

EDITORIAL

This issue of the Journal offers you an assortment of articles dealing with a wide spectrum of issues which are relevant to the black community and the Black Church. At the base of all of them is the pressing concern for a church and theology that can explain the predicament of being christian and oppressed at the same time as well as empowering the community to rise from the ashheaps to the glory of being children of God.

Bonganjalo Goba's article grapples successfully with the issues which continue to torment African christians and theologians – our christian identity as well as that of our theology. Closely related to it is that which is introduced by Gwinyai Muzorewa, namely African Christology. Those of our readers who have been following theological debates on the African continent will recall that the debate between African and Black Christology is not yet over. It is continuing. It should be easy to notice an encouraging sign in this debate – amidst all the differences, a few agreements have been reached. Gwinyai Muzorewa continues this discussion in search for more commonalities.

Mosala's article addresses the priority of the historical materialist and hermeneutical approach to the study of the Bible. This approach is used here specially in connection with the gender and cultural struggles for liberation.

This issue of the Journal being devoted to African theology and African struggles for liberation, it is appropriate that the father of African Theology in South Africa should be contributing. We refer to Gabriel Setiloane's article on "Civil Authority – from the Perspective of African Theology".

If this issue of the Journal does nothing else, it should at least underline the importance of the specificity of the oppression of Africans and therefore of the specifically African struggle for liberation. In particular it should draw attention to the religious forms of that struggle and its place in the life of theological thought and of the church. Now more than ever the place of the African in the liberation process needs to be addressed with a certain kind of deliberateness.

Simon Maimela and Itumeleng Mosala.

The Implications of the text of Esther for African Women's Struggle for Liberation in South Africa*

Dr Itumeleng J Mosala

Introduction

A word about the definition of terms is appropriate at the outset. There exists a great deal of confusion concerning what exactly is meant by Liberation Theology. In part, the confusion relates to the use of terms. There is also a conceptual misunderstanding in this confusion. Furthermore, it is not being extreme to suspect a fair deal of ideological distortion. That is, a deliberate misunderstanding that seeks to make a mockery of or to obscure things.

As far as terminology goes, the confusion is of two forms. There is the failure to distinguish between Liberation Theology and Theology of Liberation. Liberation Theology refers to the Latin American form of the Theology of Liberation. It is associated with the names of activist scholars such as Segundo, Gutierrez, Assmann, Bonino, etc. By contrast, the term Theology of Liberation is generic and denotes a movement of Third World people involved in a struggle to break the chains of cul-

tural-religious imperialism that help to perpetuate their political and economic exploitation.

The second form of the terminological confusion involves a discourse imperialism of a certain kind. At first sight, there may seem to be no distinction between this form of terminological confusion and the first. There is here a tendency to refer to all Third World theologies of the poor and oppressed peoples as Liberation Theologies, thus subsuming them under the Latin American version of the Theology of Liberation. This mistake is made mostly, though by no means exclusively, by white radical people who identify culturally more with the European descendants of Latin America than with Third World people. Cornel West raises the question of the political implication of this cultural preference of the political left when he writes:

For oppressed coloured (black) people the central problem is not only repressive capitalist regimes, but also oppressive

* *This Paper was originally read at the International Meeting of the Society for Biblical Literature, in Sheffield, England, and subsequently given in a modified form as a lecture at Rhodes University, Grahamstown.*