

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS AND BLACK THEOLOGY
IN SOUTH AFRICA

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"Organised religion is not about to give us access to the full story of the Bible. We have to recover the Bible through our own efforts to penetrate and unlock its full resources. The clue to the Bible as a social class resource is the recognition of an inner affinity between life struggle in the biblical world and life struggle today. The biblical world only looks placid when viewed from the composure of an established class perspective. If we are comfortable with having 'arrived' at a reasonable end of our lives, biblical communities will appear to us as similarly secure and 'realized' communities. If we are engaged in identifying and overcoming the splits and barriers to imperfect community, biblical communities may 'open up' to us as kindred struggle contexts... To a large extent, what the Bible is depends on who you are", N.K. Gottwald and Anne Wire, (eds), Radical Religion, Vol. II, nos. 2 and 3, (1975), p.3. (italics mine)

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to investigate the use of the Bible in black theology in South Africa. It begins by judging the extent to which black theology's use of the Bible represents a clear theoretical break with white western theology.

The use of concepts like "the Word of God", "the Universality of the Gospel", "the particularity of the Gospel", "oppression and oppressors" and "the God of the Oppressed" in black theology, reveals a captivity to the ideological assumptions of white theology. It is argued that this captivity accounts for the current political impotence of black theology as a cultural weapon of struggle, especially in relation to the black working class struggle for liberation. Thus while it has been effective in fashioning a vision of liberation and providing a trenchant critique of white theology, it lacks the theoretical wherewithal to appropriate the Bible in a genuinely liberative way. This weakness is illustrated in the thesis with a critical appraisal of the biblical hermeneutics of especially two of the most outstanding and outspoken black theological activists in South Africa, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Dr Allan Boesak.

The fundamental weakness of the biblical hermeneutics of black theology is attributed to the social class position and commitments of black theologians. Occupying and

committed to a petit bourgeois position within the racist capitalist social formation of South Africa, they share the idealist theoretical framework dominant in this class.

Thus in order for black theology to become an effective weapon of struggle for the majority of the oppressed black people, it must be rooted in the working class history and culture of these people. Such a base in the experiences of the oppressed necessitates the use of a materialist method that analyses the concrete struggles of human beings in black history and culture to produce and reproduce their lives within definite historical and material conditions.

The thesis then undertakes such an analysis of the black struggle and of the struggles of biblical communities. For this purpose a materialist analysis of the texts of Micah and Luke 1 and 2 is undertaken. This is followed by an outline of a black biblical hermeneutical appropriation of the texts. It is concluded that the category of "struggle" is a fundamental hermeneutical tool in a materialist biblical hermeneutics of liberation. Using this category one can read the Bible backwards, investigating the questions of which its texts are answers, the problems of which its discourses are solutions. The point of a biblical hermeneutics of liberation is to uncover the struggles of which the texts are a product, a record, a site and a weapon. For black theology, the questions and concepts needed to interrogate the biblical texts in this way must be sought in the experiences of the most oppressed and exploited in black history and culture. What form such an exercise may take is illustrated by a study of the book of

Micah and Luke 1 and 2. Two significant findings follow. The class and ideological contradictions of black history and culture necessitate the emergence of a plurality of black theologies of liberation. Similar contradictions in the Bible necessitate a plurality of contradictory hermeneutical appropriations of the same texts.

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I would like to acknowledge the direct and indirect debt I owe to a number of individuals and groups for their contributions and support in the development of this study.

I am deeply grateful to my mentors and comrades across the Atlantic, on the American Continent, for the theoretical guidance and support they gave me both from a distance and at closer quarters from time to time in the past four years. To them I say, "Aluta Continua! I hope this study will re-emphasise our mutual conviction that the Bible and the Black Church remain the terrain as well as the weapon of struggle for the liberation of the poor and exploited."

Not least among those I owe a special word of gratitude are my students and my colleague, Takatso Mofokeng, at the University of Botswana, in Gaborone. The thesis of this study was in fact originally conceived in the debates and discussions I participated in during my stay in that country.

Even more importantly, in the Botswana context, I must thank the members of the Bible-study group with which I was associated for two and a half years. Their inspiration, support, and above all their theoretical contribution will be reflected in the pages that follow. They are Frank Youngman, Sefapano Gaborone, Isa, Olebile Gaborone, Takatso Mofokeng, Onalenna, and Otto.

Contrary to appearances, a gynaecological metaphor is not entirely out of place in the context of a department of religious studies. The baby having been conceived and the natural processes of development set in motion, I needed a clinic and eventually midwives to do a periodic check-up and to see the whole thing through. My colleagues in the Department of Religious Studies in the University of Cape Town served this purpose in different ways. Charles Villa-Vicencio and Chuck Wanamaker deserve a word of gratitude for reading the drafts of the thesis and providing critical comments. Bill Domeris and the post-graduate students provided the forum for debating and refining my ideas. A very special word of gratitude must go to three other people. First, my colleague and mother, as indeed a mother of many others who have gone through the Religious Studies Department at UCT, Mrs Shaan Ellinghouse. She typed and retyped the various drafts of the work. I am also deeply grateful to my colleagues and comrades Dr Brenda Cooper and Glenda Kruss. Both Brenda and Glenda read the draft of the thesis and contributed significant theoretical and ideological comments, criticisms and stylistic suggestions.

This list of acknowledgments would be incomplete without a mention of three sites of struggle from which I benefited during the writing of this thesis. I refer here to the National Youth Leadership Training Programme (NYLTP) in Durban, where many of the ideas contained here were tested; The Black Theology Project of the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT) in Johannesburg; and the Black Church, that refuge where black people escape to from the brutalities of racism and capitalist exploitation, which also serves as a

resistance base; and not least, the Black Methodist Consultation.

Above all, when all is said and done, I must salute Bakubung and Bakgwatleng, Mmakgotha, Montlaletsi and Olebogeng, without whose commitment to the production and reproduction of the labour-power necessary for the creation of this work, needless to say, it would never have seen the light of day.

INTRODUCTION

Background

Black theology in South Africa first emerged in the context of the Black Consciousness Movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It came into being as a cultural tool of struggle propounded by young black South Africans who were influenced by the philosophy of black consciousness. The immediate target of black theology was the christian church and especially christian theology. The point of contention was the perceived acquiescence of the christian church and theology in the oppression and exploitation of black people. Black theologians argued, with justification, that not only was the church relatively silent on the question of oppression, but that the thoroughly western and white outlook of its theology helped to reproduce the basic inequalities of an apartheid society. Consequently, black christian activists emphasised the need for a black theology of liberation.

The tasks of this theology were to be measured against the broad goal of the national liberation of black people. Thus black theologians included among their tasks the critical function of exposing the imposition of the cultural forms of the dominant classes on the oppressed. The question of cultural dependency was regarded as being among others, at the basis of oppression and exploitation. It stood to reason, therefore, that one of the critical tasks of black

theology would be to work towards the cultural autonomy of black people. The creation and development of black theology itself, would also be part of the wider task of creating autonomous weapons of social and cultural struggle. The christian churches and especially the theological seminaries were to be the starting point for this activity and reflection on black theology. The wider black community, however, and especially the most oppressed sections of it, was to be the real base from which and in which black theology would take root and develop. There was never any doubt, therefore, that black theology was to be developed as an instrument of struggle for the liberation of oppressed and exploited black people in South Africa. It is now just over fifteen years since black theology first emerged in South Africa. Many articles, theses and books have been written on the subject. Various projects, albeit few in number, have been undertaken in the name of black theology. In short, black theologians have not stopped working since the task of creating and developing a black theology of liberation was first enunciated. In fact, the task continues and is gaining momentum.

This flurry of black theological activity notwithstanding, black theology has not yet properly emerged as an autonomous weapon of struggle. Evidence of this is reflected in its inability to become a useful weapon in the hands of the oppressed and exploited black people themselves. It has remained the monopoly of educated black christians and has often been able to interest white theologians against whose theology it was supposedly first developed. It has not been able to develop organic links with the popular struggles of

especially the black working class people - these being the most exploited section of the black community.

In the meantime the oppressed black masses relentlessly continue their struggle against apartheid and capitalism, with or without the leadership and cultural-equipment of black theology. As can be expected, however, many of the forms of resistance which the oppressed create for themselves remain open to co-optation and undermining by the dominant classes. The latter are able to co-opt and undermine the discourses of the oppressed on the grounds of intellectual and theoretical superiority. Needless to say that very often the oppressed are not able to contest this claimed intellectual and theoretical superiority. In the realm of religious practice this state of affairs underscores the absolute necessity of a theoretically well-grounded and culturally autonomous black theology of liberation.

This study, therefore, seeks to address the question of the need to develop a black theology of liberation which is capable of becoming an effective weapon of struggle for black liberation. It is argued here that the reason for black theology's failure among the oppressed has to do with its class and ideological commitments. This is especially the case with respect to the biblical hermeneutics of black theology. It is contended that unless black theologians break ideologically and theoretically with bourgeois biblical hermeneutical assumptions, black theology cannot become an effective weapon of struggle for the black oppressed people. This study, therefore, undertakes to

develop a biblical hermeneutics of liberation for black theology.

Main Issues

There are two main issues that structure the development of thought in this work. Firstly, there is the question of the historical-cultural foundations and links of black theology and how these affect black theology's biblical hermeneutical assumptions. This issue is regarded as very important in an attempt to develop a biblical hermeneutics of liberation. It comes from an understanding that people's reading of the Bible is framed by their history and culture. This is true of white as well as black people. Consequently, it is fatal not to take history and culture into account when identifying biblical hermeneutical factors. Latin American liberation theology, for instance, has failed just on this point, because in its theology it presupposes European history and culture and not the indigenous Latin American history and culture. It is for this reason that blacks and Indians are missing in the Latin American theology of liberation. Similarly, Western social and political theologies have failed to become instruments of liberative praxes because they have been premised on the dominant and patriarchal class histories and cultures at the expense of the oppressed and women's histories and cultures. Thus the rise of a feminist theology of liberation is an appropriate response against this state of affairs. In order to become a weapon of struggle for the oppressed black people, black theology needs to relocate itself within the historical and cultural struggles of these people.

Secondly, black theology needs to declare openly where it stands ideologically and theoretically. It is not enough to be on the opposition side in societal struggles. The very fact that a specifically black theology of liberation was needed, in spite of the existence of opposition theologies in traditional christian circles, underscores this point. In this study it is argued that existential commitments to the liberation struggles of the oppressed are inadequate. This is so because often those who are committed in this way are still ideologically and theoretically enslaved to the dominant discourses in the society. In the case of black theology, and specifically in respect of the biblical hermeneutical aspect being dealt with here, this means that the liberatory power of this theological discourse becomes limited. Even more seriously, often times the ideological and theoretical enslavement of black theology to the biblical hermeneutics of dominant theologies leads to a promotion of those theologies rather than black theologies. It is, therefore, argued in this study that a clear ideological and theoretical break with the dominant practices and discourses is necessary if a black biblical hermeneutics of liberation is to emerge.

Method

The historical materialist method which is usually associated with the name of Karl Marx is given priority in the study undertaken here. This method is chosen in contrast to the idealist framework that makes the history of ideas - abstracted from concrete historical and social

relations - the focus of its analysis. If black theology is to become an effective weapon in the struggle to critique and transform present realities, then it needs to employ analytical concepts that can get to the bottom of real events, relations, structures, etc.

The priority of this method of exposing the fundamental social relations is held because both in the case of the Bible and black theology there are communities and networks of relations that must be brought to the fore. Only such an exposure of the underlying material relations can throw light on the problems of which the biblical texts are a solution and enable black theology to become the kind of critical discourse that is capable of contributing meaningfully to the black liberation struggle.

It must be recalled, however, that the proponents and the forms of historical materialist methods vary. There are important historical, cultural, racial and gender variations in the way in which the historical materialist method is used.

Of particular importance in this study, therefore, is the need to include the cultural, racial and gender relations as part of the material relations that the historical materialist method undertakes to analyse. Thus various perspectives on the sociology of literature, discourse analyses, empirical sociology, political literary criticism, which are associated, among others, with the manner of such scholars as Terry Eagleton, Paul Willis and Paul Corrigan,

Stuart Hall, Cornel West, Stanley Aronowitz, E.P. Thompson, have been employed. On the specifically biblical side of this methodological approach, materialist and sociological methods associated with names like N.K. Gottwald, R.B. Coote, M. Chaney, H. Waetjen and others have been used. This study insists, however, that all of these perspectives must be tested on the grid of black history and culture in order for them to enable the development of a specifically black biblical hermeneutics of liberation.

Structure

The work is divided into three parts and seven chapters plus a conclusion. The first part is made up of chapters one and two. The second part consists of chapters three to five. And the third part comprises chapters six and seven, plus the conclusion.

In chapter 1 an attempt is made to show that the fundamental problem underlying the present impotence of black theology lies in its hermeneutical captivity to the ideological assumptions of white theology and western civilization. These assumptions are reflected in the idealist epistemology characteristic of the white theology and western culture. The notion that the Bible is the revealed "Word of God" is an example of an exegetical framework which is rooted in such an idealist epistemology. This position is criticised in this study because it leads to a false notion of the Bible as non-ideological. The effect of seeing the Bible as non-ideological is that it causes political paralysis in the oppressed people's reading

of the Bible. In addition, it leaves the privilege of a political reading of the Bible to the hegemonic sectors of society who often do not have to explicitly strain after a political reading since the texts of the Bible are themselves already cast in hegemonic codes. Thus black theology, by colluding with a dominant epistemological view of the Bible, has helped to reproduce the status quo, albeit in contradiction to its own goals. It does so not because of where its own commitments lie, but as a result of the contradictory insertion of its proponents within the bourgeois social order, thus leading to a failure to recognise a similar contradictory nature of the Bible as an ideological product.

In order to avoid a mechanistic reductionism and determinism in the view that the contradictory insertion of black theologians in bourgeois society explains the weaknesses in their theology, the most celebrated and undoubted activists in the struggle for liberation, Allan Boesak and Desmond Tutu have been chosen as examples. The biblical hermeneutics of the theology of these two activists is scrutinised thoroughly to highlight the fundamental problem of a theological discourse whose class basis is ambiguously rooted in the black working class struggles. It is a discourse which is committed to the goals of these struggles but which draws its weapons of combat from the social class assumptions with which these struggles are in conflict. This point must be made emphatically, even though it is not automatically the case that black working class discourses provide liberative weapons of struggle. It is rather to say that bourgeois or ruling class discourses place limits, ab

initio, on the range of possible liberative weapons of struggle that can be derived from them.

