominant minority.

For Hispanic/Latino people, however, hope has not vanished. Even though the traditional religious vision has alienated this people from its responsibility towards its own reality and destiny, the experience of faith has also been and continues to be a source that allows it to recognize its own values and resist the current aggressiveness caused by religious, spiritual and cultural colonization. In this respect, the theological task is to strengthen its transforming potential as well as its solidarity linkage with other peoples and the capacity to struggle and resist the forces of death. We celebrate with joy those indicators that already reveal signs of the emergence of the Hispanic/Latino people as a cry for but also a smile towards life. Among these are the refusal to disappear within the Anglo-Saxon "melting-pot", at the cost of losing its identity, the refusal to continue as strangers and foreigners in our own land or to be second-class citizens, and the re-affirmation that in Spanish or "text-mex", or "Span-glish", or "poncho", it is possible to be a vital part of a people with their own identity. Among them are also the affirmation of women, not only as agents of their own destiny, but also as a changing force with their own initiative and their own unique ways of verbalizing the experience of faith, the discovery that true identity consists in preserving intrinsic human dignity and the responsibility we have assumed in supporting our families left behind in our respective countries, including a serious commitment to improve their real condition of life and affirming that there is no salvation if it is not collective and communitarian. We rejoice in the increasingly committed faith of those whose God is not the one in whom, according to its currency, America trusts.

### **Ecological Movement**

The interconnectedness between commitment to the renewal of society and the renewal of the earth is clearly seen in the struggle of many marginalised groups all over the world. The indigenous people everywhere and many groups who have been traditionally dependent upon land and sea-farmers, fisher folk, agricultural

labourers -have kept these two dimensions together in their movements for liberation. The stubborn resistance of the poor tribal women in the now famous Chipko movement in India against the government's decision to turn their habitat into a mining area and the cry of the poor in many other countries whose habitats are threatened by the demands of modernization have brought home to us the inseparable link between the struggle of the poor and ecological issues. Integral to the struggle for justice and liberation is the struggle for preserving the integrity of creation.

Such movements remind us that the ecological crisis is created by modern industrial and technological growth and modern life-style. The western industrial growth model is uncritically and universally accepted as a paradigm of development. Ruthless exploitation of nature and fellow human beings is the necessary consequence of this development. Decisions about the kind of goods to be produced and the type of technology to be used are influenced by the demands of consumerist economy where the controlling logic of growth is greed and not need. This creates imbalances between different sectors and allows the massive exploitation of the rural and natural environment for the benefit of dominant classes. Much of the profit oriented growth which destroys the eco-balance is engineered and controlled by multi-nationals based in USA, Europe, and Japan and a few other countries. They often use the Third World as a market for powerful pesticides and drugs which are banned in their own countries.

The ecological movements are demanding an alternative form of development which calls for a halt to the violence committed to nature and human beings and the unlimited demand for non-renewable resources. These movements are bringing to our awareness how some countries are forced to trade their forests and national resources for debt relief and to be dumping places for nuclear and chemical wastes from rich nations, causing massive ecological destruction. They have brought a new awareness about our dependence on the earth. We belong to the earth. We share a common destiny with the earth. This has sharply challenged the modern view of reality and demands a revaluation of currently held values and perhaps a recovery of old values. The issue is about all of humanity living in right relations with nature. The impact of this perception on our visions for an alternate society is critical for

our theologizing. In this regard our own spirituality can be informed by the spirituality of the indigenous people whose fundamental principle is harmony with the universe.

Our theology should be, and largely is, shaped by these emerging currents in the movements of our people. We learn from their experience of struggle and their resistance to the situations of oppression. We drink from their wells (Gustavo Gutierrez) - the spiritual resources that sustain them. We have been insisting that our "method is our spirituality". It is therefore appropriate that the spirituality of the Third World became the focal point of our theological reflection at this Conference.

## **THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS**

### **Spirituality for Life**

The very word 'spirit' is an acknowledgement that human life is propelled by a principle beyond human power and knowledge. Unable to define this sense of being touched by the beyond, the word spirituality has come to our aid as a convenient term that articulates the sense of our being moved by a spiritual energy to hold on to life and to live it to the fullest. Spirituality spells our connectedness to God, to our human roots, to the rest of nature, to one another and to ourselves. Our spirituality is our experience of the Holy Spirit moving us and our communities to be life-giving and life-affirming. The Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groaning which cannot be uttered (Rom. 8:26).

