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EDITORIAL

In this issue we are offering you four related articles three of which break a new ground. They are related in that each of them touch on the role of African culture to a lesser or greater degree. And as is always the case in South African Black Theology, African culture is not uncritically and unselectively appropriated for theological reflection. At this juncture in our struggle for liberation African culture is first and foremost important as a resource that enables black christians to develop a theology that enhances that struggle. This struggle is for us a decisive guide in our cultural appropriation and utilization in Black Theology.

These articles are also related in that they almost all raise the question of the bible, theology, land and economic justice in different but interesting ways. The economy and land are presently the most topical and sensitive issues in the South African search for a democratic and just society. Politicians, pastors and theologians are all involved in discussions on these issues. These articles will hopefully contribute even in a small way to that discussion. As we have said above, this is just the beginning of the discussion. We hope that the readers will join the discussion and that more articles will be published on these topics in the forthcoming issue of our journal.
1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of our theme “Culture, religion and liberation” for our continent cannot be overemphasized, because it tries to bring together the two main approaches to African theology. The first could be referred to as the “inculturation” approach which is characterized by the attempt to marry Christianity with the African world-view, so that Christianity could speech with African idiom and accent. This approach has been the most dominant in the early development of African theology. Not surprisingly, it has become almost synonymous with Africa theology. The second which could referred to as the liberation approach was developed in the 1970s and gave birth to black theology of liberation in South Africa. This theology is characterized by its emphasis on the struggle for socio-economic and political liberation from white racial domination.

And for many years African theologians were divided along these theological approaches believing that their theological production was mutual exclusive rather than complimentary to one another. This antagonistic relationship among African theologians was best exemplified by the heavy-handed manner in which one of the leading leading African theologians, John Mbiti, dismissed black theology of liberation as irrelevant and unsuitable for independent Africa. For, in his view, black theology was nothing but an unfortunate emotional outburst which in time would simply go away when the problem of racial oppression in South Africa is solved. Against Mbiti, there were other voices which pleaded for some meaningful coexistence and mutual enrichment between the two trends of African theology. There were many obstacles and misunderstandings which had to be overcome before such a rapprochement was to be realized. On one hand, there were some Africans who mistakenly believed that, because they had already achieved their political independence from their colonial masters, they did not need liberation theology, most particularly black theology whose aim was to bring about liberation from white oppression. On the other hand, some black South Africans argued that they did not need the sort of inculturation theology that was being developed in independent Africa because socio-political and economic independence were, for them, a priority number one.
2. THE MEDIATING ROLE OF EATWOT IN AFRICAN THEOLOGY

The debate between the two camps, largely based on misunderstandings, raged for many years. Fortunately, the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians provided a forum where African theologians could meet and also be exposed to other forms of liberation theology, especially the Latin American theology of liberation with its emphasis on socio-economic liberation, and the Asian theology of liberation with its emphasis on both cultural, religious and socio-economic liberation. This exposure helped to bring the two camps of African theologians closer together.

Realizing that the struggle for liberation is an all-embracing one, African theologians began to appreciate the fact that they live in Africa as members of one family. Therefore, even though they have been divided by artificial colonial boundaries and now live in different countries, there are certain realities that confront all Africans, namely, the socio-political and economic domination by the West. Indeed, it has become clear to most of us that the so-called independent Africa may not be free after all. African theologians have now been forced to make a distinction between political independence and socio-political and economic liberation. The latter is more difficult to achieve than the first, and it is not surprising that even in independent Africa oppression abounds. For what happened during independence was merely a replacement of one form of oppression for another, that is, a substitution of a European oppressor for an African oppressor. Consequently, if Africans are to experience authentic liberation they must go beyond replacing one oppressor for another in order to destroy the oppressive thrones themselves. In so doing they would be making certain that potential oppressors are monitored and prevented from carrying out their oppressive designs because there would be no thrones to sit on.

Also, people in South Africa have come to realize more and more that, while it is true that they have suffered under white domination for over three hundred years, it does not follow that Africans have completely ceased from being Africans. Because black South Africans were not fully Europeanized, it is not surprising that during the time of crisis in their lives they often resort to their African cultural and religious beliefs and practices. It is one of the ironies of history that the Apartheid system, which was designed to humiliate black people and trample upon their dignity, became the instrument that ensured that Africans would not succeed in running away from their cultural and religious roots. For the white
protagonist of the Apartheid regime constantly reminded Africans that they were Africans and not Europeans regardless of their educational achievements or economic status, by being legally forced to live in the African townships.

We are not trying here to give praise to the virtues of the Apartheid regime, but the point that is being made here is that South African blacks, for better or for worse, are still steeped into their African cultural and religious milieu. This has made them to increasingly appreciate their African culture and religious heritage. This, above all, has created a meeting-point between themselves and other Africans in the rest of independent Africa.

In a very important sense, the theme for our conference tries to bring together the two African approaches to theology, by linking the African cultural and religious expressions to African struggles for total liberation from all forms of human oppression. This theme, in my view, underlines the fact that African theologians should be able to find one another and work together because total liberation is the priority number one for all Africans regardless of whether they live in the so-called independent Africa or Apartheid South Africa. Therefore, there is no excuse for us to continue living in our splendid theological isolation from one another, thus allowing our detractors to mislead us into believing that socio-political and economic liberation is more important than cultural liberation.

3. USES OF CULTURE AND RELIGION DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to take this opportunity and share with all of you the framework that has been given to those persons that have been asked to read papers at this conference. This is important because it will enable us to have a common point of departure.

In order not to perpetuate the past practice where discussions about African culture and religion hinged around describing, as opposed to transforming those phenomena, our speakers have been specifically asked not to discuss the problem of culture and religion in Africa theoretically or in generalities. For it is not sufficient to talk about African culture as if culture is a thing that exists by itself "out there." To do so is to reify culture and turn it into a thing that exists independent of the people who create or live in it. My understanding is that culture is something that is lived by people. The same is true about religion. Therefore, I specifically ask our speakers not to talk about African culture in general because I am not interested in that kind of discussion. Rather our speakers have been asked
to do situation analysis is and to examine specific and concrete situations in their own countries in order to demonstrate to this conference how culture and religion in reality operate in their own specific situations. Therefore, they should tell us how culture and religion are manipulated by the dominant groups in their respective places, as these dominant groups try to influence and control the behaviour of the oppressed masses.

It was in view of the above that the opening paper by Ranwedzi Nengwekul was going to examine a very important topic, namely, the dialectical nature of religion and culture. His papers discuss the twofold manner in which religion and culture could be used: either as an instrument of oppression by the dominant groups or as a resource for resistance by the dominated masses.

In order to integrate other papers with that of Nengwekul, the other presenters were asked to analyse how in their respective societies culture or religion has been used and is being used as an instrument of oppression by those who are in power to legitimize their dominant position. Incidentally I had a very interesting discussion yesterday during which a female participant who is a lecturer at a seminary told me something that I would like to share with you. She told me that she finds it revealing that theological students agree with her in almost everything in theological discussions when no reference is being made to the African culture. But when the theological discussion begins to touch on the relationships between man and women in Africa the problem of culture suddenly crops up. This is because it is convenient for males to use aspects of African culture in order to perpetuate their privileged status. Indeed too often culture has been used and is being used by African males in the family context, as husbands, fathers, sons, brothers etcetera, to try safeguard and perpetuate their dominant positions at the expense of females. Also, in the larger society dominant groups use the culture of the powerless and dominated masses with the sole purposes of making the victims of society accept their position of domination as well as the position of dominant groups.

A good example of how culture or religion could be used as an instrument of oppression is best exemplified by the colonial period. As we all know, colonizers came to Africa as agents of the European empires to subjugate and dominate the African people. In order to achieve their objective, they targeted the African culture for destruction, hoping thereby to destroy the African sense of history and being. By replacing African culture and religion with European culture, the colonizers believed that de-cultured African men and women would be easy to dominate and control.
In some instances this Europeanization process did succeed when some Africans began to lose their religion by adopting the new Christian religion of the missionaries. For instance, there were Africans who lost a sense of identity to a point of identifying with the value system of the colonizers. Recently a friend of mine told me that while he was in Europe he met a French-speaking African. As their conversation progressed he asked the French-speaking African what nationality he was, whereupon the French-speaking African responded by saying that he was French. The upshot of this story is that it does often happen that oppressed Africans internalize European culture fish and hook to a point where they could begin to believe that, blacks as they are like me, they are really not African but French or English. Such people would even try to imitate the mannerism of the French or the English colonial masters. Some Africans went so far as to try to change the colour of their skins by using skin-lightening creams or stretching their hair. The result of such internalization of the cultural and religious values of the colonial masters has had a devastating effect on the African personality, leading to what Engelbert Mveng refers to as the African "anthropological poverty, by which he means:

...the general impoverishment of the people. Colonialism brought about a loss of their identity and diminishment of their creativity. It indiscriminately disrupted their communal tribal life and organization and destroyed their indigenous values, religious beliefs, and traditional culture. This result of the ravages of colonialism is now maintained by economic and cultural neocolonialism.³

Most of us still suffer from the effects of deculturation process that accompanied the colonization of Africa.

Similarly the missionaries came as agents of the dominant West to promote European culture, economic and religious imperialism. They went out of their way to suppress and condemn African religion and culture as the work of the Devil.⁴ Africans were frightened with hell-preaching sermons and called upon to embrace the new Christian religion. What is significant here is that the kind of Christianity that was preached was one which was designed to make the colonized Africans docile and perpetual students of their European masters. Hence the leadership position was largely restricted to the Europeans. Even when the church leadership passed on to the indigenous people little was done to do away with European domination of the African churches because the whole hierarchical structure of Bishops, which is regarded as the guardian of Christian faith through its monopoly of training pastors and priests, is designed to perpetuate European domination and church structures. Using the power of money and theological training, European churches
continue to exercise their influence through those structures. Not surprisingly most African church leaders tend to be theologically more conservative than their European counterparts, believing that such conservatism will win them applause from their European handlers. And some of us who happened to have African leadership in the churches know from experience that African church leaders could be worst oppressors than the European missionaries. In both secular and ecclesiastical realms we have a situation where Africans have merely substituted colonial or missionary oppressor for African oppressors, the difference in the latter case being only the ecclesiastical garbs. Here again the mistake of those who fought against missionary domination and oppression lay in the fact that they did not destroy the thrones themselves from which secular or religious oppressors exercise their power.

4. RELIGION AND CULTURE AS RESOURCES FOR RESISTANCE

It was against this background of both cultural and religious domination that African resistance groups, during the struggle for independence, began to promote the philosophy of Negritude, African culture and African socialism. In South Africa, people began to talk about Black consciousness through which they promoted positive African self-respect. One important characteristic of this self-affirmation is best expressed in the saying: Black is beautiful. To give but a few examples of how religious and cultural phenomena could be used as resources of resistance, let me share with you the experience of my people in the nineteenth century struggle against British imperialism. Historians tell us about one young African prophetess Nongquase, who invoked the African traditional religion by telling the oppressed blacks to obey certain rituals so that the ancestors might help them drive away the white settler colonialists into the sea. Of course, the outcome was not as she had prophesied because the ancestors did not intervene to drive white colonialists into the sea. But the fact that she did not succeed does not cancel the fact that she was trying to use African culture and religion as resources for resistance against colonial domination and oppression. Her story, in my view, demonstrates the fact that there exist certain aspects of African culture and religion which could be used by the underdogs in their struggle against their oppressors. In so doing, the oppressed groups reject various forms of cultural expressions or religious uses by the dominant group. Instead oppressed groups often adopt those aspects of their culture or religion which are deemed useful for their cause of struggle to strengthen and reinforce their own resistance against class domination.