It is concluded, therefore, that biblical appropriations and interpretations are always framed by the social and cultural locations and commitments of those who do them. For black theology it is argued that the relevant base is in the historical, cultural and ideological struggles of black people. The contention is that the category of "struggle" at all levels and through various phases of black history, should be taken as the key hermeneutical factor. Thus the study seeks to probe the nature of the "struggles" behind and beneath the text; the struggles in the pages, the lines, and the vocabulary of the text; the struggles that take place when readers engage the text by way of reading it, as well as the struggles that the completed text represents.

Chapter two attempts a critique of the dominant direction which the new sociological approaches to the Bible are taking. While welcoming the sociological concern shown by the proponents of the new methods, this study laments the reproduction in the use of these methods of the same ideological and cultural assumptions as undergird the traditional biblical methods. It is argued in this chapter that sociological idealism is no real improvement on philosophical idealism. The study contends that an approach to the biblical texts is needed which recognises that they are the products of definite historical and social material conditions. This approach should also take cognisance of the fact that these texts are productions or signifying practices that reconstitute the realities of the material

conditions of which they are products in very specific ways. Such an awareness would circumvent the possibility of the use of sociological methods becoming no more than a new scholarly fashion with nothing substantive to contribute. This is so because while the concern with social systems and realities which the new methods bring is welcome, the failure to effect a theoretical break with the underlying idealist framework prevents the creation of new knowledge through the use of these methods.

As in the case of the failure of black theologians to break theoretically with the dominant approaches, an explanation of the failure of the biblical scholars to break with traditional assumptions is necessary. Social scientific approaches to the Bible seem to have failed to recognise the ideological character of even the social science methods themselves. The result has been that issues of ideology, race, gender, class and politics have not been sufficiently integrated, if raised at all, in the application of these methods to the Bible. This failure, however, is itself a function of the position and commitments of the proponents of the sociological methods in actual human struggles today.

Thus the biblical hermeneutics of a black theology of liberation cannot be adequately served by a mere shift from the "humanities" method to a sociological method in the study of texts. Rather, it is necessary that fundamental questions of ideology, culture, gender, race and politics should be integral to a liberative methodological approach. Again it is insisted that a base and an engagement in actual contemporary struggles is a necessary, even though not a

sufficient, condition for a development of such a black biblical hermeneutics of liberation.

Chapter three of this study represents the beginning of a long but indispensable process that needs to be followed in developing a biblical hermeneutics of liberation. A fundamental aspect of the argument of this work is that "the black struggle for liberation" is a basic biblical hermeneutical factor. Thus no formulation of this hermeneutic can afford to ignore the nature and forms of the black struggle over time and in the contemporary context. A historical retreat is, therefore, undertaken in this chapter to trace the trajectory of "struggle" in black history and culture from the pre-colonial to the present period. It is argued that the category of "struggle" provides the lenses for reading the text in a liberative fashion as well as the codes for unlocking the possibilities and limitations of the biblical texts. What this chapter does is to offer the weapons of struggle for engaging the text as a cultural discourse in the process of one's participation in the wider social and historical struggles. The point here is that biblical texts do not suddenly become politically supportive of the black struggle because they are being appropriated from its perspective. The relevance of the bible in the black liberation struggle may be as much a negative as it is often a positive one. To engage a biblical text in the light of the black struggle for liberation may be to take sides in and to connect with kindred struggles that were being waged in very ancient communities. By doing this, however, it may be one's way of taking sides in and connecting with contemporary struggles. It is for this

reason that it is liberating to recognise that not every God of every biblical text is on the side of the poor; nor is it desirable that this should be so.

Thus the search for biblical hermeneutical weapons of struggle must take the form, first of all, of a critical interrogation of the history, culture and ideologies of the readers/appropriators of the biblical texts. In this process the key category is that of "struggle". This is so because "struggle" is the motive force of human societies. In addition, the danger of a romantic and uncritical embracing of one's history and culture can be averted by invoking this notion of "struggle" to determine the configuration of forces in black history and culture.

The value of applying the category of "struggle" as a tool for reading black history and culture lies in the fact that such application allows for a critical appropriation of the Bible. In this way a genuine liberation project can be hoped for. This approach leads to the important understanding that not all black historical and cultural readings of the Bible are liberative. Armed with this insight, a biblical hermeneutics of liberation for black theology thus clearly presents itself as liberative neither because it is black nor on the grounds simply that it is biblical. Rather, it is a tool of struggle in the ongoing human project of liberation.

The category of "struggle" becomes an important hermeneutical factor not only in one's reading of one's history and culture, but also in understanding the history, nature, ideology, and agenda of the biblical texts.

Consequently, a biblical hermeneutics of liberation, using the same tool of "struggle" as was used to interrogate the readers' history, culture and ideology, must now address the question of the material conditions that constitute the sites of the struggles which produced the biblical texts. Operating with the hypotheses that the Bible is the product and the record of historical, cultural, gender, racial and social class struggles, chapters four and five set out to interrogate the material and ideological conditions of production of the texts of Micah and Luke 1 and 2. In the case of Micah, the conjunctural historical contours which the text in its hegemonic cast suggests are identified as falling within the eighth century B.C.E. Luke 1 and 2 presents itself as a story of the events of the early years of the first century C.E. in Palestine. In both cases the identifiable dominant mode of material production is the tributary mode characterised by monarchic political superstructures. The biblical texts of Micah and Luke 1 and 2 come out of the social-historical situations in which there was a struggle between those who exacted tribute, through control of a state machinery as well as through control of large latifundia (large estates) acquired by the dispossession of others, and those who tilled their own land but were reduced to bare subsistence by heavy taxes and rents as well as those who were the dispossessed employed labourers, unemployed, petty criminals, bandits and other lumpen-proletariat. These material conditions, together with the struggles that they produced and were in turn produced by, are inscribed in particular ways in the texts of the Bible. A reading of the Bible that utilises the

category of "struggle" as a hermeneutical key is able to plumb the depths and thus to feel the impulse of the struggle behind and in the text. The struggles that produced the text and those that are part of the nature of the text express themselves in terms of certain internal contradictions. The traditional biblical scholarship saw these in purely logical and empiricist ways. The quests for the historicity and authorial integrity of texts define a hermeneutical method rooted in contemporary Western ruling class anxiety about authenticity; this authenticity resolves itself racially as "purity of the breed" and ideologically as hegemonic "universality". Thus contradictions and logical inconsistencies in the texts were treated by the Historical Critical Method of the Bible as evidence of different literary sources or different historical provenances only. The issue of different social class, cultural and gender sources and provenances which would raise the important factor of "struggle" in and beneath the texts was never seen as a possibility. The reason, of course is the fact that these questions of class, culture, race and gender were not raised in relation to the readers of the Bible themselves in the first place.

It is argued in chapters four and five that the biblical texts and products of contradictory and struggle-ridden conditions of production. Nevertheless it is also contended that the finished textual products are, in spite of their conditions of production, still cast in hegemonic codes. This, therefore, raises the fundamental problem of how hermeneutical appropriation of hegemonic texts can be undertaken by non-hegemonic sectors of contemporary

societies. Chapters six and seven address this problem. It is suggested that a materialist biblical hermeneutic which the study has been concerned to develop can only be liberative if it again employs the category of "struggle". This category must be chosen over against other hermeneutical possibilities that either uncritically coopt the texts, to one's side of the struggle, or simply collude with texts in their dominant ideological agendas. The concept of "struggle" as a tool of hermeneutical appropriation of texts also avoids the escapist option of textual selectivism. By textual selectivism is meant an option that simply rejects as irrelevant parts of the text that seem unsupportive of one's cause and accept as the "Word of God" those parts that appear supportive. The notion of "struggle" as an instrument of biblical hermeneutical appropriation means that one is appropriating a text, however negatively, when one engages it critically on the basis of the questions and agenda emanating out of the history and culture of struggles today. It means being galvanised by the configuration of historical and social forces today to identify the nature of and to take sides in the struggles that are signified by the text. This is so whether or not the victorious forces in the struggles of the biblical texts are antithetical to one's concerns and aspirations. Equally, it means being dialectically galvanised by the struggles beneath and in the text to identify the nature of and take sides in the struggles taking place today. Chapters six and seven of this study, in the light of the contradictions and questions of the black struggle, and in the light of the struggles of the

biblical communities in Micah and Luke 1 and 2, suggests ways of appropriating these texts as part of the liberation project of black theology. The form of biblical hermeneutical appropriation suggested in these chapters is deliberately oblivious of the notion of "scriptural authority" which is at the heart of traditional biblical scholarship. The reason for this is that the fundamental presupposition of a biblical hermeneutic being developed here is not only that the Bible is the product and record of class, race, gender and cultural struggles, but also that it is the site and weapon of such struggles. The Bible is the place where and means whereby many contemporary struggles are waged. Thus the historical, cultural, racial, gender and social class character of the Bible is recognised to be so central that the need for a theological relocation of the Bible within other socio-historical and cultural aspects of human life is seen as crucial.

It is hoped that the approach to the biblical texts proposed in this study will open up greater liberative possibilities in the use of the Bible. In particular it is hoped that black theologians will take black history and culture seriously enough that it will be used more to interrogate the texts of the Bible. It is proposed that in this appropriation of black history and culture for purposes of appropriating biblical texts the category of "struggle" will serve as a critical grid. It is necessary to take sides in the struggles inscribed in black history and culture as a prior step to taking sides in the struggles that produced the Bible and are signified in it.

ABBREVIATIONS

ANET	<u>Ancient Near Eastern Texts</u> , ed. J. B. Pritchard
ASOR	<u>American School of Oriental Research</u>
AThR	<u>Anglican Theological Review</u>
BA	<u>Biblical Archeologist</u>
BAR	<u>Biblical Archeologist Reader</u>
BZAW	<u>Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</u>
CBO	<u>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</u>
HTR	<u>Harvard Theological Review</u>
HUCA	<u>Hebrew Union College Annual</u>
IB	<u>Interpreter's Bible</u>
IDB	<u>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</u>
IDBSup	Supplementary Volume to Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible
IEJ	<u>Israel Exploration Journal</u>
Int	<u>Interpretation</u>
JAAR	<u>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</u>
JBL	<u>Journal of Biblical Literature</u>
JNES	<u>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</u>
JSOT	<u>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</u>
JSS	<u>Journal of Semitic Studies</u>
JThSt	<u>Journal of Theological Studies</u>
NTS	<u>New Testament Studies</u>
OTWS	<u>Ou testamentiese Werkgemeenskap van Suid Afrika</u>
PEQ	<u>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</u>
SBLSP	<u>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</u>
SBT	<u>Studies in Biblical Theology</u>
SNTS	<u>Society for New Testament Studies</u>
USQR	<u>Union Seminary Quarterly Review</u>
VT	<u>Vetus Testamentum</u>
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum, Supplements
ZAW	<u>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</u>
ZNW	<u>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</u>

P A R T I

CHAPTER 1

THE USE OF THE BIBLE IN BLACK THEOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter the contribution and importance of black theology to and in the black struggle for liberation is presupposed. No attempt will, therefore, be made to catalogue the virtues of this theology. It is, however, appropriate that among its key contributions is its insistence on the necessary ideological roots of all theology. This, black theologians have not always identified in an explicit way. They have, however, exposed the cultural assumptions of white theology, showing its link with white society and white values. In this way black theology has exploded the myth of rational objectivity in theology, which presumes to preclude cultural and ideological conditioning.

The chapter will show that black theology does not take its own criticism of white theology seriously enough. It will show that this is particularly the case with regard to the use of the Bible. The first part of the chapter therefore, extrapolates features of black theology which represent an ideological captivity to the hermeneutical principles of a theology of oppression. It will be argued that it is precisely this slavery to the hermeneutics of white theology which is responsible for the inability of black theology to become a viable theoretical weapon of struggle in the hands

of the exploited masses themselves. In this respect it is appropriate to consider the words of Marx when he writes:

"The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism of the weapon, material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses. Theory is capable of gripping the masses as soon as it demonstrates ad hominem, and it demonstrates ad hominem as soon as it becomes radical. To be radical is to grasp the root of the matter. But for man the root is man himself."(1)

It is incontestable that although black theology has made a vital contribution to the black struggle,(2) it has not yet, as a weapon of theory, become the property of the struggling black masses. To this extent it is a theory that has not yet become a material force because it has not gripped the masses. It has served its purpose well as a weapon of criticism against white theology and white society. That activity, however, does not replace criticism of the weapon itself. Elsewhere I have argued that part of the reason why black theology has not become the property of the toiling masses may lie in the class positions and class commitments of its proponents.(3)

Black Theology's Exegetical Starting Point

All major black theological studies in South Africa draw in some way on the work of James Cone. While Cone cannot be faulted for the omissions of South African black theology, it is nevertheless necessary to trace the trajectory of the biblical hermeneutics of black theology back to its first and most outstanding exponent in order to see how it has been uncritically reproduced in South Africa.

Black theology's exegetical starting point expresses itself in the notion that the Bible is the revealed "Word of God". The task of a black theologian is to recognise "God's Word" to those who are oppressed and humiliated in this world.(4) For Cone the "Word of God", therefore, represents one structuring pole of the biblical hermeneutics of black theology, while the black experience constitutes the other. He summarises black theology's hermeneutical position when he asserts:

"The Bible is the witness to God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ. Thus the black experience requires that Scripture be a source of Black Theology. For it was Scripture that enabled slaves to affirm a view of God that differed radically from that of the slave masters. The slave masters' intention was to present a 'Jesus' who would make the slave obedient and docile. Jesus was supposed to make black people better slaves, that is, faithful servants of white masters. But many blacks rejected that view of Jesus, not only because it contradicted their African heritage, but because it contradicted the witness of Scripture."(5)

Thus the black experience of oppression and exploitation provides the epistemological lenses for perceiving the God of the Bible as the God of liberation. This process, however, does not alter Cone's perception of the nature and function of the Bible as the "Word of God". Rather, "Scripture" in its status as the "Word of God", "establishes limits to white people's use of Jesus Christ as a confirmation of black oppression".(6)

Paradoxically, black theology's notion of the Bible as the "Word of God" carries the implication that there is such a thing as a non-ideological appropriation of scripture. Black theologians condemn white people's view of God and Jesus Christ as apolitical and above ideologies on the one

hand, but maintain a view of scripture as an absolute, non-ideological "Word of God" which can be made ideological only by being applied to the situation of oppression, on the other hand. This position is taken by even the most theoretically astute of black theologians, Cornel West. He argues:

"An interpretation of the black historical experience and the readings of the biblical texts that emerge out of this experience constitute the raw ingredients for the second step of black theological reflection. By trying to understand the plight of black people in the light of the Bible, black theologians claim to preserve the biblical truth that God sides with the oppressed and acts on their behalf."(7)

To be fair to West, it must be added that he goes a step further than Cone and other black theologians by not resting the case at interpreting the black experience in the light of the Bible, but also the Bible in the light of the black experience. Nevertheless West, like Cone, insists that it is a biblical truth that God sides with the oppressed in their struggle for liberation. This is true as far as it goes. But as any hermeneutics that derives from the crucible of class struggle will attest, the biblical truth that God sides with the oppressed is only one of the biblical truths. The other truth is that the struggle between Yahweh and Baal is not simply an ideological warfare taking place in the minds and hearts of believers, but a struggle between the God of the Israelite landless peasants and subdued slaves, and the God of the Israelite royal, noble, landlord and priestly classes. In other words, the Bible is rent apart by the antagonistic struggles of the warring classes of Israelite society in much the same way

that our life is torn asunder by the class, cultural, racial and gender divisions of our society.