We live our spirituality in creative response to the cry for life, the cry for God. We celebrate our spirituality in songs, rituals and symbols which show the energizing Spirit animating the community to move together in response to God. All existence is spiritual, our way of life as third-world peoples is spiritual. The spiritual traditions of indigenous peoples - Native Americans, Aborigines, Maori's, Dalits, Tribal peoples of India and Black Africans in Africa - are a powerful reminder of this fact. The spirituality of these people recognizes the "personhood" of all things in creation and leads therefore to a deep respect for nature. They are rooted in nature and therefore live a life of reciprocal dependence with

the rest of creation. There is a life force that urges them to seek the glory of God and of creation by seeking the glory of the whole of humanity, for so to do is to *seek* a humanity fully alive. Spirituality is described as that which fuels theological reflection to generate a more immediate and attainable vision of a just and peaceful world.

There is no room for romanticizing spirituality. It is a cry for life, a power to resist death and the agents of death. Spirituality is the name we give to that which provides us with the strength to go on, for it is the assurance that God is in the struggle. Spirituality involves people's resistance to dehumanization and fills the quest for self-discovery, self-affirmation and self-inclusion, for in each of us in the whole human community is the urge to live and to live fully as human beings. It is the strength of the call to life that leads to various life-giving rituals of Native Americans.

This quest for life is one that seeks to be attained in an environment that is imbued with and reflects the justice and glory of God. Our language about spirituality uses expressions such as "spirituality for liberation, spirituality for struggle, spirituality of involvement, spirituality of combat". The current use of spirituality is not one that directs us to the next world but to justice here and now. Spirituality is not a call away from life but the life force that urges us on to do justice and to resist evil. We are dealing here with Jesus' spirituality, one that is the source of justice and righteousness.

What are the springs of this spirituality among indigenous peoples? One encounters spiritual experiences and praxis that reveal God in creation. Their spiritualities are deeply rooted in land. The alienation of such peoples from their lands is a cause of spiritual and often even physical death. The violation of their space and place becomes the violation of the very spiritual values that hold the people together. In Black Africa the cosmic religions that undergird the cultures of peoples have provided their spirituality and have continued to do so in the Afro- Caribbean cults. African peoples call us to a life-force that is earthed and efficacious. Life now is celebrated by and through myths and symbols. This enables the construction in this world of a world beyond oppression, a celebration of hope. It is a spirituality that creates and sustains

community. Recognizing this demands that we share spiritualities across religions whenever fullness of life and justice are sought. Women relate positively to this spirituality. Women's cry for life, women's sharing and caring, is a way of resisting death and struggling for life for the whole of humanity, men, women and children, and for all creation. The cry for balance, harmony, mutuality and reciprocity comes from the womb of life, it is the spirit groaning to give birth to a new humanity and community. In all communities of women and men reaching out to life and resisting death, prayer becomes a threat to those who violate life.

The authenticity of one's spirituality is demonstrated by one's involvement in the struggle and the theology that results from it. That is why the context of our lives influences both our spirituality and our theology. Consumerism and pollution have us in their bondage. We constantly face the clash of conflicting ideas. In the context of the gathering threat to health and life itself, we can have recourse only to the deep spiritual resources that are available to us as God's children. These forces of fragmentation threaten to create in us a life-denying passivity. This we resist, for spirituality is expressed in activities that defeat death. Spirituality is linked with commitment to life.

### **The Jesus of Faith**

As Christians our spirituality is rooted in the Jesus spirituality, even as our struggles for liberation are rooted in our experience of Jesus, which awakens us to the need for struggle and empowers us to sustain the struggle. This empowering experience of Jesus is not that of the Christ of the Christological dogmas, who has little relevance to life, but that of the Jesus we meet in the Gospels. This Jesus is the Jesus who experiences the conflicts we face, undergoes suffering as we do, shares in our joys and sorrows, and remains faithful to his mission even when it brings him to death on the cross.

The many faces of Jesus that are encountered in the experiences of our people need to be identified. They provide a genuine guide for interpreting the mystery of the Jesus reality. They help us avoid the pitfall of intellectual abstraction and root ourselves in the

reality of people.