In the religious sphere, many Africans resisted conversion to Christianity. Even those who embraced the new Christian religion expressed their resistance to total conversion by continuing to prac-
tice African traditional religious rites alongside Christianity, a practice commonly known as syncretism. Those of us who have the experience of serving in African congregations as ministers of religion could testify to the shock we often experience by the heavy of African traditional rites at funerals. For instance, when a person has died, it is not uncommon that traditional rituals which help facilitate the passage of the dead into the world of the spirits (ancestors) are conducted in addition to the Christian burial rites. In such cases we often see relatives of the deceased throwing some clothes, blankets or other articles in or on top of the grave even as the minister of religion is busy fulfilling the Christian part of the burial. Similarly, when a child is born into a Christian family, the African parents do not hesitate to turn to the diviner or medicine man or woman so as to acquire charms or medicine that will help avert disease, potential witches or evil spirits which might threaten the life of the child. At the same time the African parents will proceed with the usual Christian rites of baptism et cetera. Recently I was pleasantly surprised to learn that, if some of our young people did not have good sleep or have a problem, they would go to the graveyard in early hours of the morning carrying buckets of water which they poured on the graves of their parents or grandparents, before going to church services.

Without entering into the debate as to whether the syncretistic practices are right or wrong, let it suffice to say that the incidences I have referred to are, in my view, expressions of resistance to total conversion to Christianity that is devoid of African cultural underpinnings. It is this kind of resistance to Western cultural and religious imperialism that led to the break away of the so-called African Independent Churches from the white denominations in the nineteenth century. These break-aways were nothing but attempts by Africans to resist Western domination.

5. USES OF CULTURE AND RELIGION IN THE BIBLE

Having brieﬂy outlined how African culture and religion have been used either as instruments of domination or as resources of resistance, we want to briefly discuss the problems relating to the uses of scriptures. May I mention in this connection that those persons who will be presenting papers directly with the biblical material have been specifically asked to examine more closely how religion and culture have been used as instruments of oppression or resources for resistance. By way of anticipating what they would be discussing, I wish to look at certain texts in the Old Testament which best exemplify the dialectical nature of culture and religion as instruments of oppression or resources for resistance. In the Old Testament, we find an interesting story in the book of Kings where there was a struggle over the land. Here the dominant group,
represented by the king and his wife, wanted to use their cultural and religious arguments as well as political position to legitimate their disposition of the poor person. In response, Naboth appeals to a certain interpretation of culture and religion which formed the core of Israelite social ethics and justice, namely, that a family property could not be taken away or alienated from their owners however lowly they might be. In appealing to this interpretation, Naboth managed to reinforce his resistance against king Ahaz's attempted dispossession of the poor Israelite. In this argument, the Scriptures tell us that Naboth won over the king much to the displeasure of Jezebel who refused to take the defeat lying down. Rather she wove up a devious plot to murder Naboth, thereby accomplishing her initial wish of wanting to take away the poor person's land.

Anyway, the struggle between Naboth and king Ahab seems to prove the warning of the prophet Samuel against the creation of a monarchy in Israel. Samuel had correctly forewarned Israel that a monarchy would have its own political economics with farreaching consequences for the nation because it would lead to the creation of classes in society. There would be the noble class, the king's counsellors, the army generals, the courtiers and so forth — all of whom may want to be rewarded. For all these privileged classes would claim certain rights and favours from the king because of special duties they believe they perform for the royal family and the nation. Indeed, there would be nothing unusual in such an arrangement because, as we all know in our own time, if a military coup is staged in a country, the person who becomes the new ruler would tend to surround himself with the military folks. His first act of appreciation is often expressed through dishing out better salaries and privileges for the military, thereby gaining favour with those who put him in power. In the light of the above, king Ahab was thus merely using his class position in his dispossession of Naboth. There are many examples which Old Testament scholars could cite to give their papers depth and content. One such example is the conflict between Jewish tribal exclusivism which was used to sanction the dispossession of the Canaanites, as opposed to the universalism of God's love which is forcefully expressed in the book of Ruth and the book of the prophet Jonah.

With regard to the New Testament uses of culture and religion, there are numerous examples which one could cite. First, there is the story about Jesus's continuing debate with the Jewish ruling classes of his time. In these debates, we are told that Jesus would often quote some Jewish tradition such as "you have heard that it was said that "eye for an eye, and "tooth for a tooth,' but I tell you.."

Second, there were many discriminatory relationships between Jews and Samaritans based on culture and religion reflected in the story of Jesus's discussion with the Samaritan woman at the well. During this discussion Jesus ended up turning the Jewish traditional belief about Samaritans on its head. In addition, there are strands in the Gospel tradition which clearly express themselves against the uses of religion and culture to oppress the so-called gentiles, women, slaves et cetera. Their clearest expression is found in St. Paul's letter to the Galatians where it is argued that for those who are baptized into Christ there is "neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female" because they are now all one in Christ Jesus.

Third, other misuses of Jewish culture and religion to legitimize the oppression of the outcasts in society such as the lepers, the publicans, and the so-called sinners or harlots could be used with great benefit by New Testament scholars to demonstrate the twofold manner in which both culture and religion are often used to reinforce or resist domination.

Over against this, one could cite the Magnificat which expresses a liberative aspect of religion which could be used by the underdogs to resist their domination and oppression at the hands of the powerful. In a similar vein, liberation theology has appealed to Jesus' first sermon to construct a picture of a caring and liberative God who has taken the preferential option for the oppressed and downtrodden.

Fourth, the story about Jesus' feeding of the multitudes gives a clear expression of the twofold uses of culture and religion in society. On one hand, there is a suggestion by Jesus' disciples that the masses must be told to go away and purchase food for themselves since there were not sufficient loaves of bread and fish to feed the masses. The assumption here is that the masses must accept the logic of the existing unequal distribution of economic resources which benefits the capitalist few whose goods must be bought by the underprivileged masses. On the other hand, Jesus uses Jewish cultural and religious arguments to make an important ethical statement, namely, that sharing in situations of human need is the best solution because sharing makes it possible for everyone to have something to eat. After Jesus' death and resurrection, the book of Acts tells us how this new social ethic was carried to its full expression by the early church.

The above examples taken from the biblical material, I believe demonstrated the dialectic nature of both culture and religion as instruments of domination and resistance. By lifting up the twofold
uses of culture and religion, my aim is to highlight a very problematic dimension in the Judeo-Christian tradition which stems from the historic alliance between religious authorities and the ruling classes in most societies. That alliance runs like a red thread through the pages of both the Old and New Testaments and has continued throughout the history of the Church. Invariably this relationship has often implied a co-operation of religious authorities so that they might construct theology in the service of the state. This misuse of religion is made possible by the fact that the Bible itself is a problematic book, and anyone can find material to support almost any cause. Let it suffice here to mention but two main trends in the Hebrew Bible that lend themselves to the use of religion either as instrument of oppression or a resource for liberation. On one hand, there is the so-called royal trend in which religion is being systematically used to legitimate the Israeliite ruling class, as opposed to the prophetic trend which tends to appeal to the covenant tradition to promote the causes of the poor and the marginalized. On the other hand, there is Mosaic trend which, taking its cue from the story of God's appointment of Moses to liberate the Hebrew slaves from Egypt, suggests that God is the God of the poor and the downtrodden. Both traditions exist side by side in the Hebrew Bible. Therefore, as we read the Bible we should not forget the fact that it does not have a single message. Consequently, we are thus called upon to make some choices between different biblical messages, because we simply cannot read the Bible as if it has the same message, representing one trend. Rather, because there are contradictory messages, representing different theological trends in the Bible, we must make up our minds regarding which aspects of its traditions or messages we want to appeal to in order to authorize our theological propositions. Put somewhat differently, while the Bible is there for us as Christians to use, we have to recognize the fact that the rich and powerful read different messages from the Bible, messages that differ from those which are read by the oppressed groups. Put more crudely, different people read the Bible using different social lenses, depending on their "locus" in society. Therefore, it should not surprise us that the dominant groups would most likely appeal to and find in the Bible messages that favour them, while the dominated groups appeal to different texts which support the cause of their own struggle for liberation.

5. THE CHURCH'S PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POWERFUL

In view of the above, it became natural that, when Christian religion became the official religion during the time of Constantine, religious authorities, as part of the dominant class, tended to side with the ruling elites. It was in response to the Church's attempted theological legitimation of the privileges of the dominant few at the expense of
the dominated masses that, as far back as the Middle Ages, we have instances of some christians who banded together to form a sectarian group to revolt against the social and economic deprivation of their group in society. This tradition of revolt against unjust material relations and their theological justification surfaced prominently in the sixth century under the leadership of Thomas Muntzer. Furthermore, prior to the Reformation the urban classes were against the religion of Rome and the feudal social order that it sanctioned. It were these underprivileged groups that supported Luther and other Reformers largely for economic reasons, because they had hoped that the new religion would overthrow the unequal material relationships. This is evident from the fact that as soon as it became clear that the Reformation of Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin was for the kings, princes, and the middle-class and not for the underdogs, new religious splinter groups emerged to champion the Reformation of the working classes, the disinherited, economically poor and oppressed. Therefore since the sixteenth century we have had, for instance, in England denominations of the poor and the socially deprived classes such as the Baptists, Quakers, Methodists, Salvation Army, Jehovah’s Witnesses et cetera. It was therefore logical during the French revolution that both the clergy and ruling class would be roundly condemned as oppressors, because the oppressed masses were keenly aware that the church leadership had for too long taken a preferential option for the mighty and powerful.

Despite the protest of the oppressed groups against the misuse of religion in support of the ruling elite, the tension between theological trends which support the dominant classes and those support the struggle of the dominated classes has continued through the history of the church. It is not surprising therefore that during the nineteenth century missionary evangelizing activities went hand in glove with the colonization of Africa by Western countries. It was during this period that a colonial theology of oppression was developed to give religious sanction for the sociopolitical and economic bondage to which the people of colour were subjected by the Western Christian empires. There are two distinguishing features of this colonial theology. First, it teaches the oppressed people about an authoritarian God, who, as the Supreme Being in the universe, establishes classes in every society. Thus this God insists that there will always be the rich and poor in every society, because this God accepts poverty as part of the divine will for the underdogs, especially the people of colour, while wealth is given to the mighty and powerful who happen to white Christians.

Second, it spiritualizes the gospel and emphasizes a sharp separation between the bodily and spiritual needs of the oppressed people. Hence, this colonial theology permitted the missionary fervour
of saving “individual souls” and the continued support of European subjugation of the people of colour as well as the plundering and expropriation of their land and mineral resources to exist side by side. This theology taught both the imperial oppressor and oppressed that life on earth, especially for the people of colour, was a preparation for the life hereafter. Refusing to focus concretely on what is wrong in the sociopolitical and economic relationships missionary theology, at the service of imperial policies, taught the oppressed people about the individualistic sins of the heart, the inevitable rottenness of human life in our fallen world, and human hopelessness in the face of sin — all of which made human brotherhood and sisterhood, even among those who call themselves Christians, unrealizable on this side of the grave. Not surprisingly, white missionaries, who seem to have been more impressed by the spiritual sins or vices to which African “savages” had succumbed rather than by the social evils under which they were subjected to by colonialists, saw as part of their duty to warn the oppressed against worldly desires of comfort, political freedom, self-fulfillment and economic equality with their white masters.