What then is meant by the Bible as the "Word of God"? The ideological import of such a theological statement is immense, because the "Word of God" can presumably (by definition) not be the object of criticism. Furthermore, the "Word of God" cannot be critiqued in the light of black experience or any other. The only appropriate response is obedience. At best the black experience can be seen in the light of the "Word of God" but not vice versa. If the Bible is the "Word of God", therefore, the implication is that even the "law and order" God of David and Solomon cannot be the object of criticism in the light of the black experience. The black struggle cannot be hermeneutically connected with the struggles of the oppressed and exploited Israelites against the economic and political domination of the Israelite monarchic state which was undergirded by the ideology of the Davidic-Zionist covenant (2 Samuel 7). Neither can any hermeneutic affinity be established with the landless peasants, exploited workers and destitute underclasses that made up the followers of Jesus. One cannot select one part of the "Word of God" and neglect the other.

It is clear, that South African black theologians are not free from enslavement to the wider neo-orthodox theological problematic which regards the notion of the "Word of God" as a hermeneutical starting point. S. Dwane displays this exegetical bondage when he writes:

"...liberation theology as an aspect of Christian theology cannot play to the gallery of secular expectations. It seeks to understand and to articulate what in the light of this revelation in the past, God is doing now for the redemption of his people. Liberation theology is theocentric and soundly biblical insofar as it points out that God does not luxuriate in his eternal bliss, but reaches out to man and to the world...to say that liberation theology is not a Gospel of liberation is to state the obvious. The Gospel, it is true, is good news for all men. And no theology, Western or African, has the right to equate itself with the Gospel. The entire theological enterprise is concerned with the interpretation of the one Gospel for all sorts and conditions."(8)

The attempt to claim the whole of the Bible in support of black theology is misdirected because it ignores the results of biblical scholarship over the last century and has its roots in ruling class ideology. By ruling class ideology it is meant that activity on the part of dominant classes of society by which they seek to establish hegemonic control over other classes through a rationalising universalisation of what are in effect sectional class interests. James Joll makes this point succinctly:

"The hegemony of a political class meant for Gramsci that that class had succeeded in persuading the other classes of society to accept its own moral, political and cultural values. If the ruling class is successful then this will involve the minimum use of force, as was the case with the successful liberal regimes of the nineteenth century."(9)

Thus the insistence on the Bible as the "Word of God" must be seen for what it is: an ideological manoeuvre whereby ruling class interests in the Bible are converted into a faith that transcends social, political, racial, sexual and economic divisions. In this way the Bible becomes an ahistorical interclassist document. Sergio Rostagno has exposed the ideological roots of this line of thinking when

he argues:

"Historically speaking, the church has always been a church of the bourgeoisie, even when it claimed to transcend class barriers or labored under the illusion that it pervaded all classes in the same way. Indeed it has been a truly bourgeois church, if the notion of interclassism is taken as part of bourgeois ideology.... The church has been the church of the class which has identified itself with the history of the West, in which Christianity may have been considered to have been a major force. Only those members of the working class who accepted this view of history attended church. But most of the working people never accepted this view and only gave the church the kind of formal allegiance subjects give to the claims of their rulers. They could not really belong to the church of another class."(10)

Just as the church has always been the church of the bourgeoisie, theology and biblical exegesis have always represented bourgeois theological and exegetical interests. It is, therefore, a tragedy that rebel theologies like black theology and liberation theology should adopt uncritically the biblical hermeneutics of bourgeois theological interests. According to Rostagno bourgeois exegesis shows the sterility of its ahistoricism in that:

"It claims to consider humanity in certain typical existential situations which provide analogies for all historical situations resulting from the human condition. It deals, therefore, with humanity, rather than with workers as they try to wrest from the dominant class its hold on the means of production and its hold over the vital spheres of human life. In this sense, it could be said that exegesis was an interclass affair.... This was an indication that biblical exegesis had been effectively estranged from the labor movement."(11)

The belief in the Bible as the "Word of God" has had similar effects. It is, pro-humanity but anti-black working class and anti-black women. It has, to all intents and purposes, been bourgeois exegesis applied to the working class situation. The theoretical tragedy of such a state of

affairs is that claims in that direction have been made with confidence and pride. Boesak, for instance, states unashamedly:

"In its focus on the poor and the oppressed, the theology of liberation is not a new theology; it is simply the proclamation of the age-old gospel, but now liberated from the deadly hold of the mighty and the powerful and made relevant to the situation of the oppressed and the poor."(12)

Black theology needs a new exegetical starting point if it is to become a material force capable of gripping the black working class and peasant masses. Such a starting point needs to be rooted in the kind of epistemology that underlies the words of Marx and Engels when they declared: "The task of history, therefore, once the world beyond the truth has disappeared, is to establish the truth of this world".(13) The social, cultural, political and economic world of the black working class and peasantry constitutes the only valid hermeneutical starting point for a black theology of liberation.

The Problem of Universality and Particularity in Black Theology

The abstract exegetical point of departure of black theology leads inevitably to problems about the validity of the particularistic character of this theology. If the "Word of God" transcends boundaries of culture, class, race, sex, etc., how can there be a theology that is concerned primarily with the issues of a particular race? Conversely, if black people are right when they claim that in their struggle for liberation Jesus is on their side, how can the same Jesus remain the supreme universal disclosure of the "Word of God"?

This simultaneous concern for a cultureless and culturebound, classless and classbased, raceless and race-oriented Jesus manifested itself fairly early in the development of black theology. Thus Gqubule states:

"Black Theology is not an attempt to localize Christ in the black situation, but to make him so universal that the Red Indian, the Pigmy, the Maori, the Russian, the Hungarian, the Venda and the American, may each say: 'This man Jesus is bone of my bone; he speaks in my own accent of things that are true to me!' Viewed in this way Christianity can never be a white man's religion although it was brought to us by a white missionary. It is natural that any white artist would portray Jesus as a white man."(14)

This line of thinking is corroborated by Mgojo who sees black theology as contextual. By this he seems to understand that it is the application of universal theological principles to a particular situation. Consequently he traces the development of universal theology from the Age of Apology through to the period starting in 1720 which he characterises as the era of evolving theological responses to technological society. He then concludes:

"In looking at the history of doctrine we can see in every period, theology developed in response to challenges from the larger society. This being the case there is nothing strange in a particular segment of the Christian community reflecting on the nature of God in relation to its experience of suffering and oppression. Hence today there is Black Theology."(15)

Thus Mgojo's understanding of the origins and function of black theology is rooted in a belief in the fundamental universality of the gospel. This understanding stems from a hermeneutical commitment to the Bible as the "Word of God". As a result, he sees the emergence of black theology as a

logical historical development of Christian theology, not a rebellion against Christian theology. There is thus no theoretical break with traditional Western theology. Indeed black theology is simply contextual theology, that is, white theology in black clothes. It is little wonder that he applies the following strictures against James Cone:

"Cone's understanding of the theological task in his early work is in conflict with our definition of theology, in fact it is in direct opposition. His focus is on the analysis of the black man's condition, ours is on God as revealed in Jesus Christ and his relationship to the world and man. Cone's approach here could be classified as christian sociology rather than christian theology."(16)

This apologetic attitude on the part of black theologians is related to their enslavement to traditional biblical hermeneutics which we discussed above.(17) There are also forms of colonisation that are connected to this hermeneutical bondage. In South African black theology the debate between African and black theologians exemplifies this crisis of cultural identity. Gqubule, for instance, in addressing one of the points of conflict between Christianity and African religion, locates himself unproblematically in a framework that reflects at once a cultural desertion and a biblical hermeneutical position based in the dominant Western culture. He argues:

"There is a widespread belief about the role of the ancestors. One view is that they are an object of worship. Another view is that they are intermediaries who, because they know our lot on earth, are better able to mediate to God on our behalf. However, for the Christian only the Triune God can be the object of worship; moreover the Christian Scriptures say: 'There is one God, and also one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus' (1 Tim. 2:5)."(18)

The most explicit and often quoted criticism of African theology and religion, which feeds on this cultural self-deprecation, is the one made by Manas Buthelezi. Buthelezi's strictures are rightly directed against tendencies to reify the African past, especially African culture. However, the terms of his strictures display an uneasiness about culture which characterises the conflict between the universal and the particular in black theology. He writes:

"There is a danger that the 'African past' may be romanticised and conceived in isolation from the realities of the present. Yet this 'past' seen as a world view is nothing more than a historical abstraction of 'what once was'. Rightly or wrongly, one cannot help but sense something panicky about the mood which has set the tenor and tempo of the current concerns about 'indigenous theology'."(19)

Notwithstanding this rigorously anti-abstractionist stance, Buthelezi proceeds to suggest equally abstractionist solutions to the problem of indigenous theology in South Africa:

"The shift from the 'ideological' to the 'human' expressions of ecclesiastical kinship solidarity will serve as a freeing factor for indigenous theology. Considerations of esprit de corps will no longer be a haunting specter for theological freedom in Africa, since there will be another way of expressing this kinship solidarity."(20)

The abstract universalising category of the "human" as opposed to the concrete particularising concept of the "African" helps Buthelezi to maintain ties with what is "universal" and, for him, non-ideological, while at the same time his theology is intended to address the indigenous and, therefore, ideological situation. It may even be argued that for Buthelezi the "human" or "anthropological" is

finally given in the "Word of God" which, he asserts, addresses him within the reality of his blackness.(21) That is why in his view black theology is no more than a methodological technique of theologising.(22)

Bereft of a theoretical perspective that can locate both the Bible and the black experience within appropriate historical contexts, Buthelezi and other black theologians are unable to explode the myth of the inherent universality of the "Word of God". In so doing they are surpassed by the largely illiterate black working class and poor peasantry who have defied the canon of scripture, with its ruling class ideological basis, by appropriating the Bible in their own way using the black working class cultural tools emerging out of their struggle for survival.(23) To be able to reopen the canon of scripture in the interests of black liberation, black theologians will need to take the materialist hermeneutical significance of the black experience much more seriously. This study is an attempt to demonstrate the need for this.

Black theologians' failure to root black theology in the culture of resistance of the oppressed and exploited black people is a function of their own middle class commitments. Thus while they oppose the racial exclusiveness of social privileges and how these are legitimated by the existing white theology, they are uncritical of their own structural links to the societal institutions that produce these privileges. The contradictory insertion of black theologians in the social structure of the South African

capitalist society and its cultural institutions, including the churches, accounts for the contradictory character of their theological practice. On the one hand black theology represents a revolutionary rhetoric against social discrimination and oppression. On the other hand, it is the mechanism through which black theologians try to deal with their identity crisis occasioned by their exclusion from the privileges of white culture despite their secret admiration of and class qualification for it. This conflict between a critique of oppression and a hunger to occupy and control the institutions of power that produce this oppression has inflected black theologians' choice of biblical hermeneutical tools.

Thus the problem of the lack of a black biblical hermeneutics of liberation has its roots in the inherent crisis of the petit bourgeoisie of all shades but especially those of the colonised countries. Amilcar Cabral diagnoses the inherent malaise of this class when he declares:

"As I said, regarding culture there are usually no important modifications at the summit of the indigenous social pyramid or pyramids (groups with a hierarchical structure). Each stratum or class retains its identity, integrated within the larger group, but distinct from the identities of other social categories. By contrast in urban centers and in urban zones of the interior where the colonial power's cultural influence is felt, the problem of identity is more complex. Whereas those at the base of the social pyramid - that is, the majority of the masses of working people from different ethnic groups - and those at the top (the foreign ruling class) keep their identities, those in the middle range of this pyramid (the native lower middle class) - culturally rootless, alienated or more or less assimilated - flounder in a social and cultural conflict in quest of their identity."(24)

Cornel West has raised the same question of the cultural crisis of the petit bourgeois class in relation to Latin American liberation theology. In the case of this theology the problem expresses itself in terms of the conspicuous absence of Blacks and Indians, or the issues related to them, in liberation theology. He suggests that when Marxists are preoccupied with an analysis that denigrates the liberating aspects of the culture of oppressed people, the implication is that such Marxists share the ethos - not of the degraded and oppressed minorities - but of the dominant European culture. (25)

Thus universal abstract starting points derived presumably from the biblical message will not do for a biblical hermeneutics of liberation. Black theology will have to rediscover black working class and poor peasant culture in order to find for itself a materialist hermeneutical starting point. The particularity of the black struggle in its different forms and faces must provide the epistemological lenses with which the Bible can be read. Only such a position seems to us to represent a theoretical break with dominant biblical hermeneutics. Anything else is a tinkering with what in fact must be destroyed.

Oppression and Oppressors, Exploitation and Exploiters in the text of the Bible

The need for a biblical hermeneutics of liberation which is rooted in the cultural and political struggles of the black oppressed and exploited people is underscored by the realisation that black theology's propensity to appeal to the same ideology as its oppressors in fact represents the

extent of its slavery. For while the deceptions of the theology of oppression concerning its basis especially in the Yahwistic and Jesus movements must be exposed with all the might that can be mustered, it is equally, if not more crucial to recognise the presence of the oppressor and oppression in the text itself. It is fatal to mistake oppression for liberation and an oppressor for a liberator. Allan Boesak exemplifies how the black theologians are hermeneutically ill-equipped for making this identification when he writes:

"Can the whites succeed? How can they succeed if the gospel itself rejects everything that white society attempts to maintain and defend? How can the whites succeed if the gospel of liberation that Jesus Christ effects condemns white 'Christianity'? Against what paganism does white society struggle if its 'Christian civilization' can be maintained only by trampling justice underfoot? This 'Christian civilization' is established on self-centredness, selfishness, murder, and the theft of the land. ... To defend what I have been describing, you must be alienated from the gospel."(26)

Underlying Boesak's assertion is the assumption that there exists a "gospel" that all social classes, genders, and races can recognise equally as representing the essential message of Jesus of Nazareth. This perspective derives from seeing and regarding the entire biblical text as encoding, in an unproblematic way, God's message and intention to and for the world. Once black theology colludes with the text in its obscuring of the oppressors and oppression and, in its self-presentation as divine discourse emanating from among the poor and oppressed, then the way is open for defending and claiming, as part of the underclass, the programme of the dominant classes.