To follow the Jesus of faith, first, is to follow one who is unrelentingly critical of the power relations in the structures of society that engender injustice and oppression. Second, it is to follow someone who believes that it is necessary to embody in community our vision of the new, more just society, as well as the discipline to work to realize our vision in this world. Third, following the Jesus of faith means following one who was dedicated to feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and fighting for the liberation of oppressed people.

But if the Jesus we encounter in the Gospels as our inspiration and empowerment is seen as merely the human Jesus, it may be asked, why follow him instead of following some other spiritual leader like Mahatma Gandhi or Martin Luther King. In the ultimate analysis there is no answer to this outside our faith.

For us Jesus is the Lord, and fully Lord - but this does not mean that we need to impose him on everyone else. For though Jesus, we believe, truly puts us in touch with God, so that God is present to us in him, the absolute mystery of Godhead cannot be wholly comprehended in Jesus. For God is beyond all name and form, and the many insights we have into God cannot singly or collectively exhaust the mystery of God's being.

Our Christology, then, must not be an imperial Christology, such as developed in the post-Constantine era or such as was brought to us by a colonial Christianity which denied other religions (and other cultures) the right to exist, and claimed a monopoly for salvation. Jesus' own words are not the triumphalistic words of the imperialist Christ of the colonial Christianity, but words of love and service. He comes so that we may have life and have it in abundance; he comes that we may be one; he comes not to be served but to serve and to lay down his life as a ransom for many (John 1:10; Mark 10:45).

It is his followers who give him religious titles and make him into a militant conquering Christ. Such an understanding of Jesus does

not cohere either with our experience of struggles nor with our third-world spirituality. In our struggles for liberation we have discovered a common commitment in people belonging to quite different faiths; and our religious life as third-world Christians is in fact lived out of two great traditions - both the Christian tradition and the traditions of our indigenous religions.

### **The Bible and people's life and traditions**

Similarly, the reading and interpretation of the Bible too must obtain within a context of life. The poor read the Bible in the context of their struggles, their cultures as women, third-world Christians and indigenous peoples. They do it in their communities and animated by their spirituality. In the past we have read the Bible to the people. Now the people read it for themselves. The Bible begins to live in the lives of the people and the lives of the people bring the Bible to life.

For many centuries the Bible has been interpreted from the point of view of a western patriarchal and dominant culture. The Bible was used as an instrument for the spiritual conquest of America, Africa and Asia. It continues to be a tool of class, race and gender oppression of the large majorities of third-world peoples.

The people are now freeing the Bible from these wrong interpretations and recovering its text, its history and its inspiration on the basis of their own tradition of revelation and salvation.

God has revealed God's nature and being from the beginning of creation, and God continues to be revealed in nature, people's cultures are religious traditions. Revelation has always been alive and defective in the lives and religions and cultures of indigenous peoples, in the liberation movements and in the day-to-day struggles of the downtrodden. This kind of revelation is the first book of God. God gave to us the Bible as a second book to reveal to us the fullness of God's word and to transform the cosmos and the lives of our people in a big epiphany of God's presence. The Holy Spirit itself guides us in the discovery of God's revelation in our personal existence and in our community.

**The Bible constitutes a historical memory and consciousness of the people. The people maintain their tradition and re-read it continuously to discover God in the changing situations. In the Bible itself one can see the struggle of people against the manipulation of scribes and the teachers of the law. The Bible teaches us to get over those texts which are oppressive in the new context. The Bible is self-critical and has the capacity to expose the oppressive elements in the lives, traditions and cultures of our people.**

**The Bible is read and interpreted in the Third World in a communitarian way. the community appropriates the Bible in a spirit of prayer, faith and celebration. This enables the people to make critical discernment in the society and in the church. We are encouraged by witnessing the contribution to this significant movement by women who are re-reading the Bible.**

### **Commitment**

**"As our method is incarnate in our theology, so our spirituality is enfleshed in our commitment to and work for the liberation of the oppressed "- Samuel Rayan**

**A crisis of commitment is a reality for the people of the Third World. As new governments come to power with promises of a better life, our people's movements are muted. As political leaders compromise away justice, our people are left in a quandary. What are the people of the Philippines and South Korea to do now that they have toppled one oppressive regime and another regime comes to power which falls far short of their vision for life? What are the student resisters of South Africa to do as "high-level" talks proceed for a more "democratic" South Africa? What are the people of Nicaragua and Haiti to do as they face countless obstacles in hoping and struggling for liberation? What does it mean to be committed when governments talk endlessly of freedom, justice, and democracy, but grant it to only a few?**