6. THE CONTRIBUTION OF AFRICAN ANTHROPOLOGY TO CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

In the light of this reductionism of colonial theology, which tends to limit the application and relevance of the gospel to the so-called individual or spiritual sphere and claims that individuals could be saved in the midst of broken human relationships and socio-economic injustices in which the dominant West allows the African people to waste away under the crushing burden of oppression and exploitation, I believe that African theologians have a contribution to make by drawing from the insights of the rich African anthropology. It is common knowledge that African anthropology, as opposed to the otherworldly Christianity to which our people were converted, is human-centred and socially oriented. Accordingly, individuals were continually reminded that a fulfilling life cannot be lived in isolation from their human fellows. Rather life is possible only in communal relationships in which individuals try to strike balance between the private life and the social life, thus maintaining the network of relationships with their fellows so that every person is provided with a space to breathe and live a meaningful life. This human-centred anthropology is best expressed in Northern Sotho, when it is said: *Motho ke motho ka batho*, which means a human being is human only because of others, with others and for others. Hence it was important to teach people to avoid dehumanizing and bad relationships, by refraining from activities that are injurious to our human fellows or threaten to undermine the social fibre and stability of the community.
The interesting aspect of this African anthropology, in my view, lies in its understanding of sin and evil which are believed to manifest themselves in the human attempt to destroy, to diminish and threaten the life of the individual of our human fellows. In other words, sin was not understood primarily as a problem between the individual and God, a problem that could solved if the sinner makes things right with God and yet is allowed to continue to oppress one’s fellow human beings and thereby destroy their lives. Rather sin and evil were measured in terms of the life of individual human beings who suffer injustice, oppression, and destruction at the hands of their human fellows. Put somewhat differently, sin and evil were understood more in terms of the breach of loving relationships between human beings. Thus sin and evil manifest themselves in the lack of love in interpersonal relationships, through the state of absence of brotherhood and sisterhood. This is because sin and evil are understood more in terms of the violence and destruction that people do to or perpetuate against one another than in terms of the human transgression of the divine law against God. For Africans were smart to know that in the final analysis it is not the Almighty, self-sufficient God who suffers injustice at the hands of human exploiters of their fellows. Rather human beings are the ones who suffer evil in the social sphere. However, because human beings suffer evil at the hands of their human fellows, God who is the Creator of all human beings is also offended by the deeds of those who perpetrate evil in society. For Africans, therefore, the primary issue was a social one, namely, how do we, as individuals and communities, live with one another? In this African anthropological perspective, it is impossible to escape the consequences of one’s actions in relation to our neighbours, by simply running to a church to confess one’s sins so that the priest could pronounce absolution in order to assure the evil doer that things are fine before God. No, the issue was taken a bit further when the sinful person was forced to come to terms with the consequences of his or her actions by being called upon to pay reparations for the wrongs he or she had done to his or her fellows.

This African anthropological perspective on sin and evil has much to teach Christians and can help us better understand some aspects of sin in the Bible. For as I have pointed out earlier on, most of Western theology has not fully understood the problem of sin because their tendency to define sin in the light of Genesis 3, thereby losing sight of the fact that Genesis 4 has also to be taken into account in one’s understanding of sin. Indeed, any attempt to understand sin exclusively in terms of its vertical or horizontal dimensions can only result in distorted notion of sin. For as African anthropology reminds us, it is impossible to relate to God alone at the exclusion of our fellow human beings. For the divine and human realities are
interrelated. This is confirmed by the central biblical message which clearly teaches us that sin is both a vertical and horizontal reality. It is for this reason the when Jesus was asked: "What is the great commandment in the law?" he flatly refused to be drawn into some kind theological reductionism that restricts the only to the human condition before the righteous God. Rather Jesus reminded his listeners that God's law has two dimensions: The first is that we must love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind. The second, as important as the first, is to love our human fellows as ourselves.\(^{15}\) Jesus was thus restating the summary of God's law as set out in the Torah.\(^ {16}\) God's law, Jesus reminded his listeners, intends to regulate the multiple network of relationships into which all human beings find themselves between God and human beings, and among human beings themselves. In other words, Jesus reminded his listeners that they do not have to choose between faith and ethic because a healthy relationship among human beings and between human beings and God are both necessary, as Genesis 3 and Genesis 4 clearly points out.

Similarly, by focusing on the centrality of these relationships, African anthropology has a contribution to make to Christian theology, by reminding theologians, that any good theology should make the intrinsic link between right believing and right doing — none of which can stand on its own without the other. For as Jesus reminded his religious contemporaries right belief (orthodoxy) and right doing (orthopraxis) belong together; both are equally important test of the authenticity and integrity of any true religion and piety. Here African anthropology and central biblical message converge in teaching us that faith without good works is dead.

In conclusion, it seems to me that, despite the fact there are aspects in African culture and religion which we must identify as oppressive, there is also a lot that we, as African Christians, can use to highlight certain passages in the Scripture and thereby enrich Christian Theology.

5. Ibid., pp. 71-73.
1. INTRODUCTION

A reading of the Bible from a black perspective must situate itself squarely and deliberately within the study of black history and culture. In order, however, that it should be a genuinely liberating reading, it also has to be a critical practice. By this I mean that it has to aim at being a critical appropriation of black historical and cultural texts (written and unwritten) on the one hand, and of the texts of Scripture on the other hand. From this there follows the implication that not all of black history and culture nor all of the biblical texts can be assumed to be liberating for black oppressed and exploited people.

It is important in this essay, therefore, to identify aspects of black history and culture that are significant for reading the Bible under the theme of wealth and poverty from the black perspective. From my point of view, any such reading must tackle the following issues: Land, Economy and Culture. These issues represent the poles around which the problems of wealth and poverty revolve. A black analysis of wealth and poverty in the Bible must consequently ask in what way these factors define the position of the people of ancient Israel in their society. Similarly, it must enquire into the various locations of black people in the different phases of their history. The question of the place of people in society, whether ancient Israel or black Africa already touches on the issues of land and economy.

LAND AND ECONOMY

In the entire social history of ancient Israel land was a fundamental means of production. As such, ownership or non-ownership of land formed the basis of the wealth or poverty of those people.

Norman Gottwald, in his monumental work on the redefinition of the origins of ancient Israel, has contributed significantly to our understanding of the role of land in the enrichment or impoverishment of social classes in that society. According to Gottwald the basis of the exodus movement is the struggle over ownership, control of and ability to work the land. In the period of the Amarna letters bitter struggles were fought by peasant producers inside Palestine for continued ownership and control of their land. The reason being that the meagre agricultural economic surplus which
the peasant classes were producing was being syphoned off by the comprador (messenger) Palestinian ruling class. This internal, local oppressor-class consisted of the chiefs and kings of the Palestinian city states.

Their task was to squeeze the socially produced economic surplus out of the direct producers in order to pay for the reproduction of their own class. It was also geared at providing maintenance of the Egyptian colonial administrative and military personnel garrisoned in each of the city states of Palestine. This class also extracted tribute which each colonial city state was obligated to pay to the colonial power. The process of control over the social and economic surplus produced by the peasant classes inevitably led to all manner of alienation and conflict. The first type of alienation is of course the estrangement of the products of the labour of the oppressed and exploited peasants. These Palestinian underclasses were further alienated from the source of their wealth, namely, their labour which they expended in production and from land on which their labour was expended. The alienation of land happened along two different ways. In some instances peasants fell into the slavery of debt because they had used their plots of land as collateral security in order to obtain loans to enable them to participate in the next round of production. They would fall into slavery of debt because the next round of production would not able to create the surplus required for the peasant producer to service the loan, to pay tribute, to subsist with their family and to join the next round of agricultural productive activities. In other cases land alienation occurred through sheer dispossession. The wealthy classes were able to exercise their power over the powerless peasant producers in such a way that they were able to expand their estates into large latifundia on which large gangs of alienated labour, that is, workers who no longer had any control over their labour were employed. Many others existed on the fringes of this arrangement as rural proletariat.

The period just preceding the exodus was characterised by large waves of unrest and insurrection throughout what had until then been known as the Egyptian empire. This included the city states of Palestine. The official correspondence between the chiefs of the city states and the Egyptian imperial capital known as the Amarna letters point to the social and economic origins of this unrest and insurrection in the political economy of Palestine as we have described above.

One important group of social-cultural and political resisters who feature prominently in the Amarna letters is called the “apiru”. A common characteristic of the “apiru” is their dislocation within the Palestinian society of that time. Some of them were driven into one
or other form of social banditry. Others became mercenaries in the military conflicts that took place frequently among the city states of Palestine. Still others engaged in deliberate revolutionary action against the state feudalism of the Palestinian city states. As we said above, their common socio-economic dislocation derived fundamentally from landlessness into which they had fallen.

It is arguably the case that the rest of the history of the biblical communities from the Davidic and solomonic monarchical era to the Babylonian exilic period and the subsequent New Testament time under Roman rule, has been the history of the struggle over land. Wealth and poverty in the biblical experience are a consequence or result of ownership or lack of ownership of land.

Nowhere in the Bible is the conflict between the wealthy and the poor as strongly and starkly demonstrated as in the narrative on Naboth’s vineyard. Here again the key bone of contention is land. In fact 1 Kings 21 embodies remarkably almost all the issues that inspire Black Theology’s reflections on the question of wealth and poverty. I refer here specifically to Black Theology in South Africa. As a theory of the weapon of faith of the black oppressed and exploited masses in South Africa, Black Theology would identify with the fundamental issues of 1 Kings 21. These are: 1) vineyard—later significantly referred to as ‘nahalah’ (inheritance, lefa, boshwa, ilifa). The matter of land is key to this issue every time the Bible refers to vineyards or nahalas. For Blacks in South Africa no other issue qualifies better as nahalah, (lef a la bo-Ntata rona, boshwa jwa bo-Rrarona, ilifa IoBao), an inheritance from the ancestors, than land. The significance of vineyards as economic power bases which frame the freedom or unfreedom of the people of the Bible appears clearly in the text in Micah 4:3-4: “... They will beat their swords into plowshares, their spears into pruning knives... Each man (sic) shall sit under his vine, under his fig tree; and no one will be terrorised, for the mouth of Yahweh of hosts has spoken.” In my book entitled “Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theofogy in South Africa” I have dared to suggest that this is the only really socialist part of the Bible, albeit the most representative of the aspirations and struggles of the majority of the people of God in the Bible in all the phases of biblical history. 2) Fair price (Verse 2) — symbolising the power relations behind the market.

The issues of wealth and poverty in South Africa today touch significantly on the role of the economic market. For those who have power and possess wealth the market forces of the economic system of “free enterprise” should be left to determine the creation and distribution of wealth. The powerless majority of black people in South Africa have no faith in the market. They argue that the market
is an instrument of competition among those who already own wealth which they, the blacks have produced. It is the basis for the further dispossession of the oppressed and exploited black people. The notion, therefore, of "a fair price" as is enunciated by the ruling classes of biblical times (Ahab, etc.) as well as the economic bosses of our time is a hoax. 3) Political power is represented in the text by references to the king's ability to remove people forcefully from their land (verses 6 and 7) and the role of the officials and leading citizens of Jezreel in the deliberate miscarriage of justice. One parallel in contemporary black experience would be the role of the government, community councillors and homeland leaders in the process of dispossession of black people. 4) Violence — a feature in the text which a black theological reading of this narrative could not miss, in many ways always accompanies the struggle between the wealthy and the poor both in the Biblical and contemporary societies. In our situation in particular, black people have historically been on the receiving end of this process.

Three levels are discernible in the text with regard to the question of violence. Firstly, there is the violence of the state, institutional violence, demonstrated in the act of land expropriation by the king from Naboth. Secondly, there is the violence of the political functionaries of the state whose force eventuates in the death of Naboth. Thirdly, there is the violence that is necessarily embodied in the state as an instrument of class rule.

The violence referred to in 1 Kings 21:23-24 literally happens later as described in 1 Kings 22:35-37 and 2 Kings 9:30-37. A black theological reading, grounded in the experience of the black community, would be able, of necessity, to link the experience of unprecedented violence against and in the black community of the 1980's and 1990's to the violence in this text. The basis of such a linking is that this community, like its counterpart in the northern monarchy of king Ahab, is characterised by immense poverty leading to all manner of violence in it, against it and by it. 5) The role of ideology is a point of particular interest to a black theological interpreter of the Bible.

There are two levels in which ideology is involved here. Firstly, it is a question of how, in the events of the story, ideology operated to justify particular actors and actions. This is illustrated by the use of state ideology when Jezebel asks of king Ahab: "Are you the king or aren't you?" (v.7) Or when she says in the letters she wrote to the officials and leading citizens of Jezreel: "Proclaim a day of fasting, call the people together, and give Naboth the place of honour. Get a couple of scoundrels to accuse him to his face of cursing God and the king ... " (v.9-10). Secondly, ideology operates
here at the level of the text itself. A black theological reading recognises that ideology does not only function in the historical situation described by the text but that the text itself has its own ideological practice. On which side, for example, are our sympathies required? The author/s of this story invoke(s) God not only to bring a moral critique to bear on the actions of the powerful classes but to introduce into the discourse of the text another struggle: the struggle between the state and the prophets. The latter group is represented by Elijah. The question of the political economy of the rise and history of the prophetic movement and its message is one that requires separate treatment. Suffice it to note that here as in every other place where prophets arise, the dispossessed cease to speak for themselves. Their voice is replaced by that of the prophet. In this text Naboth’s voice is limited to his protest: ‘I inherited this vineyard from my ancestors, ... the Lord forbid that I should let you have it!” (v. 3).