The impotence of black theology as a weapon of struggle comes from this useless "sparring" with the ghost of the oppressor whom black theology has already embraced in his/her (oppressor's) most dangerous form, the ideological form of the text. There is a real sense in which it does not matter to oppressors that black theologians attack their "Christian Civilization" for being established "on self/centredness, selfishness, murder, and the theft of land". It does not matter, as long as before or after this onslaught blacks or oppressed peoples can go and embrace and own the same processes and their agents in the text as part of the "Word of God" or as integral to that "gospel".

The problem of black theology's biblical hermeneutical slavery will be illustrated by a further consideration of the recent publications of two of the most important black theological activists in South Africa, Allan Boesak and Desmond Tutu.

The issue of social class, race and gender struggles is the single-most undetected feature of the biblical literature. It is overlooked even by those theologies that originate from contexts of fierce struggles, and that come into being specifically as weapons of struggle. Among these theologies is black theology. The problem is illustrated by the manner in which black theologians speak and write of the "biblical message" rather than the biblical messages in the plural; the "biblical God" rather than biblical Gods in the plural, the "biblical right" rather than biblical rights, again in the plural.

Consequently, Boesak in an attack on the brutalities of white people on black people, argues without much ado that despite their manipulation of God and their economic and military power, white people cannot escape God's judgment. A biblical hermeneutician of liberation cannot but ask: which God? Baal, or El, or Yahweh; the white God or the black God?, the male God or the female God? No theology of struggle can afford, any longer, to fail to recognise the witness of the biblical texts to the historical fact that there are many Gods.

Motivated by what is undoubtedly a politically righteous conviction, Boesak asserts further:

"The right to live in God's world as a human being is not the sole right of whites that eventually, through the kindness of whites, can be extended to 'deserving' (obsequious?) Blacks as a 'special privilege'. Human dignity for all is a fundamental biblical right. Nevertheless, many whites seem to think that Blacks live by the grace of whites." (27)

As a matter of historical, political and ideological fact, blacks in South Africa do live by "the grace of whites". Boesak is correct, however, in arguing that there is no ontological reason why this should be so. Similarly, nevertheless, the Bible is not an ontological product in which the human dignity of all is ontologically inscribed. In this respect Anthony Mansueto points the way with unparalleled theoretical precision when he writes:

"Existential or religious commitment to social revolution will not substitute for scientific analysis of the valence of a tradition in the class struggle". (28)

Thus existentialist uses of the Bible in the struggle for liberation cannot be allowed to substitute for a theoretically well-grounded biblical hermeneutics of liberation. The reason for this is that while texts that are against oppressed people may be coopted by the interlocutors of the liberation struggle, the ideological roots of these texts in oppressive practices mean that the texts are capable of undergirding the interests of the oppressors even when used by the oppressed. In other words, oppressive texts cannot be totally tamed or subverted into liberative texts.

For this reason a biblical hermeneutician of liberation must respond, "Yes, but", to Boesak when he writes:

"God acts openly, not secretly. God does this as a challenge to the powers that be and to the powerful ones who think that they can manipulate God's justice, or that they can escape God's judgement. God acts openly so that the world may know that Israel's God lives - lives for the people of Israel; that Yahweh is the liberator of the oppressed and the warrior who fights for justice on behalf of the downtrodden. God is not ashamed to be called 'the God of the oppressed'. 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and that I have brought you to me' (Exod.19:4,5). Of course! You have seen!" (29)

Boesak's argument must be embraced to the extent that it expresses, albeit inadvertently, something of what Gottwald describes when he argues that Yahweh is unlike other Gods because Israel is unlike other social systems; Yahweh forbids other gods because Israel forbids other social systems; Yahweh is so different from other Gods because Yahweh is the god of such a different social organisation. In Israel Yahweh acted for and through the people, instead of for and through kings and dynasties and centralised

political entities. "Moreover, Yahweh acts for and through a whole people acting on their own behalf". Yahweh brings a people into being because Yahweh is a God of a people who bring themselves into being. Yahweh is at once the cause and the effect of a particular historical choice. Israel in the premonarchic period created a just egalitarian society because it trusted in Yahweh, and Israel trusted in Yahweh because it had created a just egalitarian society. (30)

To the extent, however, that this existential appropriation of the bible by Boesak is founded on questionable historical and theoretical grounds it must be asserted in agreement with Assmann, contrary to Boesak, that there is a

"need to reject a 'fundamentalism of the Left' composed of short-circuits: attempts to transplant biblical paradigms and situations into our world without understanding their historical circumstances. It is equally false to state that the whole biblical framework, with its infinite variety of paradigms and situations, is an adequate basis for establishing a satisfactory complex dialectics of hermeneutical principles". (31)

In a recent study Gottwald has driven home the point that Assmann is making with an even more poignant clarity. He says of liberation theologians, among whom black theologians are included,

"...while invoking biblical symbols of liberation, liberation theologians seldom push those biblical symbols all the way back to their socio-historic foundations, so that we can grasp concretely the inner-biblical strands of oppression and liberation in all their stark multiplicity and contradictory interactions. ... A thinness of social structural analysis and a thinness of biblical analysis combine to give many expressions of liberation theology the look of devotional or polemical tracts. ... The picking and choosing of biblical resources may not carry sufficient structural analysis of biblical societies to make a proper

comparison with the present possible. Likewise, those most oriented to biblical grounding for liberation theology may lack knowledge or interest in the history of social forms and ideas from biblical times to the present, so that unstructural understanding of the Bible may simply reinforce and confirm unstructural understanding of the present."(32)

The fundamental objection that is being raised in this thesis against the biblical hermeneutics of black theology is that not only does it suffer from an "unstructural understanding of the Bible" but, both as a consequence and as a reason, it also suffers from an "unstructural understanding" of the black experience and struggle. In point of fact black theologians fail in what Eagleton has called the threefold tasks of a revolutionary cultural worker. According to Eagleton a revolutionary cultural worker must, first, participate in the production of works and events, thereby intending those effects commensurate with the victory of socialism. Second, a cultural worker must function as a critic, exposing the rhetorical structures of works and combating whatever deceptions are intended through them. Third, a cultural worker must interpret works and events "against the grain". Presumably Eagleton seeks, by making this latter point, to remind us that the appropriation of works and events is always a contradictory process embodying in some form a "struggle". This "struggle", it is argued in this study, is a key category in developing a biblical hermeneutics of liberation. The "struggle" is, depending on the class forces involved, either to harmonise the contradictions inherent in the works and events or to highlight them with a view to allowing social class choices in their appropriation. In brief, therefore, Eagleton summarises the

tasks of a cultural worker as "projective, polemical and appropriative". (33)

The interrelatedness of the tasks of a revolutionary cultural worker can hardly be overstressed. There is no doubt that black theology is 'projective' and 'appropriative', albeit vaguely and loosely, in its use of the Bible. It is certainly not polemical, in the sense of being critical, in its biblical hermeneutics. Rather, themes from the Exodus, prophetic and Jesus traditions are lifted and appropriated in the service of a liberation project. The rhetorical structures that inhere in and circumscribe those themes and that have an inbuilt proclivity to produce politically undesirable effects are uncritically enlisted on the side of the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed. Oppression and oppressors, exploitation and exploiters in the text of the Bible remain completely undetected. Nothing of course could be more subversive of the struggle for liberation than the enlisting of the oppressors and exploiters as comrades in arms. Eagleton identifies this danger with enviable precision in his analysis of Samuel Richardson's work entitled Clarissa. Eagleton comments on Clarissa's forgiveness of her aristocratic rapist, a forgiveness symbolising a victory that takes the form of a spiritual submission of which the rapist himself is incapable; he writes:

"If the bourgeoisie are to attain spiritual hegemony over the squirearchy, this is an essential inversion: you must not fight the class enemy with his own weapons, and the fact that the bourgeoisie are in practice indistinguishable from their superiors on this score counts heavily against them. Clarissa's forgiveness of Lovelace thus reflects something of the bourgeoisie's impulse to make peace with the traditional ruling class: it also of course

frustrates it, since, given her death, no actual alliance will ensue." (34)

The most glaring example of this fighting of the class enemy with his own weapons is exhibited in Boesak's appropriation of the text in Genesis 4:1-16. The story is about Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve. It is about the conflict between them which led to the killing of Abel by Cain. Boesak's reading of this story is in complete ideological collusion with the text and its rhetorical intentions: to legitimate the process of land expropriation by the ruling classes of David's monarchy from the village peasants in the hill country of Palestine in the 10th century B.C.E. Boesak maintains that Cain shirked his responsibility over his brother: "Cain rejects this human responsibility in the most abominable manner: he murders his brother". (35) According to Boesak the punishment that the story tells us God decreed for Cain was justified. Cain had to be ruptured from the land. But what is more he had to be made a wanderer, a vagabond, in the world. The hermeneutical conclusion is then drawn:

"What does that mean for us? I think the story meant to tell us that oppressors shall have no place on God's earth. Oppressors have no home. Oppressors do not belong to, are not at home in God's objectives for this world. They have gone out of bounds. They have removed themselves from the world. Cain did not only break his relationship to the land, but also his relationship to God." (36)

Kgakgamatso! Mohlolo! Isimanga! What a miracle! Africans would say. The story of the oppressed has been stolen by the oppressors and is being used as an ideological weapon against the oppressed in subsequent histories. The point is that there is no historical basis in this period of Israel's

history to support the argument that the oppressors were made homeless, wanderers and vagabonds. Neither is there any historical evidence in any previous or subsequent epochs to support the assertion that oppressors can be made homeless, even by the death of the oppressed. On the contrary, there is ample evidence to suggest that the Davidic monarchy, which forms the historical backdrop of the J-story we encounter in Genesis 4, inaugurated a relentless process of land dispossession of the village peasants in Israel.(37) What the story as it stands now seeks to do is to validate this landlessness of the village peasants on the ground - hardly convincing - that their harvest was not an acceptable offering to the Lord.

On this issue of an acceptable or a non-acceptable offering to the Lord, a critical biblical hermeneutics of liberation would have immediately thought of the question of tribute exaction by the ruling classes of the Israelite monarchy from the village peasants. This perspective would have raised the question of the class struggle in monarchic Israel and how its reality is signified in a discursive ideological textual practice such as Genesis 4 represents.

There is also evidence that village peasants often resisted encroachments on their nahalabs - their inherited or family lands (2 Kgs.21). While no indications of their victories exist in the texts of the Bible, except in the New Testament (Matt.21:33ff), it is reasonable to believe that the death of Abel may stand for one such victory. But of course the text comes to us from the hands of the ruling class and thus

one could hardly expect a textual celebration of that death. The class and ideological commitments of Genesis 4 are unequivocal. This factor, however, is not immediately obvious to the reader. It requires a reading that issues out of a firm grounding in the struggle for liberation, as well as a basis in critical theoretical perspectives which can expose the deep structures of a text.

Desmond Tutu is even more deeply steeped in the traditional biblical hermeneutics. As in the case of Boesak, he also fails to identify the oppressor in the text. At a memorial service for Steve Biko, the leader and founder member of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa, he likened the sacrifice that Biko had made of his life to that of Jesus of Nazareth. The liberative hermeneutical significance of that connection is not in question. Having done that, however, he then proceeded to collude with the oppressors in the Bible by describing Jesus, like other black and liberation theologians would do, in terms of Isaiah 61:1-7. He ignored the class basis of the text, as it now stands, in royal ruling class ideology (the Hebrew term *masiah*, is thoroughly royal). This is so notwithstanding the liberative aspects of the text. For although the text appeals to a tradition of liberation that probably goes back many centuries, it is now framed by the interests of a formerly Zion-based elite. This group of former ruling class people is now displaced from Jerusalem; it is in exile in Babylon where an ideology of return - not liberation - is being hammered out on the basis of old liberation traditions of Israel and the political and ideological interests of a

former Zion-based ruling class: "To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion - to give unto them beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be glorified. And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolation of many generations."(38)

Surely it is the liberation - if one may speak of it as that - of the exiled elites which this text has in mind. It is their restoration to the luxuries and privileges of Zion that the text is predicting. If this text had in mind the oppressed and exploited peasants and underclasses of monarchic Israel their vision of the future would have been different. It would certainly not have been symbolised by the possession of luxury items such as oil, mantle of praise, buildings and cities. Rather, it would have been the repossession of land, tools, control of their labour for productive use, and their security (Micah 4:3b-4; 1 Samuel 8:11-22).

Of course the real difficulty about criticising Tutu's biblical hermeneutics here is that one is assuming that he shares one's ideological uneasiness about ruling class values. The reason for this assumption comes from the fact that he speaks of liberation as the goal of his theology. It is, however, difficult sometimes to maintain the assumption in the face of assertions such as this one:

"My dear Brothers, you are being prepared for one of the most wonderful moments in your life - when you will be ordained priests. This means that you will have a special share in the one royal

priesthood of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the true High Priest of our faith who ever lives to make intercession for us. ..." (39)

The basic question which arises here is, which side of the class struggle in the social history of the biblical communities do we connect with hermeneutically when, like Tutu, we describe our vision in terms of a share in the royal priesthood of our Lord (i.e. our ideological landed nobility)?