**The rapidly changing world situation forces us to examine the nature of commitment. Commitment means a radical conversion to the God of liberation and life. Conversion is becoming aligned with God's mission for the world. Sometimes this conversion forces persons into struggle. For other conversion emerges out of**

the struggle, and for yet others it is an on-going experience. What is important is that conversion takes place. Conversion is not merely to an institutional church, a particular religion, or even to a social system. Conversion is to the God of justice, peace and life. It is the radical experience of conversion that helps maintain one's commitment to the reign of God. Conversion makes commitment meaningful because it becomes a commitment to radically change the world.

To be committed to the people's struggle for life is to be committed to a world where there shall be justice, freedom and new respect for all of creation. To be committed means not just settling for resolutions of regional and national conflicts. To be committed means not selling out the vision for personal gain. To be committed means standing fast until anything which threatens the full humanity of any person is destroyed.

Commitment varies with the particular context of struggle. To a Ghanaian it might mean speaking for the rights of women in church and society. For a Mexican-American it might mean leading a group of poor men and women to stymie the daily function of a local bank. For a Filipino it might mean mobilizing to oust the U.S. military bases from its shores. To a South Korean it might mean working towards the reunification of the Korean people and for peace.

There is a price to commitment. Commitment might lead to harassment, marginalisation, ecclesiastical sanctions, arrest, torture or even death. To be committed means there is no cost too great when one joins God's mission to make the world a place where life is valued for all of God's creation.

Within the lines of commitment to justice, there may be legitimate differences in the strategies and priorities for reaching our goal. Our task is not to judge the justice commitments of others. The cry for life challenges us to continually affirm our commitments to transform all reality so that all life can thrive.

## **A Specific Challenge**

### **1492 - The Beginning of Today's New World Order**

In the last two decades of the fifteenth century "A new world order" was born: the Portuguese went around the Cape of Good Hope into the Indian Ocean (1485); Columbus in search of a passage to the "India's" arrived in the Caribbean islands (1492); and Vasco da Gama touched Mombasa in Kenya on his journey to Calicut in India (1498). Soon after, France, England, Holland and the other countries of Europe would begin competing in their efforts to conquer, colonize, missionize and exploit all the other continents and their peoples.

Africa, the Americas and Asia were now destined to become absorbed into this new European world order! Europe's growing and expanding trade, strengthened by its military, political and economic power, imposed its culture and religious traditions all over the other peoples of the world.

When the ruling elites of Spain, England and other European countries are celebrating 1992, the "Discovery of America" and "The Encounter between Two Worlds" the native peoples of the Americas are launching another campaign "500 YEARS OF INDIAN, BLACK AND POPULAR RESISTANCE". This "Encounter of two worlds" was experienced by the indigenous peoples of the Americas not as encounter but just as a tragic genocide. A Maya-Quiche poet described the arrival of the Spaniards in Guatemala in 1528 as follows:

"They taught us fear  
They came just to wither the flowers  
So that their flower may blossom  
they damaged and swallowed our flower."

In Africa, the Europeans provoked the birth of modern slavery with a tremendous upsurge of the traditional Islamic slave trade by the opening of the "middle passage", the Atlantic Slave trade. According to Lerone Bennett, Jr, an African American historian, in his classic book *Before the Mayflower*, the period between 1444 and 1850 is a period in which Africans lost an estimated forty million people, many of whom died in Africa during and after their

capture or on the ships in the middle passage. South Africa was colonized; the land was forcefully taken from the Africans by white settlers. The abominable system of apartheid was created. It was also during this time that Asians from today's Philippines were carried as slaves to Mexico.

Henceforth humanity was divided into two: White-Christian-Europe versus all others: western civilization and culture versus all others; the western academic tradition versus all others; the capitalist system versus all others; the white peoples versus all others. Through a coming together of various forces, the European white men would henceforth see themselves and their way of life as normative for all the other peoples of the world and themselves as the natural masters of the rest who by "God's eternal will" were born inferior and hence had developed inferior ways of life based on false religions.