Be that as it may, in the ideological practice of the text there is the God of Naboth who is about to be rendered poor by the experience of land expropriation and the God of Elijah who represents the middle class interests of the Deuteronomistic writer who has a bone to chew with the Northern monarchy of ‘‘King Jeroboam son of Nebat. ‘‘ verses 20ff. Questions of wealth and poverty are articulated differently by different ideological practices in the Bible, even within the same text. Thus a black theological reading of the Bible is at the same time an ideological reading, as indeed all readings of the Bible are. The only real question is in whose social class, racial, cultural, and gender interests is the reading taking place?

CULTURE.

The struggle to free oneself from poverty that is born of landlessness is cultural. This is so because the wealth of the powerful classes both in the Bible and in black history was also a function of cultural domination. As Amilcar Cabral points out:

Study of the history of liberation struggles shows that they have generally been preceded by an upsurge of cultural manifestations, which progressively harden into an attempt, successfully or not, to assert the cultural personality of the dominated people by an act of denial of the culture of the oppressor. Whatever the conditions of subjection of a people to foreign domination and the influence of economic, political and social factors in the exercise of this domination, it is generally within the cultural factor that we find the cultural germ of challenge which leads to the structuring and development of the liberation movement (1980: 142-143).

Scholars of the Bible have from time immemorial argued that in the experience of the biblical communities there is no division of labour
between the spiritual and material aspects of life. The cultural resistance, therefore, of the oppressed communities of the Bible has inevitably shown a religious form. Culture in the Bible, as indeed in the black communities, is spiritual in character albeit in effect the mode and means in which the material life of the people manifests itself.

It is thus not surprising that to the extent that the society is socio-economically homogeneous it has one culture, although such a culture may not be evenly developed. Where, however, there are divisions based on the possession of wealth or the lack of it, we must of necessity speak of the culture of the wealthy and the culture of the poor. In the Bible it manifests itself in terms of the differences in ethos of the various covenants. For example, the covenant with Moses on mount Sinai has produced a perspective in the Bible that can be traced throughout. It is a perspective which represents a movement of protest and struggle among the poor and disinherited. The God of this perspective tends to intervene decisively against forms of oppression and exploitation. Conversely, the covenant with David represents a movement in the Bible whose emphasis is on law and order, consolidation among the established and the secure classes of society. This perspective “articulates its theological vision in terms of a God who faithfully abides and sustains on behalf of the ordering.” (W. Brueggemann, in N.K. Gottwald, 1983:308f.).

In the history of struggle against poverty and oppression in the Bible the people of Israel have constantly appealed to the cultural-spiritual traditions of resistance. Sometimes, however, these traditions exist in a form that shows they have been coopted by the wealthy and powerful classes to be used to legitimise the power and wealth of the ruling classes. The Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7 is a case in point.

It is on the basis of this that Black Theology insists on a critical historical and biblical hermeneutics of liberation. No culture of the Bible is automatically liberating. Once again, the task of the biblical cultural worker involved in the struggle for freedom from poverty is to liberate the Bible so that the Bible can liberate us. Cabral is once more right when he writes:

A people who free themselves from foreign domination will not be culturally free unless, without underestimating the importance of positive contributions from the oppressor’s culture and other cultures, they return to the upwards paths of their own culture . . We see, therefore that, if imperialist domination has the vital need to practise cultural oppression, national liberation is necessarily an act of culture (1980: 143).
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Restitution/Reparation: A Commitment to Justice and Peace

by Dr. D. Mosoma (UNISA)

This paper attempts to show that socio-economic and political justice and peace in South Africa imply land restitution. That is to say, without it, the conditions necessary for the creation of a just, democratic social order marked by shalom cannot be realized. In accordance with this thesis, I shall endeavor to examine some elements which form the thread of this paper. The elements include: 1. Black reaction to land dispossession, 2. African Religion and Culture, 3. moral argument for restitution; and, 4. theological underpinnings for Restitution drawing from both the Jubilee corpus and Rustenburg Declaration.

Black reaction to land dispossession

In all fairness, one cannot seriously speak of justice without first speaking about injustice. Similarly, one cannot fruitfully talk about restitution without, at the same time, reflecting on the history of land dispossession. The problem of restitution arises, for the most part, out of the historical matrix of land dispossession by means of political power, naked military force and legal decree. This historical reality is embodied and expressed in the land Acts of 1913 and 1936. Blacks consider these Acts as the cornerstones of legal land dispossession. Evidently, the Acts promulgated had decreed and designated 87% of the land to Whites while Blacks were confined to 13% of the barren land. Population removals and resettlement programmes were a direct consequence of these infamous Acts. Although the Acts are in the process of being repealed, one cannot expect the government to address the historical land claims and redress of the effects of apartheid as the white Paper has already demonstrated. Blacks agree that they are the sole owners of the land and passionately articulate the issue of unjust legal land dispossession. Tatu Joyi, a Thembu sage, strikingly summarized the history of legal land dispossession when he said, "... abantu... were defeated by the white people's papers, which took by law, their law, what they could not take by war. That was their witchcraft and magic." In addition he said: "White man brought a piece of paper and made Ngangelizwe put his mark on it. He then said that the paper gave him possession of the land and when Ngengelizwe disputed that, the white man took him to court and the court looked at the paper and said Ngenegelizwe had given the white man 4,000 morgan of land. The court said white people needed the land of the Thembus to protect themselves from the Thembus!"
Joyi’s account is not alien to the countless number of the indigenous people. The story of dispossession has been told constantly and it forms the basis of the struggle. That is to say, for blacks the struggle is not based on some abstract formal principles but it is firmly concretised in land. Letswalo gives an analytic testimony of how the peasants were forced from the indispensable land in order to give way for white settlement or farming. She speaks of the alienation of the lands previously owned by the indigenous populations. Davenport concurs with Letswalo in his assertion that “White settlers in South Africa stole or acquired land from Blacks.... that the original owners of the land were transformed into tenants; and that more and more people of these tenants became redundants in White capitalist agriculture.”

Desmond Tutu attributes land dispossession to conquest by white “superior fire power.” Consequently, he regards whites as “temporary sojourners.” In support of his assertions, he states, in part, that:

“They (whites) decided to settle and build castles and to take over large tracks of land not so much as by your leave and they resented the indigenous people whom they had found in possession when they arrived and had now displaced. When these first settlers found British rule irksome, they ventured into the interior capturing vast pieces of land through conquest because of their superior firing power.”

The argument Tutu advances is that the claim whites make for land ownership is by any stretch of imaginable logic implausible because it is based on a falsified fact of history. The falsification of history has to do with both the denial of the fact that the settlers did not bring land with them, and that upon their arrival they settled in an unoccupied land. The claim that the land was not occupied then, is not sufficient justification for plausible white ownership of the indigenous land. Tutu also notes that the acquisition of land by conquest through “the barrel of the gun” was soon replaced by “more sophisticated way of legislation passed through democratic process,” a process that has progressively eroded “land rights to Blacks” and effectively rendered them landless. That is to say, both the legislation passed through pseudo-democratic mechanism and conquest produced the same effect regarding land dispossession. Like Tutu, Mgojo places the land question at the center of political discourse stating that “we cannot avoid it.” Further, he argues:

“the land must be returned to the people. The land cannot be owned by the few and worked by the many. The land is the future of the people and without it, the majority of the people will be lost.”

Mgojo makes close connection between the political future of the people and land. For him, any political order that does not address
the issue of land reparation consigns people to some form of political utopia. Both ANC and PAC agree on the fact that the whites have robbed the indigenous people of their land. However, they disagree about the strategies for restoring the land to the people because of their differing social visions. For PAC the land historically and morally belongs to the people and to them alone. This position makes reparation a non-negotiable issue, since it is the only basis upon which a reconciled political transformation can be achieved. While for the ANC the “South Africa (land) belongs to all who live in it, Black and White.” — Freedom Charter. While this statement seeks to demonstrate that each person has legitimate access to land ownership, it, at the same time, nullifies any land restitutio nary claims, since it is illogical to advance restitutional claim to a property from someone whom you consider to be its owner. Put differently, by stating that the “South Africa belongs to all,” one cannot at the same breadth demand restitution.

African Religion and Culture

These terse black reflections on landlessness give rise to a crucial question: why after 360 years are the black pastors and politicians uncompromisingly demand that the land be returned to its original owners? The persistent or constant demand for land return is necessitated, in part, by the black peoples’ schizophrenic behaviour — a behaviour that reflects brokenness of black personality conditioned by years of apartheid’s mental and spiritual occupation. Their alienation from the land contributed drastically to a low self-image of black personality. The Bible says if you are in Christ you are a new creature. Blacks find it difficult to experience the new creaturely reality because of what they consider to be the political and social truncation of their humanity. The split personality syndrome of the black humanity is a direct consequence of the effects of apartheid’s political uprooting and alienating praxis. In the African traditional religion there is close connection between the living and the “living dead:” ancestors. There is a constant communication between them. The reverence of the ancestors is inextricably bound with a high degree of land reverence. “Ali Marui, a political scientist, attests to this fact when he says:

“The mystique of land reverence in Africa is partly a compact between the living, the dead and the unborn. Where the ancestors are buried, there the soul of the clan resides, and there the prospects of health of the next generation should be sought.”

The land is quite fundamental to the African people because it is the shrine of the ancestors and the very substance life. Landlessness renders an African politically impotent and spiritually bankrupt, hence the problem of split identity. For Africans, history and
identity are intimately bound with the land. A statement drawn up by the workshop on "Race and Minority Issues" under the auspices of the World Council of Churches in 1978 makes same point: "The history and identity of our people are intimately bound up with the land, and therefore our history and self-understanding become meaningful only when they are related to our land. Land is the primary means of our continuity as a people, and it connects our past with the present, and it is the hope our future."

The question as to whether or not the land is a gift from the ancestors in non-negotiable for the indigenous people and it forms the basis of their self-understanding and bondedness to the soil from whence they came to which they shall return. The sacredness of the land, mountains valleys and trees is related to its being a gift. Indeed the land has religious significance. This truth, the indigenous people's sense of relatedness to the land, underlies the contention overland between South African blacks and the white society today. These disputes have a theological dimension which generally goes unrecognized. Land, for blacks, is sacred and central to their whole civilization. It cannot be bought or sold, for it belongs to the living, the dead and the yet unborn. It cannot be ravaged and exploited beyond its capacity for renewal, since it is the living link between the past memories and expectant future in which the new generation will actively participate. Let me hasten to say that the African understanding of the land displays some important similarities with the Judaeo-christian tradition. 1 Kings 21 recounts Naboth's refusal to sell the vineyard because the land is sacred; land is a gift that cannot be sold. Naboth says in substance, (v.3). "I inherited this vineyard from my ancestors... The Lord forbid that I should let you have it! "The creation account in Genesis 2 links humanity with the earth; humanity is created out of the earth." The African understanding of land can serve as one of the sources of African view of justice. For instance, the onto-genetic conception of justice which expresses justice as relational is at the core of the African moral thought. This idea is based on the African idiom, derived from the African way of life, which says: "Motho ke motho ka ba bangwe batho," meaning one's humanity is depended on the humanity of others. Further, it means that one's humanity is defined, complemented and enhanced by the humanity of others. The reciprocal interdependence of our humanity provides new basis for doing theology and politics. Africans knew that the poverty of any of its members was an indictment to the community's well-being. How the community treated those in need became a criterion by which the community's practice of justice was measured. The idea of human interdependence and its corresponding view of justice gave rise to Mafisa practice which practice helped to safeguard the poor and strangers against perpetual material poverty. That is to
say, the strangers were given material self-defense not only against poverty, but also against humiliation and degradation. For Africans, it would be morally untenable to deprive people access to the land as this would render them less human. For this reason, the African thought gives rational justification for land restitution in that it inextricably connects the wholeness of life with land. Having said this, it is essential to observe that the issue of land restitution is a crucial one today. Let us, therefore, examine the moral ground on which a case for restitution could be made.