In all fairness to Tutu, Boesak and black theologians in general, it is not their personal intentions that are in question here. The problem is basically one of "contradiction". It has to do with the difficult area of the interface between personal existential commitments and structural-ideological locations as well as frameworks of political activity. It is not enough to be existentially committed to the struggles of the oppressed and exploited people. One has to also effect a theoretical break with the assumptions and perspectives of the dominant discourse of a stratified society. Thus unless the nature of this contradiction at the heart of Boesak and Tutu's theologies is identified and dealt with adequately the effect of black theology will be no more than what West describes in relation to the Black American scene in the 1960s. He writes:

"The working poor and underclass watched as the 'new' black middle class visibly grappled with its identity, social position and radical political rhetoric. For the most part, the black underclass continued to hustle, rebel when appropriate, get high and listen to romantic proletarian love songs produced by Detroit's Motown; they remained perplexed at their idolization by the 'new' black middle class which they sometimes envied. The black

working poor persisted in its weekly church attendance, struggled to make ends meet and waited to see what the beneficial results would be after all the bourgeois 'hoopla' was over. In short, the black nationalist moment, despite its powerful and progressive critique of American cultural imperialism, was principally the activity of black petit bourgeois self-justification upon reaching an anxiety-ridden middle-class status in racist American society".(40)

Gottwald offers some way out of the dilemma that black and other liberation theologians find themselves in terms of gleaning liberation themes and perspectives from biblical texts. He writes in relation, specifically, to feminist biblical hermeneutics:

"Instead of straining after possible 'feminine' elements in the overwhelming masculine deity of Israel, women and men who care about the future of feminism in our religious communities should be examining the techno-environmental and socio-political conditions of ancient Israel to see what parameters actually existed for a feminist movement and to assess the extent to which Israelite women benefitted or lost from the transition between elitist hierarchical Canaan and a generally much more egalitarian inter-tribal Israel. A careful calculus of these gains and losses will ultimately be of far more significance to the contemporary religious feminist movement than attempts to make ancient Israelite religion look more feminist than it actually was. . . . For feminists who wish to keep in continuity with their religious heritage, I believe it is sufficient to assert that contemporary feminism in church and synagogue is a logical and necessary extension of the social egalitarian principle of early Israel, which itself did not exhibit any appreciable independent feminist consciousness or praxis." (41)

Clearly, however, black theologians are correct in detecting glimpses of liberation and of a determinate social movement galvanised by a powerful religious ideology in the biblical text. It is not the existence of this which is in question. Rather, the problem being addressed here is one of developing an adequate hermeneutical framework which can

rescue those liberative themes from the biblical text. This task will not be successfully performed by a denial of oppressive structures which frame what liberative themes the texts encode. The need for such a framework can be seen from the use of even a semiological approach to texts. Describing how this approach underscores the urgency of materialist readings Michael Clevenot states:

"But the reading that is interested only in the meaning is idealist, believing in the innocence and transparency of the text. The exchange is governed here by the general equivalent - just as on the economic level, fascinated by the signifier 'gold', workers are unable to see the real process of production; and just as on the political level, fascinated and intimidated by power and its signifiers such as king and Caesar, the subjects find the established order natural. So on the ideological level, fascinated by a 'god' or the 'truth' and by the false evidence of the signified (the meaning of the text), people read with the eyes of faith and 'good sense'." (42)

It is this manner of reading the biblical text as an innocent and transparent container of a message or messages that has caused black and liberation theologians not to be aware of or more correctly, to appropriate as otherwise, the presence and significance of oppression and oppressors, exploitation and exploiters in the signified practices that the biblical texts really are. In reading a biblical text it is possible to decide its message in any number of reference-codes. One could either read the text in terms of the code in which its message has been coded, thus colluding with it. Stuart Hall calls this the dominant or hegemonic code of a text. According to him there are at least three other codes within which the messages of a text or discourse can be decoded. (i) The professional code attempts to

communicate messages which are already signified in a hegemonic manner. Whereas this code has a relative autonomy, it nonetheless operates within the hegemony of the dominant code. As Hall aptly puts the matter:

"Indeed, it serves to reproduce the dominant definitions precisely by bracketing the hegemonic quality, and operating with professional codings ... It may even be said that the professional codes serve to reproduce hegemonic definitions specifically by not overtly biasing their operations in their direction: ideological reproduction therefore takes place here inadvertently, unconsciously, 'behind men's backs'. Of course, conflicts, contradictions and even 'misunderstandings' regularly take place between the dominant and the professional significations and their signifying agencies." (43)

(ii) The negotiated code: this position combines within itself adaptive and oppositional elements. It takes dominant codes as a starting point while it allows itself "a more negotiated application to 'local conditions'." (44) Hall succinctly captures its essence when he says that they

"...operate through what we might call particular or situated logics: and these logics arise from their differential and unequal relation to power." (45)

(iii) The oppositional code is another means by which a message may be decoded. This particular framework while understanding perfectly the preferred code inherent in a text or discourse may choose to read such a text or discourse in a contrary and often alternative framework. "This is the case of the viewer who listens to a debate on the need to limit wages, but who 'reads' every mention of the 'national interest' as 'class interest'." (46)

The effort, in the later chapters of this study to develop a materialist black biblical hermeneutics of liberation, takes

its cue from an understanding of the existence of these various ways of reading a text. The next chapter, however, attempts a critique of the recent sociological approaches to the Bible which have not taken seriously the materialist framework of analysis. To this we must now turn.

Notes for Chapter 1

1. Marx and Engels, On Religion, Schocken Books (1964), p.50.
2. See J. Noko, The Concept of God in Black Theology, Ph.D. thesis, McGill University 1977; Ntshabe, A Voice of Protest, M.A. thesis, Rhodes University; S. Mogoba, The Faith of Urban Blacks, M.A. thesis, Bristol, 1978; T.A. Mofokeng, The Crucified among the Crossbearers, Doctoral thesis, Kampen, 1983; and numerous articles in the various issues of the Journal of Theology for Southern Africa.
3. "Black and African Theologies", unpublished paper read at the University of Cape Town (1982). See also the "Final Statement of the Black Theology Seminar" ICT News, vol.1, no.2, Sept.(1983), pp.9ff. S. Noplutshungu, writing on the political interpretation of the so-called "Black Middle Class" corroborates this contention. He writes: "As things stand, it is not surprising that attempts to define a modern cultural sensibility for Blacks in the late 1960s and early 1970s were so derivative in idiom and style - deep and authentic through the anguish which they expressed. 'Middle class' Blacks remained, even so, firmly attached to the common culture and even in the area of religion where much was written about the need for a black theology, radical dissent was still expressed by separatist churches that were predominantly non-middle-class in following", Changing South Africa, David Philip, Cape Town (1983), p.125.
4. cf. J.H. Cone, God of the Oppressed, Seabury Press, New York, (1975), p.8.
5. Ibid., p.31.
6. Ibid.
7. Cornel West, Prophesy Deliverance, Westminster Press, Philadelphia (1982), p.109.
8. "Christology and Liberation", JTSA, 35 (1981), p.30.
9. James Joll, Gramsci, Fontana Paperbacks (1977), p.99.
10. "The Bible: Is an Interclass Reading Legitimate", The Bible and Liberation, ed. N.K. Gottwald, Orbis Books, New York (1983), p.62.
11. Ibid.
12. A. Boesak, Farewell to Innocence, Orbis Books, New York (1976), p.10.
13. Marx and Engels, op.cit., p.42.
14. S. Gqubule, "What is Black Theology", JTSA, 8 (1974), p.18.

15. E.K.M. Mgojo, "Prolegomenon to the study of Black Theology", JISA, 21 (1977), pp.26f.
16. Ibid.
17. See also E.K. Mosothoane, "The Use of Scripture in Black Theology", Scripture and the Use of Scripture, Unisa, Pretoria, (1979), p.32.
18. S. Gqubule, op.cit., p.17.
19. Manas Buthelezi, "Toward Indigenous Theology in South Africa", The Emergent Gospel, Orbis Books, New York (1978), p.62.
20. Ibid., p.73.
21. Ibid., p.74.
22. Ibid.
23. For a helpful study of this process see J.M. Schoeffeleer's "African Christology", unpublished paper, Free University, Amsterdam (1981), passim.
24. Amilcar Cabral, "The Role of Culture in the Liberation Struggle", Latin American Research Unit Studies, Toronto, vol.1, 3 (1977), p.93.
25. "The North American Blacks", The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities, Orbis, New York (1981), p.256.
26. Allan Boesak, Black and Reformed, Skotaville Publishers, Johannesburg (1984), p.5.
27. Ibid., p.6. (italics mine).
28. A. Mansueto, "From Historical Criticism to Historical Materialism: Towards a Materialist Reading of Scripture", Seminar Paper, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley (1983), p.2.
29. A. Boesak, op.cit., p.8.
30. N.K. Gottwald, Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the religion of liberated Israel 1250-1050 B.C.E., SCM Press, London (1980), pp.692f.
31. H. Assmann, Theology for a Nomad Church, Orbis Books, New York (1976), p.104.
32. N.K. Gottwald, "Socio-Historical Precision in the Biblical Grounding of Liberation Theologies", An address to the Catholic Biblical Association of America at its annual meeting, San Francisco, (August, 1985), pp.5f.
33. Terry Eagleton, Walter Benjamin or Towards A Revolutionary Criticism, Verso, London (1981), p.113.

34. Terry Eagleton, The Rape of Clarissa, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis (1982), p.90. (*italics mine*).
35. A. Boesak, op.cit., p.149.
36. Ibid., p.151.
37. See I.J. Mosala, "Social Justice in the early Israelite Monarchy", M.A. thesis (unpublished), University of Manchester (1980), chapter 4, M.L. Chaney, "Latifundalization and Prophetic Diction in Eighth Century Israel and Judah", Sociology of the Monarchy Seminar, Anaheim, CA. (1985), passim; "Systemic Study of the Sociology of the Israelite Monarchy", Sociology of the Monarchy Seminar, (Dec. 1981), passim; N.K. Gottwald, "Social History of the United Monarchy...", Seminar on the Sociology of the Monarchy, (Dec.20, 1983), passim.
38. See D. Tutu, Hope and Suffering, Skotaville Publishers, Johannesburg (1983), p.7.
39. Ibid., p.17, (*italics mine*).
40. C. West, "The Paradox of the Afro-American Rebellion", in S. Sayres et. al., (eds), The 60s Without Apology, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, in co-operation with Social Text, (1984), p.53.
41. N.K. Gottwald, op.cit., (1980), p.797, note 628.
42. Michel Clevenot, Materialist Approaches To the Bible, Orbis Books, New York (1985), p.67f.
43. Stuart Hall, Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Birmingham (1973), p.22.
44. Ibid., p.23.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.

CHAPTER 2

SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC APPROACHES TO THE BIBLE; ONE STEP FORWARD TWO STEPS BACK??

Modern criticism was born of a struggle against the absolutist state; unless its future is now defined as a struggle against the bourgeois state, it might have no future at all'. (1)

Introduction

The rise of modern biblical criticism in the 18th and 19th centuries was an inextricable part of a new emerging capitalist world in the West. This world was socially and politically pitted against an older historically disappearing feudal world. Thus the emergence of modern biblical criticism was never simply an isolated mental act. It was a manifestation and a self-conscious response to a historical and social movement, the rise of the bourgeois society. Looked at in this way biblical criticism can justifiably occupy its space within modern criticism in general and thus be included in Terry Eagleton's statement that "modern criticism was born of a struggle against the absolutist state". Few biblical scholars who are aware of the links between forms of consciousness and forms of social and cultural institutions will deny Eagleton's identification of the circumstances of the origin of biblical criticism. Mansueto corroborates Eagleton's contention when he states that:

"The roots of both historical criticism and the sociological tradition can be traced to the crisis of 19th century liberalism. The tremendous development of the productive forces unleashed by

modern industry, and in particular steam power, and the great revolutions of the later eighteenth and the nineteenth century undermined the older, ideological theories of social life--e.g. natural law doctrines--and sparked a wave of historical studies and theoretical investigations struggling to come to terms with the diversity of human social existence, the dynamics of social change, conflict and integration: i.e. with the new world of bourgeois society, and its manifest difference from the old world of the ancien regime". (2)

The present era of the modern world, which may well be the last phase of this modern world and the womb in which is developing the "new world", is witnessing the emergence of new biblical critical methods. A new criticism has begun to operate that expresses itself in various ways. In this chapter we propose to examine that form of new criticism which is referred to as Sociological or Social Scientific approaches to the Bible. Eagleton's warning that "unless modern criticism is now defined as a struggle against the bourgeois state, it might have no future at all" will be seen here as an appropriate grid for an assessment of these social scientific approaches to the Bible. In fact the title of this chapter already betrays the judgment we propose to offer.

Social Scientific Methods: Their Usefulness

Wilson has warned that the use of social scientific approaches in biblical studies is still in its infancy. It is, therefore, too soon to predict the influence that these methods will have.(3). It is not unreasonable, however, in the light of what has been produced in a somewhat systematic manner for about a decade now, to seek to judge whether there is a future for biblical criticism which is not simply a new reiteration of a past. Biblical Criticism cannot

afford to continue to engage its energies, uselessly, against the kind of absolutist state whose material conditions have been virtually eroded. If it chooses to do so, it does so in defense of the bourgeois status quo in conjunction with which it came into being in the first place. In that case, however, the boundary between it as criticism, and ideology, the latter being the glue that welds existing social relations together, will be precariously thin.

There can be no doubt that the present deliberate and sometimes systematic application of sociological insights to the Bible has brought about a new atmosphere in biblical criticism. There is a new climate of freedom from what Gottwald has termed the distinctly individualising tendency of the humanities, a perspective reinforced and complicated by the attachment of biblical scholars first to monarchic and aristocratic class interests and then to bourgeois class interests (4). As we shall see later the presence of this atmosphere does not mean that the protagonists of the social scientific methods have necessarily taken advantage of it. The recognised legitimacy of these methods, however, does create conditions under which such freedom is possible.

In addition, a greater social-historical relativism, in opposition to the dominant positivist empiricism of the historical-critical method, has been introduced to the understandings of ancient Israelite and early christian communities. This means that a healthier attitude towards the biblical texts which sees them as ideological products

of social systems and of the configurations of social relations internal to these systems is now possible. Such an attitude is in opposition to the atomising and ideologically reductionist approach of the historical critical methods (5).

Some may argue that the most crucial contribution of the social science methods is that they may finally free biblical criticism from the neo-orthodox theological problematic which in Mansueto's words "set the terms for biblical research during the period after the First World War" (6). As Mansueto makes clear, this theological starting point of biblical criticism stifled even the implicit sociological concerns of form-criticism and tradition history. By questioning the premise of biblical criticism that the Bible is the "Word of God", the new methods have also called into question the idealist epistemological framework that undergirds such criticism. Real living human communities whose histories and struggles are represented in the biblical texts may soon be seen to constitute the goal if not the starting point of modern social science criticism of the Bible. It is important that we are referring to whole communities rather than just prominent individuals. The social science methods may enable us to see that the historical critical methods, however much they may seem antithetical to the biblical criticism of the pre-bourgeois era, were born ironically of political consensus and served as a catalyst in the creation and unifying of the new bourgeois ruling bloc. While it

called for the emancipation of biblical study from its feudal prisons, historical criticism was uplifting the profligate aristocracy by retaining the latter's fundamental doctrinal assumptions as a starting point and goal of its activity" (7). The use of the social science methods may enable us to discern the central irony of all Enlightenment criticism, including the historical critical methods as applied to the Bible. The essence of this irony is that while the Enlightenment criticism is characterised by its resistance to absolutism on the one hand, it is nevertheless repressive of the transgressive in the context of its own model of discourse, on the other hand. (8).