Through the process of modernization, Europe and later North America were so convinced of their own superiority that they would develop historical, philosophical and theological teachings about the fundamental inequality of the races. This would further the moral legitimation to colonialism with all its mechanisms of exploitation of the colonies and their peoples.

In terms of the expansion of the Christian faith, the sword and the cross came together. So evangelization came to Africa, America and Asia supported and enforced militarily and politically. thus colonialism was, generally speaking, justified religiously. Many of the first missionaries were opposed to the violence of the enslavement and exploitation of the indigenous populations in America, but the Christian religion was an essential part of the colonial order. Hence even the best of the missionaries were, in effect, the agents of the ultimate violence: the destruction of the religious systems which were the inner roots of the life of the people.

When the missionaries opposed the colonizers, they were persecuted and expelled and their missions; for example Jesuit Guarani's projects in Paraguay were simply destroyed. This collision between Western Christianity, Catholic or Reformed, and

the colonial powers, carried with it the religious legitimation of the Black enslavement and produced a theology of enslavement instead of offering the gospel of liberation.

So evangelization as spiritual conquest, especially after the military conquests, distorted the gospel and profoundly hurt the Indian spiritual life. The Aztec theologians replied to the Franciscan missionaries in Mexico:

"Let us die!  
Let us perish!  
Because our Gods are dead."

## **Search For Alternatives**

### *Beyond Capitalism and Socialism*

The historical expressions of socialism have failed in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. But we do not accept international capitalism, dominated by the TNCs and the main capitalist countries, as an acceptable social order for the future. Unbridled capitalism, with its emphasis on technology and productivity, offers no acceptable future for the masses of the poor and for nature, and it provides an atmosphere for the growth of insidious racism.

We commit ourselves to a more community-responsible form of social organization that ensures life for all and uses the resources of nature caringly. In our search for new alternatives we re-affirm certain fundamental values, which can help evaluate and correct deficiencies in each historical experience.

Every society should endeavour to ensure: sustainable economic growth to meet human needs without exploitation of persons and nature; a just distribution of incomes and wealth without overly curbing the need of initiative and due reward for work; fair trade with and among nations, without permitting a few oligopolies to control and manipulate the markets for resources and products; the civil and political as well as economic, social cultural and religious rights of all, especially the poor and the marginalised;

**and international social justice based on relationships of solidarity and mutuality.**

**These require an ongoing effort to meet the basic needs of all: food, work, land, shelter, health, education and leisure. The fullest democratic participation of all persons at all levels is a means of treating all persons and groups with dignity, of providing space for ethnic and cultural identity and spiritual development, of promoting relationships of mutuality irrespective of gender and sexual orientation, as well as of (at least) reducing exploitation, competition and waste.**

**It is not within our competence to provide one blueprint for the structures of future development everywhere. We are, however, more than ever convinced that the power and strength for our future should emerge from the accumulated experience for survival and resistance of oppressed and poor people, and also subjugated or marginalised cultures.**

**Along with the people's movements emerging throughout the world, we can endeavour to influence different social systems and areas of social life in the direction of practically realizing the values we hold, correcting unwholesome trends. We urge a new style of politics and a paradigm of relationship in which people can be truly fulfilled and not exploited and dehumanized. Both private and public enterprise should be made efficient, meaningful in productivity and socially responsible. Individuals, companies, elites and all power-holders are subject to the higher demands of the right to life of each and all persons, and the common good of humanity. We should resist the efforts at "privatization" merely because of capitalistic pressure. The public sector often needs to be safeguarded to serve the people.**

**We should work to bring about effective checks on the accumulation of private profit by companies, and of power by rulers. This is a most difficult and challenging task in the present world situation, and more so with the capitalistic, so called "New World Order".**

The TNCs must be brought under effective forms of public control at national and international levels by people's pressure. Public enterprises, especially in poor countries, and the international agencies such as UNCTAD and GATT can be valuable agents in developing countervailing power vis-a-vis the TNCs and the world political powers that exploit and dominate the poor. The Non-Aligned Movement needs to be strengthened for this.

Within nations the rulers and elites must be obliged to serve the people, and not misuse power, generally in collusion with the TNCs and foreign powers, often coming as donors of aid.

## **People Power**

In the present national and global situations, it is the enlightened and sustained commitment of alliances of people's movements that can bring about practical action towards reaching such desirable goals. The very magnitude of the crisis and its global nature can motivate such movements in all countries to try to work together to save humankind from this present misery.