The Moral argument for Restitution

The question of restitution is new in South Africa, but it has been treated by some theologians (Aquinas) and political thinkers. In the 1960s the issue gained prominence in the African American Civil Rights struggle. The demands were made for reparation of the African American indignities suffered and alienation from their continent of birth. However, the demand for reparation fell on a deaf ear and it was partially replaced instead by affirmative action. The issue, however, is on what ground could a demand for restitution in this country be based? A claim for reparation arises in a situation where one's property has been forcibly taken without the consent of the owner. Thomas Aquinas argues for the necessity of "restitution of what has been unjustly taken... Furthermore, he reasons, "... a man is bound to restore several times over the amount (property) he has taken unjustly." The unjust taking of someone's property implies violation of justice. For this reason, the demand for restitution is essential in the supposition that justice has been effectively violated. Consequently, the restoration of the imbalance caused by such an unjust appropriation is the only moral thing to do. In pursuance of this line of thought, Fray Pedro employs a simile to express the significance of restitution. He says:

"As medicine is necessary to help repair the wounds which we suffer in our flesh and to put the body back in its pristine condition of health, so also is restitution necessary to close up the wounds caused by a violation of the virtue of justice, to put once again in their original condition of balance and equity."

This apt simile demonstrates a political healing that restitution effects as an act of restorative or commutative justice. More importantly, it reveals two things: 1. it acknowledges that the act of taking one's property causes or inflicts wounds, 2. that such wounds cannot be wished away, but have to be nursed. In a word, it calls for appropriate restitutionary measures. As Tutu once said, if you have my pen, it is ludicrous to say let us reconcile before you return my pen. For him genuine reconciliation can only take place if the object taken is returned. The same logic applies to land which is the
object taken by whites. Further, Pedro reminds us that "... not every giving back of a taken object is to be called restitution, but that only through which a thing is given back that was already due in justice." For this reason, he defines restitution as "the returning of a taken object which was due in justice."¹⁵ It can be deduced from the above simile that the essence of restitution is the "re-establishment of the equilibrium put out of balance by the violation of justice."¹⁶ For Pedro, like Aquinas, restitution and justice are closely linked together. That is to say, restitution implies violation of justice. One can, therefore, conclude that the population removals, expropriation of tribal lands and other forms of landlessness constitute basic violation of the tenets of justice. The fact that justice has been violated serves as the moral basis for political resistance to reclaim the object taken: land. The question is whose justice? In South Africa there are two kinds of justice: 1. Justice for the powerful (whites) and justice for the many (blacks). When we speak about justice we mean different things. That is to say, the understanding of justice is racially determined. Given our distorted view of justice, the church is challenged to recapture a holistic image of justice that does not compromise and shrink from its confrontation with a world dominated by injustice.

Theological underpinnings for Restitution

The jubilee year tradition may serve as a resource and a guide for our deliberation on the issue restitutary justice. It is important to note, however, that the jubilee year event served as a protection for the Israelites against exploitation by another Israelite. To appropriate this tradition for our political circumstances may be stretching the tradition too much. The reason for this caution is: first, that our situation, unlike that of the Israelites, is marked by race. So that those to whom restitution is due are not of the same skin-colour, second, our situation is, in many respects, different from that of the Israelites, and third, "the jubilee provisions emerged as the Israelite's understanding of God's requirement for justice in the midst of injustice in a particular historical setting."¹⁷ Third, it must be noted that Jubilee is not a blueprint for a perfect social political order, it does present a new reading of the text and its implications in our quest for social and political construction. However, the tradition provides significant insights, which cannot be ignored. Clearly, the Jubilee year was both a political and theological event. Political, in that it culminated in the emancipation of the slaves accompanied by social and economic structuring. The jubilee event conjures two images: liberation and economic restructuring. That is to say, the land and property expropriated and confiscated from the people due to economic difficulties were returned. It was an occasion for the people to return to their land and property of his "their ancestor" (Lev.25:41). Clan and families were to make a fresh start again.
In speaking about the importance of Jubilee event for social construction, Lebacqz says:

"It is an image of reclamation. Reclamation means both the returning of something taken away and the action of calling or bringing back from wrongdoing. What is reclaimed is set right, renewed. It ‘jubilee’ shows clearly the centrality of economic injustice and its relation to loss of political power."

It was not simple call for emancipation without corresponding appropriate structural innovation. To be sure, political emancipation without corresponding economic well-being embodied in land is a fraud. For this reason, Ringe states that jubilee points to a radical “change in the power relationship between oppressor and oppressed.”

The jubilee makes political power and economic justice inextricably bound together. That is to say, any false dichotomy between the two realities is not acceptable. The land was the primary focus of genuine political transformation because "the land was the major source of income and hence the focus of oppression." The purpose for land return was to be "a major form of redress of injustice. More importantly, "to ensure that "the former debtor could attain economic independence instead of merely beginning a new cycle of poverty and indebtedness." Ringe makes a close connection between liberation and land repossession. The one without the other does not create conditions conducive to justice and peace.

Like Ringe, Lebacqz assert that the release of slaves was immediately followed by "the release from indebtedness and the re-lease of the land so that people can begin again." Further, she attests, "there is not only freedom from enslavement, but agenuine economic and political restructuring that provides the possibilities of new beginning." This event provides holistic political order based on equity and economic renovation. The jubilee tradition was a theological one because it was predicated upon the will of Jahweh. That is to say, the emancipatory justice of the oppressed was not antithetical to God’s justice. The healing that this liberation brought was to effect same healing between the oppressed and their alienated environment: land. This can only happen when communities and individuals are allowed to have an access to the land, which is a means of production and a source of life. The Biblical injunction which says, ".. proclaim liberty throughout the land. It shall be a jubilee year for you; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan" (Lev. 25: 10), contains, according to Lebacqz, two important elements: liberation and the idea of redress. The justice reflected in this passage favoured those who were on the receiving end of the society. The liberty referred to here involved both the oppressor and the oppressed, in that the oppressor would terminate his oppressive power, while the oppressed would also be released from the tentacles of oppression. For Lebacqz,
"the Jubilee year and its related sabbatical and release images depend on the fundamental image of; the interdependence of human beings and our dependence on God." Further, she argues, if justice is "to each his/her own," then the jubilee makes clear that his "own" can be judged only in the light of God's interventions. Family land is returned and slaves are freed, not because they "deserve" it by some human calculation, but because it is the best approximation of God's justice in an unjust world."25

Rustenburg Declaration

The treatment of the Jubilee year tradition leads to a reflection on the contemporary demand for restitutionary justice. The declaration places a high premium on what it calls the "the affirmative acts of restitution."26 The call for affirmative action reduces the struggle for liberation into a Civil Rights one. In the United States of American from which the idea of Affirmative action was first applied, the white majority opted for this practice, rather than offering comprehensive reparation.

In our country, however, it is ironical that the black majority place themselves under the mercy and whim of the white minority by uncritically advocating Affirmative acts of restitution. The document's failure to address concretely the question of land restitution leaves much to be desired. The documents seems to create an impression that it is preoccupied with promoting church relations, rather than giving substantive form and content to the theology of land restitution. It can be argued that the Church's lack of enthusiasm in seriously treating the issue of land restitution demonstrates its complicity in land dispossession. The fact that the declaration calls for "state and church to restore and to the dispossessed people," is to be welcomed but its failure to spell out the mechanism by which land restoration is to be accomplished makes the call somewhat suspect. As in the jubilee event, the Rustenburg declaration cites the issue of land restitution. Both the Jubilee and Rustenburg declaration connect justice and peace to land restitution. This predication makes restitution a necessary condition for the attainment of lasting peace and justice.

Conclusion

There are two approaches that the debate on land restitution should take into account: First, the conquest approach bases its land claims on conquest rather than on indigenous origin. Most whites in this country subscribe to this approach. However, the danger of the conquest approach is that it elicits revolutionary response from those whose legitimate land claims are based on the indigenous grounds. Second, the restitutionary approach acknowledges the indigenous
origin as an authentic ground for land ownership. For this reason, this approach yields positive results for those whose primary aim is the creation of a harmonious community of persons. Whites in this country should admit their role in black land dispossession. Such truth will undoubtaly free them and help them to realise and accept that land restitution is a form of justice that participates in the enhancement of the "wholess of life" — justice that breaks the stronghold of economic and political dependency and provide a future characterised by jubilee and celebration of life. Admittedly, the exponents of land restitution do not rule out the need for a fair and equitable land distribution, but they argue that land distribution is the sole prerogative of the indigenous owners, rather than of the illegal occupants.

NOTES

1. Fatima Meer, Higher than Hope: The Authorized Biography of Nelson, (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), p. 15. One can deduce two things from this statement: (a) the first introduction of the title deed, and (b) private ownership of land.
5. Ibid.
7. The ANC prescribes to Non-Racialist democratic vision, while PAC supports africanist Socialist democratic vision.
11. Mafisa Practice: The Practice mandated Individuals and community to provide basic material means to the poor and strangers to enable them to start new life. Depending on the individual needs, the community provided either a cow for milk or a piece of land and seeds. This was not a form of charity. The aim was to facilitate the poor's material independence (break the circle of material or economic dependency) rather than always depending on the benevolent handouts offered to them.
13. Ibid., p. 108.
15. Ibid., p. 50.
16. Ibid., p. 51.
18. Many tribes which have been forcibly removed from their ancestral land demand that they should be allowed to return to their former lands. For example the residents of mogopa, Bakubung and other tribes, will not rest until the government has conceded to their demands. See Saturday Star, March 16, 1991, p. 11.
22. Ibid.
25. Ibid. p. 128.
26. Ibid. p. 128.
27. Rustenburg Declaration, (National Conference of Churches in South Africa, November 1990), Section 4. 1.2.
The African Version of Christianity

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(Paper read at the Annual Bishops’ Conference of Council of African Independent Churches (CAIC) held at Otimati on May 19-21, 1988)

INTRODUCTION

Thanks very much for giving me the opportunity to read a paper at this conference. I have decided to speak about the African version of Christianity. To avoid generalizations, I shall, however, specifically speak about the Pedi (Northern Sotho) version of Christianity. I believe that this represents the African version of Christianity among the Pedi speaking Africans.

It is my contention that though God is not bound by any human culture God chooses to operate within or in terms of a given culture. God does not require that the converts abandon most or all of their own cultural systems as a concomitant of their conversion to Christianity. God knows very well that the converts cannot escape their culture. What the divine seeks, instead, is “to cooperate with human beings in the use of their culture for God’s glory”. Kraft rightly says, “It is allegiance to the Satanic use of that same culture that He stands against, not the culture itself.”

God knows that people of different cultures perceive the divine in quite different ways because of their different world views. The strong desire for African Christianity by the majority of the present generation of African Christians endorses this. The missionaries were mistaken to think that the Western culture is the only way through which Christianity can be expressed. God uses any given culture as the vehicle for interaction with human beings. Thus, faith, conversion, and God’s Kingdom emerge only through God’s interaction with human beings within a given culture. Anything more or less than this is doomed to fail.

1. THE PEDI IDEA OF GOD

The Pedi version of Christianity has always been part and parcel of the evolution of Pedi Christianity. To many Pedi Christians awareness of the nearness of God and his concern with the personal circumstances of believers is an essential feature of their faith. Thus they understand the Christian God in terms of the existential experience underlying the Pedi notion of Modimo (God). Modimo for them retains his/her basis character as the source of all dynamic
power, who is infinitely beyond human prediction, comprehension, or influence. On the other hand, they perceive God as the loving parent who cares for his/her children and who may be approached directly and personally.