Having briefly assessed the contribution of the social science methods to biblical understanding, most of which is methodological, there remains the need to address the question of whether these methods as they are used in biblical criticism represent a theoretical break with the past. In other words, viewed theoretically, how new are these methods?

3. The Historical and Social Context

Late monopoly capitalism constitutes the wider social-historical matrix of the social science methods in biblical study. On the non-discursive level this social-historical context is characterised by the movement of the "subsumption of many capitals into one capital based on a vastly expanded reproduction process; the progressive abolition of capital as private property and the socialisation of the accumulation process; and the transformation of the whole of society into a sort of 'social factory' for capital" (9).

Historically, this is the period characterised by the Universal market. The dominant tendency of the capitalist mode of production is to transform and subordinate the individual, family and social needs to the market and to the needs of capital. It is the period of the total commodification of life. By thus extending the commodity form to all aspects of life capital gives fresh energy and scope to its operations. This era is the era of the obsolescence of the family and the subjection of its members to productive activity under the direct supervision and control of capital. Everything is for selling and for buying. As Braverman so succinctly articulated it:

"...the population no longer relies upon social organization in the form of family, friends, neighbours, community, elders, children, but with few exceptions must go to market and only to market, not only for food, clothing, and shelter, but also for recreation, amusement, security, for the care of the young, the old, the sick, the handicapped. In time not only the material and service needs but even the emotional patterns of life are channeled through the market" (10).

This era is the era of large scale capital accumulation. Its dominant rule is the ever-expanding valorisation of capital. If human life must be devalued in order for increased surplus value to accrue, so must it be. As Marx pointed out when this process was still in its very early stages:

"...it is not the diminished rate either of the absolute, or of the proportional increase in labour-power or labouring population, which causes capital to be in excess, but conversely the excess of capital that makes exploitable labour-power insufficient...it is not the increased rate either of the absolute or of the proportional, increase in labour-power, or labouring population, that makes capital insufficient; but, conversely, the relative diminution of capital that causes the exploitable labour-power, or rather its price, to be in excess

...the rate of accumulation is the independent not dependent variable; the rate of wages, the dependent, not the independent variable" (11).

The sine qua non, the differentia specifica, of the capitalist mode of production is increasing accumulation. The specific form of accumulation characteristic of late monopoly capitalism is that all of social and individual life is subjected to the dictates of accumulation and structured through market relations. Braverman summarises the point exquisitely

"In the period of monopoly capitalism, the first step in the creation of the universal market is the conquest of all goods production by the commodity form, the second step is the conquest of an increasing range of services and their conversion into commodities, and the third step is a 'product cycle' which invents new products and services, some of which become indispensable as the conditions of modern life change to destroy alternatives" (12).

Given the unprecedented levels of accumulation and the total involvement of exchange relations at all levels of social and individual life, the traditional role of the state has become expanded and more complex under monopoly capitalism. The accumulation process churns out more economic surplus than can be absorbed. This leads to crises of disorder in the economy, which express themselves in terms of the lack of "effective demand". The gap created by this lack of "demand" has since World War II been filled by government spending, accompanied, of course, by increased taxation.

The increased accumulation of capital has in the last hundred years also led to the internationalisation of capital. The latter process has created economic

competition amongst capitalist nations which has in turn led to military clashes over spheres of economic influence. Also, the rise of people's revolutions in Third World countries, especially, has led to an interest in what Braverman calls "policing the world structure of imperialism". Government is thus able to absorb the economic surplus and guarantee "effective demand" by playing this international role.

The capitalist state under monopoly conditions has also had to intervene domestically within capitalist countries in a situation of permanent poverty and insecurity in order to diffuse local political bombs and also simply to sustain life.

Government-sponsored services like education have become imperative under modern conditions. As Braverman states, "the minimum requirements for 'functioning' in a modern urban environment - both as workers and as consumers - are imparted to children in an institutional setting rather than in the family or community" (13). The cultural effects of late monopoly capitalism are summarised by Eagleton when he writes:

"Late capitalism overcomes the sheer separation of the symbolic from the economic, but does so by bringing the symbolic under the dominance of the economic. The processes of this subsumption are precisely designed to block the overcoming of the subjective divisions inaugurated by capital. It is here that the cultural processes of late capitalism are most crucial: Through its dominant cultural norms and practices, late capitalism strives to sever social experience from the formation of counter-ideologies, to break collective experience into monadic isolation of the private experiences of individuals, and to pre-empt the effects of association by subsuming the discourses and images

that regulate social life." (14).

The effects of late capitalism were felt at two different levels in different parts of the world. In the Third World, capitalism caused dislocations at the structural levels of society. The First World experienced alienation at the level of discursive practices. The peasants and workers of the Third World, on the one hand, arose in revolution against capitalism. During colonisation substructural and discursive uprootings of the indigenous life had been combined as a condition of the success of colonisation. The students and professors in the institutions of higher learning in the West, on the other hand, encountered the alienating and totalising force of monopoly oligarchy primarily at the discursive level. This was so because even the last bastion of Western privilege, college and university, had been invaded by the dominant cultural forms and practices of the armed, repressive state of late monopoly capitalism.

It is thus not unfair to characterise modern criticism in terms of Barthes' view of it as that criticism which expresses itself as "text". And according to him text "is...that uninhibited person who shows his behind to the Political Father".(15) But as Eagleton indicates:

"That reference to the Political Father is not fortuitous. The Pleasure of the Text was published five years after a social eruption which rocked France's political fathers to their roots. In 1968 the student movement had swept across Europe, striking against the authoritarianism of the educational institutions and in France briefly threatening the capitalist state itself. For a dramatic moment, that state teetered on the brink of ruin; its police and army fought in the streets with

students who were struggling to forge solidarity with the working class. Unable to provide a coherent political leadership, plunged into a confused melee of socialism, anarchism and infantile behind-baring, the student movement was rolled back and dissipated; betrayed by their supine Stalinist leaders, the working class movement was unable to assume power. Charles de Gaulle returned from a hasty exile, and the French state regrouped its forces in the name of patriotism, law and order. Poststructuralism was a product of that blend of euphoria and disillusionment, liberation and dissipation, carnival and catastrophe, which was 1968. Unable to break the structure of state power, poststructuralism found it possible to subvert the structures of language". (16)

It would appear that this sense of the inability or powerlessness to break the structures of monopoly capitalism on the one hand, and the feeling of strength and enthusiasm about ransacking and subverting the social systems and social worlds of literary texts, on the other hand, remains the defining characteristic of modern criticism. The latter has not been able to live down the experience of the 1960s. It is sometimes even uncertain about its moment of Entstehung, and thus is generally unable to theorise this moment. Scroggs, for instance, expresses this uncertainty when he states about the new sociological criticism in biblical study that:

"Today the pendulum has swung again. Whether this is the result of a neo-liberalism, or social tensions such as the Vietnam war, student revolutions, and severe economic and political oppression in various parts of the world, or all of these, is not clear as yet. Nevertheless, Gerd Theissen speaks for many of us when he notes a rising Unbehagen about a discipline which limits the acceptable methods to the historical and theological". (17)

Systematic theology has responded to the cultural and political convulsions of the 1960s by evolving a 20th century secularism which was distinctly distinguishable from the secularism of the Enlightenment rationalism of the 18th century. The new secularism was a search and plea for an accommodation within the discursive structures of late monopoly capitalism. It was a cry for freedom from the captivity of pre-Enlightenment religious ideology to which it had returned in the 19th century but also especially in the period after the Second World War. It was an embracing of the metaphors, symbols, and controlling notions of the so-called "technopolitan civilization", i.e. a euphemism for late monopoly capitalism. The title of Cox's most celebrated book, but especially its sub-title, is extremely revealing in this regard. It is called: The Secular City: A celebration of its liberties and an invitation to its discipline.

Cox argued, as would most secularists of the 1960s, that a theology that developed around the symbols of secular city would better be able to deal with the social change situation of the modern world. His position is succinctly summarised in the following statement:

"The idea of the secular city exemplifies maturation and responsibility. Secularization denotes the removal of juvenile dependence from every level of a society; urbanization designates the fashioning of new patterns of human reciprocity. Combined in the symbol of the secular city, they portray man's continuing effort to find a basis for common life as archaic order and sacral ties disappear. The secular city emerges as tribes and towns vanish - and the process is never over". (18)

This process that Cox invited us to celebrate is the moment of statification of society and socialization of the state which is characteristic of late capitalism. The disappearance of archaic order and sacral ties is the transgression of traditional boundaries between private and public which happens under conditions of monopoly capitalism. Eagleton aptly describes the real nature of this process:

"As bourgeois society develops into the modern epoch, the relations between public sphere, 'intimate' sphere and state undergo significant changes. With the increasing 'statification' of the public sphere, the 'intimate' sphere becomes progressively marginalized; state education and social policy take over many of the functions previously reserved to the family, blurring the boundaries between 'public' and 'private' and stripping the family of its social, productive roles. The 'intimate' sphere is in this sense deprivatized, pulled into public society - but only, in a notable historical irony, to be reprivatized as a unit of consumption. Private consumption and leisure, based upon the now shrunken space of the family, replace the forms of social discussion previously associated with the public sphere". (19)

Be that as it may, systematic theology saw the changes wrought by monopoly capital as the creation of new liberties which needed to be embraced and celebrated. Biblical criticism, in the meantime, stuck to the idealist theological terms set for it by the Neo-orthodoxy of the post 1945 systematic theology on the one hand. On the other, it continued to abide by the norms of positivistic empiricism endowed upon it by the rationalism of the 18th century Enlightenment. No real new developments were widely felt in response to the social and political movements of the 1960s. Change in biblical criticism had to await the unprecedented rise and in some instances, success

of the liberation movements in the Third World and the concomitant questioning of the assumptions of Western theology as a whole, including biblical studies.

The response of biblical criticism to the revolutions and economic crises of the 1970s was in line with the convulsions of the 1960s; it was of the same type as the stock of responses that were generated in order to deal with the world reality of the 1960s. These were represented by studies in Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Reception theory; Structuralism and Semiotics, and most recently Post-structuralism. The so-called sociological approaches to the Bible belong, politically, within the same framework as these new literary critical methods to the Bible. Like them, sociological approaches have not really honestly addressed the question of the politics of cultural and ideological discourses. West's strictures against the Marxist hermeneutics of Jameson apply without qualification to our sociological approaches, if not more so:

"In my view, Jameson goes wrong in trying to relate epistemological moves to ethical ones in ideological terms without giving an account of the collective dynamics which accompany these moves. From the Marxist perspective, all metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical discourses are complex ideological affairs of specific groups, communities, and classes in or across particular societies". (20)

A similar criticism is levelled by Eagleton against the deconstructionists, and it is also relevant to our sociological criticism. He writes:

"If deconstruction is telling academic liberal humanism that it does not know quite what it is doing, or whether it is doing anything or not, or whether it can know whether it is doing anything or not, then this is not only because of the tropical, fictive nature of all discourse; it is

also because of an historical uncertainty in the wider social functions of academic humanism, which neither it, nor much deconstruction, will fully acknowledge". (21)

Thus the sociology of the Bible literature often gives one the impression of wading through no more than sociological, as opposed to literary textual, deconstructionism. The feeling that the terms of debate are still set by the problematics of the 18th and 19th century is difficult to avert. In a simple but brilliantly written article, Rorty affirms that this is in fact the case.

"I have been saying, first that idealism and textualism have in common an opposition to the claim of science to be a paradigm of human activity, and second, that they differ in that one is a philosophical doctrine and the other an expression of suspicion about philosophy. I can put these two points together by saying that whereas nineteenth century idealism wanted to substitute one sort of science (philosophy) for another (natural science) as the centre of culture, twentieth century textualism wants to place literature in the centre, and to treat both science and philosophy as, at best, literary genres". (22)

This turning of criticism, literary or sociological, into "critically ingenious but politically deluded" ideologism or to put it another way, "imaginative response to once pertinent but now defunct problematics" (23), does no more than play the role of the "anthropological...tiger which regularly disrupted a tribal ceremony by leaping into its midst; after a while, the tiger was incorporated into the ritual". (24)

Sociological approaches to the Bible often raise and address political issues in the Bible. They do not, however, address the issue of the politics of the sociological approaches themselves. The question is: on whose side, politically and socially, are these critical methods? For as West put it:

"To resurrect the dead, as bourgeois humanists try to do, is impossible. To attack the dead, as deconstructionists do, is redundant and, ironically to valorize death. To 'go beyond' the dead is either to surreptitiously recuperate previous 'contents' of life in new forms (Nietzsche), or to deceptively shrug off the weight of the dead whether by promoting cults of passive, nostalgic 'dwelling' (Heidegger), or by creative self-rebegetting and self-redescribing (Emerson, Bloom, Rorty)". (25)

Our contention, therefore, is that the new methods of biblical study under the rubric of sociological approaches, do not really take us a step forward. They fail to constitute a criticism that "aims at transforming present practices - the remaining life - against the backdrop of previous discursive and political practices, against the dead past." (26) Biblical study under repressive, totalising, commodifying conditions of late monopoly capitalism cannot afford to be reduced to an attack on the dead past of ancient Israelite history or early christian discursive and political practices.

Social Scientific Methods: A Critique

Now it remains to show how the politics of our sociological approaches are constantly symbiotic with the object of their criticism: the dead past of ancient biblical

societies, on the one hand, and the dead past of the 19th century historical critical methods, on the other hand. The point of this argument is to show that in their present form, the sociological approaches cannot serve as adequate tools of a black biblical hermeneutics of liberation.

Mansueto has convincingly shown that these methods do not represent a theoretical break with the past; rather they "amount to no more than the sociological potentialities of liberal biblical criticism along interpretive sociological or structural functionalist lines. (27) Weber, the chief theoretician of interpretive sociology, defined it as:

"...a science concerning itself with the interpretive understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences. We shall speak of 'action' insofar as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to his behaviour - be it overt or covert, omission or acquiescence. Action is 'social' insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course" (28)

While Weber shared with his contemporaries a belief in "positive science", he nevertheless objected to the use of the methods of the natural sciences in the cultural sciences. In this he shared similar concerns with 19th century metaphysical idealism which "wanted to substitute one sort of science (philosophy) for another (natural science) as the centre of culture" (29)

But interpretive sociology, as a product of and response to the social disruptions of emerging late capitalism, exhibits the modified features of idealism that we discerned in the textual idealism of twentieth century literary criticism.