As an organization of theologians we can contribute by participating in the people's efforts, learning from them and supporting them by our faith, analysis and commitment.

We need to work everywhere to share in existing movements, and helping to form, strengthen and correlate peoples groups and movements around their felt needs. Such basic Christian and basic human groups can be the primary bases for national and global people's movements.

For this we need to develop our methodologies of analysis of situations at all levels to see the deeper causes of our problems; ways of promoting practical commitment undeterred by opposition and the difficulties of the tasks.

The core inspiration of our faith and of the other faiths and persuasions of the peoples can be a powerful motivation for such commitment. We can develop inter-faith relations while mutually correcting non-liberative trends in each of them.

In the face of the enormous power of the forces of exploitation, and the destructiveness of war and violence, we need to develop

effective means of resistance. Ultimately our hope lies in creating a non-violent society. Recent experience has shown how governments and even super-powers can be impacted by the organized non-violent movements of people power.

We can participate in the emerging movements of people power working for justice in the relationships of gender, racial, ethnic and social groups, among cultures and religions and with nature. The hope for the future lies in the convergence of such efforts towards desirable goals as against the combined exploitation by economic, political, military and cultural super-powers. Our hope is especially in the new movements such as of women, indigenous peoples, black, the urban poor, farmers, dalits and others. Thus the environment movements have sometimes prevented companies and governments from doing damage to nature. The women's movements have contributed immensely to safeguarding human rights against sexual abuse, and worked for peace within and among nations.

While working at local and national levels we can help generate people's movements for the reform of the United Nations and its agencies such as the Security Council and the UNCTAD. It is imperative that the IMF and the World Bank be made responsible, at least, to the governments of all the nations, and not be dominated as at present by the rich countries to the utter detriment of the poor almost everywhere.

As a movement of theologians we shall endeavour to develop relevant theologies to understand and respond to this global human crisis. Our response to the cry for life can be partly in the effort to transform the thought patterns and value orientations of Christians to be more truly disciples of Jesus. We shall try to influence Christian reflection, spiritual life, and practical action within our communities, nations and internationally.

We need to carry out during the coming five years an intense programme in these directions and influence the churches as global organizations so that they may truly contribute to the emergence of better human relationships at all levels. The churches, thus motivated and mobilized, have a tremendous potential for responding meaningfully to the cry of the people everywhere. We

would thus help fulfil the mandate of Jesus to take the message of love and service to all the peoples of the world.

The repentance and resolute corrective action of Christians, especially of the affluent and dominant culture, can be a meaningful witness to our faith, a strengthening of the dialogue of the faiths, and a cementing of collaboration among persons committed to justice everywhere, regardless of particular religious beliefs.

In this we honour the memory of the numerous martyrs who have given their lives in recent decades for the liberation of the poor and the oppressed, and we commit ourselves to endeavour to contribute our combined mite towards this cause.

We trust that the organized power of the people, resisting the illusion of the "new World Order", going through the night of resistance, will help usher in a new dawn when people's power triumphs over the present forms of exploitation and takes us all towards a more livable and human world.

All these demand a price from each one of us. It is the call of Jesus Christ to all disciples to take up our cross and go forward towards a more hopeful future for all. It is precisely for this journey into the future, listening and responding to our people's cry for life, that we need a spirituality that does justice to our faith convictions on the one hand and our commitments to the aspirations of our people on the other.

We see the Spirit in the ancient gong  
Calling us to silence, to listen  
The embryonic rhythm life  
Vibrating, resounding, all embracing

We see the Spirit in the water  
Cleansing our body, healing our soul  
We drink from the same cup  
Renewing, sustaining, replenishing

**We see the Spirit in the fire  
Irrupting with passion, like a volcano  
Our anger against injustice  
Burning, glowing, fast-spreading**

**We see the Spirit in the circle  
Learning Miriam's dance, taking first steps  
In solidarity with all women  
Dancing, chanting, spiralling**

**We see the Spirit in the colours  
Taking pride in our culture, our rites  
Black, yellow, brown and white  
Celebrating, living, rejoicing**

**We see the Spirit in our bonding  
Confessing our brokenness, our division  
I hope we offer to each other  
Visioning, struggling, empowering.**