In this way they have abandoned the traditional belief in a distant and unconcerned supreme Being. But the belief that God is the source of all dynamic power has affected tremendously their understanding of prayer. Among Zionists, for instance, prayer is used as a magical technique for tapping supernatural power. On the other hand for them the Pedi expression “Ke Modimo” (it is God which is used in case of unexpected death), is a prayer which expresses a sigh of relief. It relieves them of thinking in terms of sorcery. They believe that God is completely in control. By retaining this characteristic of the Pedi notion of God, Pedi Christians still believe that no one can resist what God has done. Thus acquiescence is one of the main characteristics of Pedi Christianity. Pedi Christians place much emphasis on God the parent than on Christ as the Son of God. Jesus for them is the Son of Man rather than the Son of God. They regard him, therefore, as the great of the Church rather than as one with God the partner. Thus they recognise Jesus as mediator who suffered and died for humanity’s salvation and set an example of humility, endurance, love, and compassion. As such for them he is not the ultimate authority. He was sent by Modimo. However, they have accepted the idea of the self-disclosure of Modimo as a person in his/her promise. They perceive God as the personal power which needs to be acknowledged as the author, owner and Lord of all reality, and as the source of life and death, the giver of absolute law, which man has to fulfill, the only final judge.

This is God who defines a person’s identity as that of the creature of God, meant to be adopted into the privileges and obligations of Sonship. They view him as God who demands exclusive loyalty and challenge humans as having forfeited their purpose and destination by disobedience.

They also accept the belief that God and humans are in a constant conflict because humans are sinners and that God is their Redeemer. As such Pedi Christianity is also characterised by the dualistic view of the relationship between God and humans. This is a new dimension they have added to the Pedi idea of God. It is a novelty unheard of before.

From the unknown beyond, which could not be reached by human religious initiative, Modimo moved into the center of man’s devotion, praise, supplication, intercession, obedience, assurance and
hope. He was still the great "beyond, but the proved to have a heart." And this heart could be conquered — in fact it wanted to be conquered.

This idea of the personal encounter with God has, however, caused Pedi Christians to identify Christ with Modimo and the people of God with the flock of Christ. Both are seen in contrast to the non-Christians, a perception which shows that Pedi Christianity is heavily influenced by dualism. On the other hand, however, Pedi Christians make no distinction between the Old and the New Testaments. Thus they conceive Christ as subordinated and instrumental to the purposes and acts of Modimo. Due to this conception Christ is often replaced by other prophets and, such, to some Pedi Christians — especially in the Independent Churches—he has lost his existential relevance and unique significance altogether.

2. RELIGION AND POLITICS

Pedi Christian Churches which advocate separation between religion and politics perceive God as the Creator and law giver who acts through a living prophet for the small community of the elect. The functions of Christ are more or less redundant. At best they view him as the prophet of the whites. The centre of religion for these Churches is the new law, the new way of life, and the new ritual. All these are proclaimed and enacted on behalf of Modimo. Obedience, discipline, and the importation of divine power through the prophet, especially in a therapeutic sense, are all regarded as the basis of religion.

On the other hand the Pedi Christians see religion and politics as one articulate black awareness of Modimo. They perceive God as the God of a whole nation. For them this God has entered into a covenant of "Shalom" (peace and prosperity) with this nation. He/She is the one who calls, enables, and directs charismatic political leaders. He/She is the great actor behind the scenes of history. He/She liberates from oppression, gives the land, and guarantees economic prosperity and justice. He/She is the social reformer. Christ as the suffering servant is replaced by the black liberator who is the representative and channel of the life force of national resurrection and revitalization. Black theology plays a significant role in these Churches. In short, the Pedi version of Christianity is also characterised by the apocalyptic view of the Kingdom of God.

However, the Pedi conceive the biblical Jahweh as a God of the whites, because the Jews where whites. Thus they call for the return to the religious roots of the Pedi society. For them this is the only way of proclaiming judgment on an idolatrous nation. They tend to
value the Pedi belief that Modimo cannot be approached with personal or national concerns and requests. Thus they begin to believe that things just happen and all that is needed is to strengthen the life force which carries one through immediate necessities and frees him from the rest.

3. THE SPIRIT AS GOD’S POWER, LAWS AND GOOD WORKS

Pentecostalist and Zionist churches place much emphasis also on the Spirit (which for them is God’s power). They perceive possession of the spirit as the source of knowledge. They eagerly seek power. Speaking in tongues and the use of violent gestures are interpreted as evidence of the working of the spirit. Through prophecy, visions, and dreams it is believed one is able to receive from the spirit knowledge which is hidden from others. From the spirit one receives also the power to overcome the forces inimical to life, and to enhance vitality. It seems the Zionist prophet in a magical way increasingly possesses and controls knowledge and power.

Pedi Christians also place more emphasis on adhering to laws and doing good works than on grace. Thus the Pedi Christianity is as moralistic or legalistic as the missionaries’ Christianity. It is, however, possible that this is also the result of the Pedi belief that assistance and good will of the ancestors depend on correct behaviour of the living. This was a rule bound cosmology like that of the Old Testament. Love and peace are emphasized only in a general way. The local churches generally have little concern with larger social and political issues. These issues are left to national and regional churches. Pedi Christians do not consider an action wrong or sinful, if it does not become public knowledge. This is the consequence of a secretive attitude which has emerged from numerous prohibitions during the missionaries’ era. Traditional sacrifices are also disguised with Western forms of behaviour; for example, sacrificial meals for ancestors are called dinners or tea-parties.

4. EMOTIONS AND SALVATION

Emotionalism or the elaboration of ritual is one of the outstanding features of Pedi Christianity, because Pedi religion is expressed emotionally rather than intelectually. Sacraments and other liturgical activities are, however, generally accepted in the form in which the missionaries taught them (though the magical nature of Zionist belief and ritual is self-evident).

Zionist Churches interpret salvation primarily in terms of health and vitality. As representatives of Independent churches say, “Everybody knows that healing is very important in our Churches. In general most of the Independent Churches offer salvation here and now.
In contrast, Pedi orthodox Christians interpret Christianity as primarily concerned with other — worldly salvation. Thus they use prayer to alleviate hardships rather than to remove them completely. On the other hand, the Zionists use prayer to drive out evil spirits, witchcraft familiars, or the powers of sorcery. Laying on the hands, a violent and emotional activity carried on in an atmosphere of suspense, are all parts of prayer. The Zionists shun traditional techniques of healing and Western medicine. Many Pedi Christians today believe that their ancestors will send misfortunes, if they neglect certain important traditional duties or customs. Thus belief in ancestors remains the main feature of the Pedi version of Christianity. Dreams and other experiences are often interpreted as visitations from ancestors. Similarly, certain fortunate events are regarded as blessings from ancestors. Ancestors are perceived as a bridge through which God’s power is transmitted to the living.

Many Pedi Christians ascribe certain events in their own lives to sorcery and witchcraft. Thus these two are seen as the enemies of Christianity. They are the embodiment of the devil.

Pedi Christians in general believe that Jesus did not come to destroy people’s customs, such as ancestor belief and ritual, as stated in Matt. 5:17. They, therefore, identify witchcraft familiars with the demons and evil Spirits Jesus drove out. Diviners and medicine-men are regarded as supplementing God’s aid to humans. So to neglect their assistance would be a way of tempting God by taking unnecessary risk.

This short survey of the interpretation of Christian traditions by the Pedi Christians shows that Western Christianity has in itself failed utterly to meet their aspirations. It has instead created in their lives a serious religious vacuum. It has taken from them a religion which was functional and useful in their life. Thus the Pedi Christians have created viable syncretisms of their own as supplements, but are forced to feel guilty about them and hate them. In order to fill the vacuum, Pedi Christians have combined Christian religious faith with their traditional values and practices. This is a very significant point, because it shows that people, whether missionaries or not, will always develop their own version of Christianity which is in line with their own culture. This does not, however, mean that the present Pedi Christians are free of the missionaries’ influence.

5. DYNAMIC CHRISTIANITY

Pedi Christianity is a very dynamic form of Christianity which yields numerous questions for theological reflection. To dismiss it as syncretism is to miss a golden opportunity for theological reflection. It is indeed a fertile source for the construction of African theology.
which is of the utmost importance for our day. This Christianity needs to be analyzed and understood by theologians of all persuasions in South Africa. It needs to be investigated and understood thoroughly rather than dismissed as syncretism. It is unique in that it combines biblical Christianity, western Christianity, and Pedi traditional values and practices. Thus it provides a forum for theological debate in South Africa and gives a tremendous hope for the emergence of eminent African theologians in South Africa.

It challenges these emerging African theologians to stop reflecting on the ideas of Western theologians. People have been theologizing and are continuing to theologize in terms of Pedi culture and what they now desperately need are the professional theologians to guide them in their journey toward a more dynamic Pedi Christianity. It calls these theologians to be theologians in their own right, i.e. in terms of their unique historical and cultural situation. It is only in this way that these theologians can make a substantial contribution to a world-wide theological debate.

CONCLUSION

In their own way the Pedi Christians have combined religious faith with their traditional values and practices. Their perception of God and His Kingdom, therefore, is to a large extent moulded by Pedi cosmology. Thus the task of theology in Pedi society is to discover the symbolic meanings which the Pedi derive from the doctrines of God and of His Kingdom. Theological task in Pedi society cannot be effected and transformative unless it is informed by anthropological analysis of the Pedi cosmology. Theology must in other words aim at making the Pedi customs more suitable vehicles for God’s Kingdom in Pedi society, and to make Pedi Christians feel that they are God’s co-workers. Pedi Christians should be viewed as Christians who have entered the kingdom of God with their own culture and world-view. The gospel message is meant to transform the Pedi culture and world-view so that they can be used for the glory of God.

NOTES


2. Ibid


BOOK REVIEW

CONE, James, H.: Martin & Malcolm & America: A DREAM OR A NIGHTMARE.

Maryknoll: Orbis 1991. xii + 317pp. $22-95 (Cloth).

In this groundbreaking book James Cone has excelled himself as a writer and a giant among black theologians. The book is lucidly written, balanced and well researched and documented.

The book consists of twelve chapters. Chapters 1 and 2 provide background information about the social environment that shaped Martin's dream and Malcolm's nightmare about America. Chapters 3 and 4 give a very perceptive analysis of their early ministries during which their sharply opposed viewpoints about the American reality began to surface. Chapters 5 and 6 are devoted to the analysis of the differing religious views which greatly influenced Martin's and Malcolm's perceptions of white America. Chapter 7 discusses Malcolm's heart rending break with Elijah Muhammed whom Malcolm served with unwavering devotion. Chapter 8 discusses Martin's disillusionment with the American Establishment during black riots in America's ghettos and the barbarous war in Vietnam. Chapters 9, 10, and 11 provide useful insights about the alternative options to the Black struggle for freedom proposed by Martin and Malcolm, an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of each of those leaders and finally how their insights complement each other. Chapter 12 rounds up the discussion by focussing on what could be learned from Martin's and Malcolm's insights in order to prosecute the Black struggle for freedom, thus taking the struggle where they left it and bring it to its successful completion.