It seeks not an Archimedian point from which to pontificate over culture, but it locates itself midpoint between the metaphysical idealism of philosophy and the positivist empiricism of natural science. (29)

"'Meaning' may be of two kinds. The term may refer first to the actual existing meaning in the given concrete case of a particular actor, or to the average or approximate meaning attributable to a given plurality of actors; or secondly to the theoretically conceived pure type of subjective meaning attributed to the hypothetical actor or actors in a given type of action. In no case does it refer to an objectively 'correct' meaning or one which is 'true' in some metaphysical sense. It is this which distinguishes the empirical sciences of action, such as sociology and history, from the dogmatic disciplines in that area, such as jurisprudence, logic, ethics, and esthetics, which seek to ascertain the 'true' and 'valid' meanings associated with the objects of their investigation"

(30)

Weber sought to have sociology accorded the status of positivist science in general, while he preferred to have it refrain from using the methods of this science. He struggles to distance sociology from metaphysical idealism while not really disagreeing with the importance of the role played by the latter. Mafeje summarises Weber's sociological attempt succinctly when he asserts:

"...in his attempt to cut off sociology from German metaphysics, Weber succeeded in relativizing and abstracting ideology in such a way that it ceased to be a question of class conflict and became merely a problem of interpreting individual intellectual reflexes under determinate social conditions. Now that history was no longer seen as an intelligible totality held together by social struggles, what remained was the subjective freedom of each individual to act according to his reason". (31)

The Weberian sociological approach manifests itself in a number of the works of biblical sociologists. Meeks is Weberian to the core in his study, The First Urban

Christians. He seeks to meet ordinary early christians as individuals. Since, however, the latter did not write the texts which we have about them, we must rather seek to find them "through the collectivities to which they belonged and glimpse their lives through the typical occasions mirrored in their texts". (32) Meeks' approach is inimical to social structure; its point of departure is individuals and their subjective choices. It is self-confessedly eclectic. According to Meeks: "Society is viewed as a process in which personal identity and social forms are mutually and continuously created by interactions that occur by means of symbols". (33) Meeks argues that this view of the social structure makes him a moderate functionalist. (34)

This theoretical and methodological eclecticism seems to us a new way of concealing old theoretical and ideological perspectives. It moves us one step forward to the extent that it focuses our attention on the social nature of our texts. It pulls us back two steps, however, in that it not only reintroduces the old ideological hunches inherent in the Historical Critical Methods, but it hides them under the cloak of a more systemic approach. Thus it blunts the edge of a possible new social and political hermeneutic of the Bible which could itself once more become a liberating tool.

The more positivist aspect of the Weberian approach is discernible in the work of E.A. Judge. He complains against Holmberg's failure to "bestride ideas and facts in an equally secure manner". According to Judge, the fundamental

question that remains unasked in much of the biblical sociology approaches, especially the New Testament, is this:

"What are the social facts of life characteristic of the world to which the New Testament belongs? Until painstaking field work is better done, the importation of social models that have been defined in terms of other cultures is methodologically no improvement on the 'idealistic fallacy'". (35)

The idealist-positivist problematic of the historical critical methods and of most of 18th and 19th century science remains the structuring pole of the new sociological approaches. Scroggs is at pains to prove that the use of new sociological methods is not a turning of the idealistic tables; it is no reduction of christianity to social dynamic. "Rather it should be seen as an effort to guard against a reductionism from the other extreme, a limitation of the reality of christianity to an inner-spiritual, or objective-cognitive system. In short, sociology of early Christianity wants to put body and soul together again".(36)

As we have argued above, this 20th century idealism, like nineteenth century idealism, is a response to the social-historical crisis caused by the expansion of capitalism and its conquest of every aspect of life, especially as it made itself felt in the 1960s in the West. In biblical studies, it is a belated response to the 1960s.

The most staggering example of this idealist sociological eclecticism seems to be Gager's study Kingdom and Community, (37). In this work Gager describes early christianity as a millennial movement. It is, however, one which lost its eschatological vision as a result of the cognitive

dissonance experienced by the followers of Jesus. This loss of vision was consequent upon the death of Jesus. The result was a disconfirming of the belief that Jesus was the Messiah. As a means of rationalising the experience of dissonance the movement turned to a proselytising mission. In the process it also engaged in activities to de-eschatologise the Christ message. According to Gager:

"The success of these efforts may be seen in the fact that by the year 150 C.E. not only was Christianity no longer an eschatological community, but, as the reaction to the apocalyptic fervour of Montanism clearly reveals, that it had come to regard eschatological movements as a serious threat. Toward the end of the first century Christians could still pray, 'Thy Kingdom come' (Matt. 6:10). But at the end of the second century, Tertullian tells us that Christians prayed 'for emperors, for their deputies and all in authority, for the welfare of the world, and for the delay of the final consummation' (Apol. 39.2; cf 32.1)". (38).

Gager combines models such as the sociology of millenarianism (39), cognitive dissonance (40), interpretive sociology (41), and revitalisation (42), without regard to the need for a systematic theory of social structure and development. As Mansueto correctly points out:

"Many of his models - e.g. millennialism - are based on comparative data drawn from societies which have little in common with the Roman Empire, while his account of the social structure of the Empire itself fails to take into account the tremendous diversity of landholding patterns and means of surplus extraction, as well as the very substantial evolution the Empire underwent, especially in its last stages". (43)

It is, moreover, the sociological idealism of Gager's Weberian approach, in political collusion with the status quo under present monopoly capital conditions, which requires critical attention. Gager's approach, like that of Weber, relativises and abstracts ideology in the Roman Empire and in our societies. The result is that it ceases to refer to questions of class conflict and of the material conditions of production of the Christian literature and theologies. Instead, it confines itself to the subjective reflexes of christians. This is a necessary logical position on the part of Gager and other Weberian biblical sociologists. For they themselves purport not to be engaged in their scholarly labours in the interests of any specific social class today. In other words, they conceal their real class commitments.

In the area of Old Testament studies, Wilson's study of prophecy stands as an example of this sociological idealism. Wilson abstracts activities and institutions from societies of one kind (horticultural) and compares them with similarly abstracted phenomena in a society of a vastly different kind (Tributary agrarian social formation of Israel). The question of social structure and of the complexity of social relations and contradictions is neglected by Wilson. For this reason Chaney's strictures against Wilson are justified:

"A recent and distinguished work, for example, purports to be a study of Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel (Wilson, 1980). In fact, it is no such thing, but rather a learned study of

the role of the prophets. Wilson's failure to take macrosociology seriously leaves two serious and related deficiencies in his work. a) The prophetic roles delineated with such care are not adequately articulated within the larger web of society, its conflicts and its changes. b) Just these latter considerations are demonstrably a major concern of the prophetic texts themselves. The same cannot be said of the prophetic roles in and of themselves, a fact which leads to no little speculation in any attempt to describe such roles".

(44)

Wilson's attempt to locate prophecy within society is extremely generalised and disappointingly sketchy and brief. He asserts, for instance, that ancient Near Eastern intermediaries articulated with their societies in complex ways and functioned in a number of different ways. As an example of this he states vaguely:

"Some intermediaries, such as the Mesopotamian diviners and the Palestinian seers, were part of the central social structure, which they helped to regulate and maintain. Such figures were carefully selected, trained and supported by the whole society or at least by the ruling elite. On the other hand, some intermediaries, ...were peripheral figures who delivered messages aimed at reforming the political and religious establishments". (45)

The theoretical poverty inherent in this descriptive account of phenomena in ancient societies is staggering. What is more, it is not clear what advantage a sociological method that works in this way has over the traditional humanities approaches.

Another group of other biblical sociologists pay greater attention to questions of social structure. It deploys the Durkheimian sociological method, or, more accurately, the structural functionalist model. This model has been

inherited by Durkheim from Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer. During the time of these two thinkers "rationality, utility or functional value, order and progress were guiding principles of bourgeois society. These were both an affirmation of its achievements and a justification of its existence". (46) They conceived of society as an integrated social whole based on an utilitarian philosophy of order and progressiveness. Comte's specific contribution was in instituting positivism as a general theory of bourgeois science. The specifically functionalist paradigm in the social sciences is to be attributed to Spencer. According to him, society adapted to changing circumstances through increased division of functions. It was this functionalist paradigm and its attendant notion of the division of labour that constituted the starting point for Durkheim's sociological functionalism. As Mafeje ably asserts:

"Worst of all he (Durkheim) was not able to escape from Spencer's basic idea of the integrative function of division of labour in society. Nor was he able to overcome Spencer's organic conception of social progress as a movement from homogeneous to heterogeneous systems. In actual fact, he achieved the same effect by equating the former with 'mechanical solidarity' and the latter with 'organic solidarity'". (47)

Gerd Theissen employs the structural functionalist sociological model in biblical studies most systematically. According to Theissen, three procedures may be distinguished in a sociology of the Jesus movement. These are first what he calls "constructive conclusions". This procedure is applicable to sociographic or prosographic statements. The former type of statement has to do with descriptions of groups, institutions, organisations and so forth. The

latter concerns individuals, their background, status, and roles. (48) The second procedure he calls "Analytical conclusions". These "are drawn from texts which afford an indirect approach to sociological information. Statements about recurring events, conflicts between groups or over ethical and legal norms, literary forms and poetic modes of expression (e.g. parables) are illuminating in this respect". (49) The third procedure involves what he terms "comparative conclusions". These derive from "analogous movements to be found in the world of the time". (50)

Having delineated the Jesus movement through the use of the above three procedures, Theissen proceeds to locate the movement structurally, utilizing what he calls "Analysis of Factors: The Effects of Society on the Jesus Movement". Four major social structural factors are identified by Theissen: (1) Socio-economic factors are at the basis of the "social rootlessness" of the movement. "Socio-economic factors are the organisation of work and the distribution of its products between productive workers and those who enjoy the benefits". (51) (2) The socio-ecological factors concern the contradictions between town and country. They "are the results of an interplay between man and nature" (52), and they involve issues like the trading patterns of a country. (3) Socio-political factors relate to the institutionalisation of oppression and exploitation through government machinery in Palestine, (4) "socio-cultural factors include all values, norms and traditions which give a group self-awareness and identity". (53)

On Palestinian soil the Jesus movement was a failure, according to Theissen. The reason for this is that the Palestinian Jewish society of this time was reaching back to its traditional patterns of behaviour; it was intensifying dissociation from anything alien and giving currency to fanatical slogans. "...This development diminished the chances of the Jesus movement, which encroached on the taboos of society with its criticism of the temple and the law". (54)

The Hellenistic society, by contrast, positively welcomed the Jesus movement. The atmosphere of peace, stability and prosperity that characterised the Hellenistic society formed the basis for the success of Christianity in this area. "Consequently a sociological theory of integration is a more appropriate perspective from which to approach an analysis of earliest Hellenistic Christianity and from which to assess and co-ordinate the relevant sociological data". (55)

Theissen makes two contentions. Firstly, he argues that "a sociological theory of conflict" is applicable to the Palestinian version of the Jesus movement. Secondly, he contends that "a sociological theory of integration" is appropriate for an analysis of earliest Hellenistic Christianity. These proposals, however, are based on a fundamental flaw which characterises a large number of biblical sociological works. The distinction presupposes the accessibility of one set of data in a way that is independent of the use of another set of data. In other words it is being supposed that Palestinian "Christianity"

is accessible as an object of study independently of the Hellenistic texts that inform us about it. While some of the biblical texts of the New Testament may have a Palestinian regional focus, it is doubtful whether too much can be made of this, given the pervasiveness of the so-called "Hellenistic culture" by the time of their composition.

More importantly, Theissen fails to provide an adequate systematic structural location of the Jesus movement within the political economy of the Roman empire and its specific form within the Provinces. What for instance was the mode of integration of the Palestinian economy into the wider and dominant economy of Rome? How and what contradictions did this occasion in the social life of Palestine? What were the cultural effects on the Jesus movement? A more adequate attention to the complexity of class contradictions in the context of the wider Roman Empire might have led Theissen to a more adequate account of the Jesus movement.

Further, Mansueto is correct in charging that Theissen does not deal with the real ecological, economic or political contradictions in Palestine but only with the ideological conflicts occasioned by such contradictions. Mansueto writes:

"Thus we hear of a sense of relative deprivation (a term which concerns the subjective state of individuals) and of a conflict between a theocratic ideal and the reality of priestly practice, rather than of the relative power of classes, nations, etc. As a result, Theissen is unable to correctly assess the diverse class stands of the various renewal movements and ends up confusing Jesus' opposition to the political program of the Zealot movement - which reflect the interests of urban middle strata and

displaced clerical elements - with a generalised pacificism or 'love patriachilism'". (56)

Structural functionalism, a product of nineteenth century Western European bourgeois society, came into being as a theoretical rationalisation of an epoch fraught with contradictions and conflicts. Its ideological status was to serve as an instrument of integration for the disintegrating bourgeois social system that threatened the progress of science and technology. Whether its scientific value can prove greater than its ideological function is a matter that must still be demonstrated by its proponents.

In biblical study, functionalist sociology has remained recognisable by its ideological status. As Mansueto puts it:

"Functionalist sociology, even where its political agenda is a benign pacifism (Theissen) is fundamentally a study of social phenomena from the point of view of conflict management: i.e. how to contain, defuse, even resolve the economic, political and ideological conflicts generated by capitalism. ... Thus Theissen's reduction of objective contradictions - which may or may not challenge the prevailing social order - to conflict, tension, aggression which poses a threat to order, or at least to the full integration of individuals into the prevailing system. For these reasons biblical studies joined with functionalist sociology must also be considered ideological rather than scientific in character". (57)

The disappointing character of much of the sociology of the Bible derives from precisely this ideological rather than scientific orientation. While the sociological approach has advanced biblical study by drawing attention to the sociological basis of many of its objects of analysis, it has taken us two steps back by adopting some of the subtle

ideological manoeuvres of modern society - lending an academic aura to what is essentially an ideological political method. More significantly, it conceals its ideological and political agenda through the use of recognised and respected academic methods within bourgeois society, like the Weberian interpretive sociology and Durkheimian structural functionalist sociology.