The theological perspective that Cone has brought to the discussion and comparison between two influential African-American figures of the twentieth century, Martin Luther King, Jr and Malcolm X, has brought new insights about the social and religious environment that gave shape and influenced their perspectives on American life. Cone's non-partisan approach to his analysis of facts relating to these great thinkers has enabled him to evaluate and provide a realistic portrait of Martin and Malcolm as human beings who had their strengths and weaknesses, whose insights and perspectives on the American life should better be understood as complementary and mutually enriching. Taken together, their insights have a lot to offer to the contemporary African-Americans in their struggle for freedom and human rights in the "socio-economic conditions" in which poor blacks are "worse today than during Martins's and
Malcolm’s time” (p.315). However, I have the feeling that Cone’s criticism of Martin and Malcolm for their insensitivity to sexism, especially to black women, and their failure to incorporate economic and class analysis in their struggle against the social evils of America is a bit harsh and unfair. These are not sins of omission that can be charged only to Martin and Malcolm because they represent the shortcomings of most social thinkers and theologians of the 1950s and 1960s. Indeed, Martin and Malcolm have to be applauded that towards the end of their lives they had begun to talk about the important role that women could play in the Black struggle for freedom. Besides, Malcolm’s strength lay in his perceptive understanding of the evils of capitalism in relation to the enslavement of black people. Martin too began to be critical about the socio-political and economic conditions of the black poor. Therefore, the reader is left wondering whether Cone was not merely using Martin and Malcolm as a launch pad for his own self-catharsis from his insensitivity towards sexism and lack of economic and class analysis in his theological reflection in the 1960s and early 1970s. Indeed, as Robert Brown correctly points out, it was not until 1977 that Cone began to incorporate economic and class analysis in his theology (vide A BLACK THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION: Twentieth Anniversary Edition, pp. 166-167). Cone himself confesses these omissions in his FOR MY PEOPLE (1984), and his Preface to A BLACK THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION (1986 edition). His criticism of Martin and Malcolm seems to be a part of that self-catharsis.

The above observations are not intended to detract the readers’ attention from this very important book which seems destined to become another classic from Cone’s pen. I recommend it highly to all women and men who want to be better informed about that mysterious undercurrent that has and continues to inform the religious and socio-political beliefs of African-Americans and make them tick.

Prof S.S. Maimela, Dept. of Systematic Theology, Unisa

Words fail me to express my deepest appreciation to Orbis for making available to the public the Twentieth Anniversary Edition of this important publication, which placed James Cone's name on the theological map. This is because this book was significantly better in content and depth of perception to Cone's first book entitled A BLACK THEOLOGY AND BLACK POWER — both of which made it impossible for the admires and detractor of Black Theology to ignore the challenge that he put to traditional theology as a whole.

The passion with which he put his case soon won him staunch disciples both in the United States and South Africa. I am one of his early disciples and one of the black seminarians who, as Delores S Williams (1990: 189) perceptively points out, treated A black Theology of Liberation as "scripture. Therefore, it was not altogether unjustified that, after picking up certain affinities between my theology (expressed in a chapter entitled "Die Relevanz Schwarzer Theologie" in Christus der Schwarzer Befreier, Theo Sundermeier, ed., Erlangen, 1973) and that of Cone, Allan Boesak in his doctoral thesis entitled Farewell to Innocence and subsequently published by Orbis (1976) singled Cone, Albert Cleage and myself as the most radical ideologues of the Black Theology movement (see pp. 75-77, 97). Boesak was correct because my theological views were heavily influence by what Cone had said in his in A Black Theology of Liberation which has since become a classic in Black Theology.

Of course much has changed in the intervening period between the 1970 and 1990 editions. As Cone himself candidly admits in the Preface to A Black Theology of Liberation (1986 Edition), if he were now writing that book for the first time, he would have written a different book which would be free from certain verbal excesses in his criticism of white theology and would have tempered his response to his white sympathizers. Furthermore, he would have been more sensitive to the sexist oppression, especially of black women who are doubly oppressed, and would also have incorporated economic and the class analysis in his black theological reflection. Indeed, Cone became sensitive to those named problems over the years and, already in his book entitled For my People (1984), he pointed out the weakness of his earlier theological position as a result of which he failed to make sexism and class analysis part of his theological data. As his respondents have rightly pointed out in A Black Theology of Liberation (1986), Cone's admission of these
errors and willingness to learn from other theological perspectives within EATWOT theological forum are signs of his greatness and not weakness. All of us have a lot to learn from him, because theologians tend to take what they write or say too serious, as if the salvation of the world depends on their theological positions. Yet such a lack of theological humility and humour betrays an unwillingness to accept that even for theologians justification is by grace alone and not through infallible written or uttered words, however true their words might have been for particular situations at a given time.

The critical responses the Twentieth Anniversary Edition make for an interesting reading and have certainly enriched the text. Cone’s concluding response, especially to Robert McAfee Brown, is highly perceptive. But I must also be frank and say that I have found the Cone of the 1990s, perhaps due to mellowing process or ageing, which has a notorious tendency of turning young revolutionaries into conservative states men and women, rather unacceptably inconsistent. For, while he correctly affirms Malcolm X’s basic contention to the effect that a black theologian cannot “communicate with the ghetto-dweller and at the same time not frighten many whites to death” (1986:199), I am persuaded that Cone, in his haste to control what he refers to as “my intemperate behaviour” which “prevented some whites, whose intentions were more honorable than my responses suggested” (1986:xiv-xv), has done his erstwhile disciples like myself grave injustice by omitting entire paragraphs in the Twentieth Anniversary Edition (1986) he believed were offensive to his white dialogue partners. Yet it were precisely through those allegedly offensive paragraphs in which he told the truth as he saw it that his theology struck a chord among his black audience, and which enabled the black community to take Cone serious when he contended that black Theology was not “in any way accountable to white theologians or their cultural etiquette” (1986: XV). Therefore, it comes as a shock that, in his desire to “control” his pen or tongue, Cone appears to have given too much concessions to the white audience and came pretty much close to repudiating a very important norm of Black theology which he affirmed in his first edition, namely, that “black theology will not spend much time trying to answer critics because it is accountable to the black community .. There is only one principle which guides the thinking and action of black theology: an unqualified commitment to the black community as it seeks to define its existence in the light of God’s liberating work in the world” (1970:33). And if Cone wants his black readers to take his contention serious (in Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare, 1991: 315) that “the socioeconomic conditions of poor African-Americans is worse today than during Martin’s and Malcolm’s time ...” then he has a lot
of explaining to do why he is now hesitating to affirm the norm of black theology which he himself formulated in 1970. Otherwise an impression shall be created that Cone's locus in society in the 1980s and 1990s is such that he is no longer the same young, angry and hungry Cone of the late 1960s, and therefore his antennae is no longer properly tuned on the wavelength through which the cry and the groanings of the poor African Americans are transmitted.

Finally, I find it regrettable that this edition has not included a single input of critical reflection from Africa which could have offered friendly amendments to Cone's theological insights. I view this omission in a serious light because Cone's first edition has had the greatest impact in South Africa, and his works are read by the largest number of student there, perhaps second only to the United States. I therefore find Cone's special pleading: "I regret that the African theologian invited to participate in this dialogue found it impossible to respond" (1990: 200) completely unpersuasive, to say the least. Unless Cone had asked a special person who for some unknown reasons was the only one he considered the qualified respondent, his comments sounds rather hollow. This is because we have many people in South Africa who could have gladly participated in the dialogue. Indeed, Cone himself has met some of those people when he visited South Africa (1985). Besides he is well familiar with the Black Theology Project of which I am the Chairperson, and which brought, at its own expense, ten black South African theologians to Union Theological Seminary for a theological consultation and exchange of ideas with their American counterparts in December 1986. The results of that dialogue were published in We are One Voice: Black Theology in USA and South Africa (Johannesburg: Skolaville Publishers, 1989). It is against the background of this amicable working relationships between the African siblings in South Africa and diaspora that I find his comments unintelligible. In fact, they lead one to conclude that perhaps some black sisters and brothers in United States are hesitant in treating their South African counterparts as their serious theological conversation partners on black theology. Therefore, it was not totally suprising that during a theological conference in honour of James Cone as the founding "father" of black theology, Howard University, 1989, organizers did not bother to invite or inform South African black theologians on this historic conference. Even I, as Chairperson of Black Theology Project, learned about this historic conference from a newspaper report in Amsterdam while I was attending the Executive Committee of the Ecumenical Association of Third Theologians. If I had not gone to Europe neither I nor my fellow South African black theologians would have known about this conference. I believe
something will have to be done if black theologians on both sides of the Atlantic ocean are going to take one another as serious conversation partners.

These critical remarks notwithstanding, I believe that Cone's book is worth reading because the issues raised in it are still as challenging and relevant as when when it was first written. I only pray that white theologians would not be tempted to read only this Twentieth Anniversary Edition because they would miss some of the pain that Cone expressed in his earlier book.

Prof S.S. Maimela, University of South Africa.
This is a significant publication to come from the so-called independent Africa in that it marks a major departure from the sterile framework of a monotonous discourse on the "indigenization" or "Africanization" of theology which has characterized most of African theological production for the past twenty years and more (p. 172). The author dismisses the common practice of trying to recapture the past African culture and religion so that the Christian faith could speak in the African idiom as nothing but "a dangerous alibi" for theological silence in the face of African oppression by their human fellows (p. 170). Instead, Ela challenges African theologians to begin addressing some of the vexing questions that confront contemporary Africans such as urbanization, unemployment, inadequate health care, drought, famine, economic dependence and underdevelopment which are being promoted by neocolonialism, the exploitation of the rural masses by the elites in power and the urban middle class, and the chronic repressive military regimes that are often cut off from their people. As they begin to address these problems, African theologians would be engaged in prophetic ministry and doing relevant theology — both of which will at last "announce the gospel with boldness, and courageously denounce torture, exploitation, and the oppression of the majority by a minority who often serve only foreign interests" (p. 177).

The book comprises of eleven chapters. Chapter 1 takes the readers through the transforming experience that Ela underwent when he served the rural parish among the mountain poor, illiterate peasants who were defenceless, exploited and oppressed for generations. This forced Ela to reread the gospel through the eyes of the poor and oppressed, discovering the power of the gospel to liberate people from oppression. In Chapter 2, Ela calls for a meaningful relationship between the Christian faith and African belief in the ancestors, as opposed to embracing a form of Christianity that transfers dogmas, rites, and customs formed overseas to the African world. Challenging the view that confuses the African veneration of ancestors with the so-called "ancestors worship, Ela argues that offering beer and food to the dead is nothing but the "reliving a kinship relationship with them, actualizing such a relationship once again in the living present" (p. 19). That is, this is not a religious act but a symbol of fellowship, "a recognition that the departed are still members of their human families" (ibid.). In chapter 3, Ela, with deep insights, discusses African religious symbolism and shows how these could be integrated into African Christianity. Chapter 4 is devoted to the defense of the formation of local Christian com-
munities, as opposed to the oppressive and imported “clerical imperialism” that characterizes much of the African church. In his view, the “tyranny of the clergy” which does not recognize the “different kinds of ministries” in the church but treats lay ministry as “extensions of the hierarchical ministry”, has done nothing good for the African Christianity but inhibit the lay people’s ability to innovate and try out new forms of ministry, thus stifling their growth (pp.56-57, 60-61).

Chapters 5 and 6 are devoted to a social analysis and unmasking the social mechanism that oppress the poor and powerless. Here Ela delivers a devastating critique of the so-called independent African countries whose leadership is corrupt and misuses national economic resources to benefit the ruling elite and their cronies particularly government workers. To illustrate his point, he cites the inadequate medical services in the rural areas and exploitation of the working rural communities by the urban dwellers.

In Chapters 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11, Ela develops a theology of liberation that challenges both the theologians and church leadership to take preferential option for the poor and oppressed. In so doing, the African church would be helping men and women to get food, stay in good health, and find their own voice and initiative to resist the forces that are exploiting and oppressing them. Arguing that the resurrection “cannot remain merely an event of the past, but must become contemporary, Ela contends that “the only form of Christianity that can be relevant to generations humiliated by poverty and oppression is one which “strives to redefine itself in its totality according to the struggles of the people in their resistance against the structures of domination” (p. 134).

Ela’s book is a powerful call to action by both theologians, church leadership and lay Christians in order to transform unjust social structures into humane ones. However, there is a disappointing element that calls for a comment, namely, the temptation by Ela of wanting to make his own experience and ministry among the rural poor and basic communities the norm of “authentic” Christian ministry. This temptation has led him to dream of what he refers to as “a theology under the tree” which would be done as “brothers and sisters sit side by side wherever Christians share the lot of the peasant people” who seek to be the architects of their own history, thereby transforming their living conditions (p. 180). Such a theology can be done if people “leave the libraries and give up the comfort of air-conditioned offices” and “accept the condition of life in the insecurity of study in poor areas where the people have their feet in water or in mud and can neither read nor write” (p. 180). Ela tries to underpin his “dream” by arguing that God in Christ did not use
"the vocabulary of scholars and philosophers" but spoke the "language of peasants and shepherds in order to be revealed to humanity" (p. 180.). While Ela's challenge to theologians to take preferential option for the poor is one which all those who are genuinely concerned with the oppression of the poor should embrace, I believe the above quoted sentiments are misleading if they are taken at their face value. First, the attempt to "canonize" the so-called "people" who have their feet in water or in mud and can neither read nor write, thereby try to make ministry among them the only authentic ministry is both idealistic and an impractical illusion. Such a canonization would lead to replacement of the "tyranny of the clergy", which Ela correctly condemns, by the "tyranny of the people." Also, such an outcome would flatly contradict and call into question Ela's own powerful call for the church to recognize "different kinds of ministries" as well as the "charisms and the Spirit who is the source" of all ministries in the church (pp. 56-58). Ela would therefore be well advised to realize that the variegated nature of human problems require that socially concerned Christians adopt multiple strategies and different types of ministries as they struggle to transform oppressive human conditions. Therefore, Ela's recommendation of one type of ministry or one way of doing theology would not wash.

Secondly, Ela seems to confuse Christian solidarity with the poor and oppressed with a sort of identification that would reduce everyone involved in the struggle of the poor into a sort of sameness. This again is an illusion because no matter how much Ela would wish to identity with the "people" who "can neither read nor write", in the final analysis he would not be the same with them because he would still retain his reading and writing capabilities. In other words, by virtue of his high academic training, Ela has an option which those poor people who cannot read or write do not have, namely, to stick his feet with theirs "in water or in mud" as long as it is convenient to do so with an option of leaving them there if he so chooses. In fact, our contention is borne out by the fact that this is what Ela himself did when he returned to Yaounde a few years later to resume his academic work, and to consult the libraries which he urged all African theologians not to use. The fact that he can choose to be with the poor and opt out demonstrates that his "dream" is as unrealistic as it is impractical. Ela needs to remember that what the poor needs least of all is the sympathy of academics like Ela or their attempted demonstration of their staying power among the poor and oppressed as if the latter enjoy the dehumanizing conditions to which they are subjected. Rather the poor and oppressed are struggling to break out of their dehumanizing socioeconomic conditions. Therefore, we would be doing them a better service if, we in solidarity with them, struggle against the
forces of death and oppression, employing multiple approaches and resources at our command so that at last everyone might become free.

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Wallis, J. and Holliday J. (eds.): CRUCIBLE OF FIRE — The Church Confronts Apartheid.

Maryknoll, Orbis Books 1989
XII + 163 pp. R24,95 (Paperback).

Many people are wondering whether the church has any role to play in the struggle for freedom in South Africa. Jim Wallis and Joyce Holliday allow the church to speak through its selected leaders on its stand in the face of the corrosive and brutal apartheid.

While the majority of the parishioners may be lukewarm and apathetic, some church leaders are being teargassed, hosepiped, ridiculed, detained and made to feel like nobodies. The church has recently organized and led powerful marches to Parliament in an attempt to draw the attention of the South African racist government to the atrocities of apartheid. While the marches were aborted by the action of the police, the intention and message of the church were well received.

Not only are the insides of the church leaders ripped open through their sermons and interviews, the bible is made to be the source of their inspiration and the springboard from which the injustice of the government is attacked. The role of the international community is analysed, the hidden agendas of some exposed while the honesty and sincerity of others is appreciated. The opening words of the foreword usher in the election of George Bush as the president of the United States and the significance of his victory for South Africa. The Editorial after the election of Mr. Bush is quoted as saying: “The forces against Apartheid in the West have been called to a halt, and the policies of the previous administration will be continued” (p1X).

State President P.W. Botha is not singled out because he has been the worst ruler of this country but because it is mainly during his time of office that the church, through her leaders, steps forward and attacks the injustice of the state, not only in words and resolutions, but with defiance in the form of civil disobedience. Annoyed at the muzzling of the press and the gagging of the mouth of the opposition to the government e.g. the silencing of the 17 political organisations, the church perceives itself as the only body left to speak for the voiceless. The march is a demonstration of that truth. Following the prophetic tradition, church leaders yoke themselves to each other and symbolically march to the place where the oppressive laws are made with a clear message.
In the first chapter, Jim Wallis portrays the church as "stepping forward." It is as if the church has been asleep all the time and has suddenly woken up. The banning of such progressive political organizations such as AZAPO, U.D.F. and Cosatu etc. demonstrates that the only authority the government knows is that of the gun. The Church, having chosen the path of non-violent resistance, is willing to step into the political vacuum and into the "Crucible of fire."

The problem of the church for too long has been, and still is, for many so-called christians, to live with a "mystical Christ, the Christ of personal experience and inner emotions. This tendency or emphasis rather, Wallis says, "immunizes people to the real gospel.

Chapter two is a powerful sermon by Allan Boesak in which he tells the government that "Your Days are over." Here the Dutch Reformed Church is criticized for calling itself reformed "but has denied every basic tenet of the Reformed tradition."

Chapter Three is another powerful sermon by Desmond Tutu with the caption "Clarifying the Word." Here Tutu demonstrates the power of the Gospel which cannot be silenced in the face of brutality and injustice.

These two sermons are followed by six interviews in which each forms a chapter on its own. This is a very incisive part of the book. The sharp and penetrating questions by Wallis are matched with equally penetrating responses from Boesak, Tutu, Frank Chikane, Charles Villa-Vicencio, June Chabaku and Beyers Naude. The reader becomes more enlightened about the past history of the interviewees, their perception of the present situation and their hope for the future. From these interviews the reader is left in no doubt about the embarrassing connivance of the church with the forces of evil.

Apartheid, as one of the respondents points out "was first conceived in the Church. And the church was used as the model for the state" (p.47). In the Dutch Reformed Church (D.R.C.) apartheid was implemented first around the communion table. The silence of the church at a time when it should be speaking is compared with the attitude of the German Christians during the time of Hitler when the "Niemoellers, Bonhoeffers" and many others were intimidated and persecuted. What should fascinate the reader of this book is that the harsh words said, about the church, are said by the very people who love her. A way forward is suggested. Like many prophetic utterances, it does not end with words of condemnation and judgement but with words of hope if the church wakes up and take her faith seriously.

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J Okure, Teresa: THE JOHANNINE APPROACH TO MISSION


The book is in soft cover, spans 311 pages without the preface, the foreword of the editor, a list of contents, a list of charts and illustrations, a list of abbreviations, the introduction, selected bibliography, index of selected passages, index of ancient and modern authors, index of Greek words and index of subjects.

This work is unique in three respects: (a) The use of mission as a valid paradigm for the study of John 4:1-42, which affords the work opportunity to become (b) A contextual study of John 4:1-42, and thus concomitant with (c) a critique of Western theology or its definition of mission in terms of geographical categories like “foreign mission” or “foreign mission aid.”

The author takes christology as a point of departure for the understanding of mission: the role of the Father as the one who sends; the role of Jesus or the Son as the one who is sent, and salvation as the purpose of mission. The Father is thus both the origin and goal of missionary enterprise, “the unsent sender of the Son, of the Holy Spirit and of John the Baptist” (p23).

The content of the missionary enterprise is truth communicated by the word of the one who is sent. The truth becomes the object of discipleship; the characteristic of truth is that it liberates or makes you free (John 8:32).

The focus on christological truth engendered by mission approach to the Johannine studies tends to give the biblical texts the voice and disclosure that unleashes a moral claim on the hearer of the Gospel. Needless to say, the geographical definition of mission reduces the reader of the Gospel to no more than a hearer of the good news.

From the global or macrocosmic pre-occupations with mission the author then discusses mission in relation to John 4:1-42, which is about Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman. The pertinency of the author’s approach is confirmed by the fact that research has revealed that contemporary discussion on the mission theme in 4:1-42 centres on verses 31-36 which refer explicitly to the sending of the disciples and to “others” (namely Jesus) who laboured before them (p64).
The author is at pains to demonstrate that although scholars see a clear and strong emphasis on the post-Easter missionary activity of the disciples or of the church (i.e. a Geographical perspective), they exhibit a corresponding reluctance to see Jesus’ work in Samaria as a missionary activity. The author then cogently attributes this reluctance to some “tacit agreement that mission refers only to the post-Easter activity of the disciples (as it does in modern terminology)” (p65). The author argues that her theological interpretation of mission is consistent with modern research on the subject of mission in John’s Gospel.

Perhaps, we should turn to the question of methodology, or the impact of the author’s approach on the exegesis of John 4:1-42. In the first place, the history of research on the pericope reveals two diametrically opposed lines of argument. There are those who laud the artistic unity of the passage and consider it one of the most skillfully written in the Gospel. The passage is thus attributed to one biblical author. There are others, however, who detect in the passage joints, aporias and thematic incompatibilities which they contend, testify to the presence of many hands in the composition of the passage (p59). The survey concludes (p63) as follows:

Of the 42 verses in the pericope, only 11 (i.e. 5-7; 16-19; 28-30 & 40) are assigned in part or in full by wide consensus to the pre-Johannine level, while the remaining 31 verses are attributed to the Evangelist. The survey thus reinforces the author’s synthetic approach to the passage.

Regarding methodology the author presents the contextual method as one which combines rhetorical and literary analysis in the quest for theological meaning. Such meaning is viewed from the standpoint of the Evangelist and of his intended audience (p50). The following are the characteristics of the contextual method:

1. The contextual study emphasizes the canonical text in its final redaction as the work both of the final author and presented in a form his audience would have understood. In this regard, we wish to vent our agreement with Okure but would add the following: A comparison between the pre-existing material and the final editorial activity reveals the theology of the final redactor. However, in the case of certain redactors who are given to a high literary and artistic ability like John and even Luke, it becomes difficult to distinguish between the Christian tradition reflected in the text and editorial activity. Things are easier where a clear allusion to the scriptures is made or hinted at. There is also a question of literary dependency on other Gospels which has other ramifications, like dating, literary agreements and variations etc.
2. The total context of the Gospel is seen as a “book” i.e. one passage is used to highlight another and the relationship of the different parts are stressed.

3. *The Sitz-im-Leben* is also that of the Evangelist and of the audience of his final published work.

The second most important feature of contextual methodology for determining meaning, especially in controversial passages, is the giving of logical priority to the viewpoint of the biblical author and the order established by him. In a nutshell, this states what is obvious (p50). The aids given in the Gospel itself for determining the viewpoint of the biblical author include:

1. The knowledge which is attributed to or presupposed in the characters, and the way in which these characters understand and interpret the events of which they are part.

2. The structural order and context in which the events are placed.

3. The Evangelist’s own interpretations given either as asides (4:9) or by the use of some interpretative formula (stin mehermgumenon wristY). 1:41 cf 4:25. Thirdly, the contextual approach works on the presupposition that the Evangelist is reasonably consistent in his use of terminology, and so looks for his meaning in the disputed passage both in the immediate- and remote context. (P51)

Last but not least, a contextual study is described as a listening approach in that it lets the book dictate its own hermeneutical principles and pays attention to different levels of rhetoric (p31).

Finally, those who are still imprisoned by history to recognise the relatively of culture, those who have fallen prey to invincible ignorance through sheer prejudice, those unable to free themselves from cultural imperialism and its superiority complex as well as their counterparts who have resigned themselves to inferiority complex, will do well to read what the editor of the series, namely Martin Hengel, has to say about the glories of Africa, and its contribution to knowledge, from ancient times in the foreword.

Perhaps Teresa Okure best epitomizes the dreams of Black consciousness, which sought to merge the useful from the West, and the valuable from Africa; even as she employs science to articulate meaningfulness. It may be that just as physicists and natural scientists have succeeded in splitting the atom to release energy, exegetes will have found the formula to unleash the power of the word to improve the lot of humankind.

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