The essence of this objection is not that the sociological approaches employed by biblical scholars should not have had an ideological and political agenda. On the contrary, the plea is for an open acknowledgment of the class interests that are being represented and thus an acknowledgment of at least the social limitation of the methods. More importantly. Like the historical critical methods before it, biblical sociology tries to be scientific by identifying with the intellectual projects of secular methods on the one hand. On the other, it maintains the social and political agenda of the ruling class by not taking seriously issues of class, ideology, and political economy not only of the societies of the Bible, but of the societies of the biblical sociologists themselves. For this reason, it seems that an appropriate way to bring this section of our study to an end is by reiterating Eagleton's words, quoted at the beginning, that "unless modern criticism defines its future as a struggle against the bourgeois state, it might have no future at all". In the context of the Azanian/South African black struggle for liberation, the working class subversion of the normal criteria of biblical interpretation in favour of an organically black working class hermeneutic

as shown, for example, in their preaching, represents at least an ideological break with biblical criticism. The challenge of the black biblical critic in that situation is to give discursive articulation and theoretical refinement to this black biblical hermeneutic. In the chapters that follow an attempt to lay the foundations for the development of such a biblical hermeneutics will be made. The point of departure of such a biblical criticism/hermeneutics is the black working class struggle against an apartheid bourgeois state.

Notes for Chapter 2

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P A R T II

CHAPTER 3

THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL STRUGGLES OF THE BLACK PEOPLE AS A HERMENEUTICAL STARTING POINT FOR BLACK THEOLOGY

This chapter seeks to identify and examine the salient features of the black struggle for liberation. Liberation is to be understood in Cabral's sense when he argues:

"Liberation of the people means the liberation of the productive forces of our country, the liquidation of all kinds of imperialist or colonial domination of our country, and the taking of every measure to avoid any new exploitation of our people... We want equality, social justice and freedom... Liberation for us is to take back our destiny and our history". (1)

What is important in this definition of the struggle for liberation is the linking of a people's destiny and history, their freedom, to the liberation of their productive forces. That is to say, a people's liberation is not purely moral or spiritual, it is material. Productive forces refer to the articulated combination of the means of production available to a people, e.g. land, cattle, machinery, raw materials etc. with human labour. It is the liberation of these elements of social and material life that makes for freedom, spiritual and material.

Any attempt, therefore, to reconstruct the salient moments of the black struggle will have to focus on the dialectic between groups of people and between people and their productive forces.

More specifically, though, this chapter will attempt to give an account of the struggles of those whom Debray describes as follows:

"An aristocracy of absence - and the highest title of all is conferred by death, by murder or execution. Death gives its noblemen their names and even their facial features. Unlike the more vulgar class of ministers and heads of state, the most eminent people in these secret military ranks only come to life by being put to death. Politicians shine when present and go out like lights when they leave the scene; they, on the other hand, pass directly from obscurity to immortality". (2)

A recovery of this "aristocracy of absence" in the black struggle, and an assessment of its concerns and aspirations, constitute an important heuristic tool in an effort to evolve a black biblical hermeneutics of liberation. This is so because within the biblical text itself an "aristocracy of absence" is characterised by its passing "directly from obscurity to immortality".

It is proposed to periodise the black struggle by dividing it into epochs. These are characterised by the dominance of a particular mode of production as the fundamental feature of a social formation. Thus a study of black history and culture in South Africa points to the existence, at one point or another (not necessarily unilinearly), of three stages of struggle: the communal, the tributary and the capitalist. These modes of production sometimes precede one another, at other times they co-exist with one dominating. Susan M. Brown's concept of periodisation provides a model here:

"Rather than attempting to pinpoint a series of dates or 'watershed events', as though dividing the 'line' of history into separate segments, periodisation consists in distinguishing qualita-

tively distinct shifts in social relations. Another mistaken approach to periodisation is the attempt to posit some general sequence of events (e.g. 'stages of economic growth') which serves as an historical recipe, or a model which all social formations may be expected to follow. This denies the specificity and uniqueness of the combinations of structures and contradictions of a given social formation. The attempt to understand these is part of periodisation".(3)

In fact, there is a sense in which what follows is an attempt to periodise the black struggle, in order more usefully to appropriate it as a biblical hermeneutical factor for liberation. To periodise the struggle in this way will enable black theologians to avoid the traditional danger of not being able to find a way between the Scylla of cultural reification and the Charybdis of ahistoricism. Uncritical appropriations of historically diverse features of the black history and culture has often led to either a romanticisation or an incorrect dismissal of the black traditional past. It is in order to avoid these dangers that a periodising perspective is seen as useful. This is particularly the case in an effort to develop a critical biblical hermeneutics of liberation which seeks to be rooted in the black struggle against oppression and exploitation.

The Communal Mode of Production

No direct information or evidence exists about the communal stages of African development and struggle in South Africa. A great deal of what is known has to be deduced from cultural and historical vestiges that persisted into later modes of production. Nevertheless, enough is known about the fundamental features of these modes from other parts of the world, either from the same period or from other periods in history, to enable a reasonable reconstruction of the

black struggle at this stage. Like other communal modes of production elsewhere, the African communal stage is distinguishable by the fact that property is communally owned and the products of labour are communally appropriated. It is important to remember, however, that this communalism was a function of the low level of development of the forces of production. As Gandy so aptly describes, with regard to the very early stages of the communal mode:

"Life in the primeval forest was hard and dangerous, so people formed groups and stayed together. Food was scarce. When men and women found it they must have shared, for that was the way to survive. Hunting was cooperatively organized. Everyone had to work and to work for the group. There was no surplus and no hoarding: the struggle for life drove primitives into communism".(4)

The key feature, therefore, of this stage - in its early (hunting and gathering) and later (tribal settled agricultural, pastoral and handcraft) forms - is the low level of development of the forces of production. Land and cattle in the later stage of this mode were the fundamental means of production. Members of households contributed their labour on family fields and shared equally in the pastoral and/or agricultural activities of the community. Egalitarian control over the means of production ensured egalitarian appropriation of the products of social labour.

Production in this society was production strictly of use-value, i.e. production was based fundamentally on human needs. Because of the low level of development of the forces of production, which was itself a function of an undeveloped division of labour, the human needs that

controlled production were structured around the household as a unit of economic production. There was, therefore, no permanent collective or communal labour organisation on a national level. Co-operative productive activity was confined to the basic unit of production, the family. Consequently, not enough surplus production was generated at this stage of African society to enable a further development of the technological capability of the tribe or group which would itself necessitate new methods of labour organisation. There is a dialectical relationship between the forms of labour organisation in production and the technological forms which this labour sets in motion. On the one hand what forms of labour organisation there are is dependent upon the nature of the technology available to this labour. On the other hand, the technological capabilities of a society have a structuring effect on the labour organisational possibilities. The point is a simple one. Peasant production at the communal stage of black history, did not permit a further development and progress of its society. The reason is that it confined its best form of labour organisation, co-operative activity in production, to too small a unit of economic production, the peasant household. Nevertheless, the egalitarianism of the communal mode of production has not been paralleled in subsequent history. Instead, now and again contemporary black people take a nostalgic launch into this distant past history to seek weapons of struggle from it. For as Marx has so rightly observed:

"Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and trans-

mitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just as they seemed engaged in revolutionising themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language".(5)

Often this borrowing from the past is done by us, as has been done by other people in other histories and cultures at other times, as a way of finding "the ideals and art forms, (and) the self deceptions that (we) need in order to conceal from (ourselves) the ... limitations of the content of our struggles".(6)

This danger must be avoided in the attempts to root black theology in black history and black culture. When reappropriating the economic systems of black history the intellectual integrity that Frederick Engels exhibited in his assessment of primitive communism must be shown. Gandy has this to say about it:

"Engels speaks well of early communism, but he is not guilty of primitivism. He argues that this stage was inferior to civilization. He notes the war between tribes, the cruelty of the warfare, the stunted productive forces, the religious superstition, and the power of nature over people. Primitive communism, he thinks, was better than civilization in only one way, its morality".(7)

That is the fundamental strength of this mode of production, this economic system: its morality. The morality of this system is not abstract; it is not tagged on from outside. The ethics of the communal mode of economic production is the condition of existence of this mode. It consists in the fact that production is for meeting perceived human needs.

Human beings and their well-being, are the starting point and the goal of production in this mode. People are the basis and the content of the morality of this economic system.

Thus when black theology speaks of being critically and firmly based within the black history of struggle it has in mind the conflicts and harmonies between people and nature and between people and people that revolved around the morality of production for human needs, production of use-values. Economic investment in the communal mode of production took the well-being of people as a point of departure and the goals of economic production and development were structured around the issue of the well-being of people. It is this economic morality which black theology seeks to base itself upon in its attempt to become a liberative weapon of struggle. Its biblical hermeneutics must draw from the struggles of black people and especially from the values of a culture that came out of this stage.

In the absence of institutional superstructural processes, which presuppose a fairly developed social division of labour, the African communal stage structured its relations primarily through ideology. Kinship relations were ideologised in order to serve as a regulatory mechanism on the necessary socio-economic processes that households undertook in order to survive. Thus the struggles with the natural and other external forces which Africans could not win, as well as the successes they did achieve, were theorised and expressed in ideological terms. By ideology

in this regard is meant the nuances pointed to by David Miller. According to him, ideology refers to theories, belief-systems, and practices involving the use of ideas. Theories would involve propositions which purport to explain things; belief-systems involve common sense ideas used by ordinary people to categorise things around them; and practices would take more institutional expressions (8).

And even more accurately it is the notion of ideology as described by Louis Althusser:

"In ideology men (sic) do indeed express, not the relation between them and their conditions of existence, but the way they live the relation between them and their conditions of existence: this presupposes both a real relation and an 'imaginary', 'lived' relation. Ideology, then, is the expression of the relation between men and their 'world', that is the (overdetermined) unity of the real relation and the imaginary relation between them and their real conditions of existence. In ideology the real relation is inevitably invested in the imaginary relation, a relation that expresses a will (conservative, conformist, reformist or revolutionary), a hope or a nostalgia, rather than describing a reality".(9)

Some of the effects of the way Africans "lived the relation between them and their conditions of existence" persisted in the subsequent history and culture of black South Africans, pointing to the struggles they have waged in history. These cultural and ideological products have been attacked, suppressed, prostituted, reappropriated, marginalised and even coopted by the variegated forces of subsequent history. It is in their capacity as purveyors of "struggle contexts" that a black theology of liberation is interested in them. Within the context of this discussion of the communal mode of production they will be identified, their "struggle contexts" briefly discussed, and then they will be followed

up in their reappearance in other modes of production in which black South Africans have been involved.

Probably the most dominant of these cultural vestiges is the "sphere of the ancestors". G.M. Setiloane, who calls the "ancestors" "the living dead" describes them as follows:

"At biological death, all initiated Sotho-Tswana become 'badimo'. Babies are the gift of 'badimo'. Through childhood they grow until they are initiated as adults. At death they again change their state. ... As the immediate agents of Modimo (God), the function of 'badimo' is to ensure the good ordering of social relationships among the biologically living, and the fertility and well-being of men (sic), their crops and stocks. In return they expect 'tirelo' (service). Their attitude to the living is basically parental - protective, corrective and aimed at the welfare of the whole group".(10)

Since at this stage the household remained the basic unit of production, the contradictions which the members of these households encountered, individually or collectively, especially in relation to the natural forces, were resolved by being projected into the ideological sphere of the ancestors (badimo). At this stage the ancestors were the ancestors of the household. There being only an embryonic social division of labour characterised by the sexual and age-based differentiation of functions, the father in the household officiated ritually with the ancestors on behalf of his household. The equality of social relations of production and reproduction that existed among households existed correspondingly among the ancestors of each household. It must be remembered that in the communal mode of production human beings are related to nature and to one another in a two-fold manner. To the extent that nature provides human beings with the raw materials out of which

they can fashion the means of their livelihood, their relation with nature is harmonious. To the extent that at this point the forces of production are undeveloped, thus preventing human beings from taming nature and subjecting it to their needs, their relation with nature is characterised by a contradiction. This same two-fold relation with nature also characterises the relations of production and reproduction that exist between and among people within this mode. Depending on the nature of their ability to relate to the natural forces, humans can either relate to one another in a harmonious or a hostile way.

It is the case in relation to the communal mode of production, however, that on the whole relations between people remained harmonious. The contradictions that were encountered were with nature. The ideology of "ancestors" as articulated within this mode expresses the "struggle contexts" encountered by blacks during this time. Describing a typical ritual occasion in which the ancestors are being invoked to intervene J.L. Lebulu, in an amazingly identical way to how black South Africans do it, says of the Pare of Tanzania's practice:

"The 'protective charms' were the technico-symbolical devices whose purpose was to canalize the power of the supranatural forces. The invocations in the form of prayers, were addressed to these supranatural forces with the intention of influencing their will and intention. The Pare acknowledged the superior position of these forces (personalized) by offering sacrifices to them. The sacrifice (mtaso) consisted in immolating a bull or a cow, a sheep or a goat, depending upon the gravity of the matter or the circumstances which necessitated the offering of the sacrifice. It was the duty of the head of the family unit to preside over the ritual and all the kinsmen were obliged to participate in the sacrificial performance. Allowing the blood of the sacrificial victim to flow and soak the ground,

the officiating person would offer the victim to the ancestry by mentioning their names in ascending order insofar as his memory could carry him. He would tell them that he was giving them their share in the social product of the family unit and would also thank them for their protection and ask them to remain favourable to their descendants and to protect them from any subsequent danger. After the prayer the meat would be shared by the members of the family unit".(11)

The function of the ideological domain of the communal mode of production was to reproduce the social relations of cooperation, in addition to providing symbolic mechanisms of living the relations of contradiction between members of households and the natural forces. The significance of an all-pervasive ideological structure, in a society where an organised military, political and economic ruling class that could coerce people into cooperation was absent, is underscored by Marx when he says of this cooperation under other modes of production:

"The non-agricultural labourers of an Asiatic monarchy have little but their individual bodily exertions to bring to the task, but their number is their strength, and the power of directing these masses gave rise to the palaces and temples, the pyramids, and the armies of gigantic statues of which the remains astonish and perplex us. It is that confinement of the revenues which feed them, to one or a few hands, which makes such undertakings possible. This power of Asiatic and Egyptian kings, Etruscan theocrats, etc., has in modern society been transferred to the capitalist, whether he be an isolated, or as in joint-stock companies, a collective capitalist".(12)

Under the communal mode of production "the power of directing masses" resided in a strong ideological domain. One of the key aspects of this domain among black people in South Africa was and still is the role of "the living dead", the "ancestors", "badimo", "Amadlozi", "Sinyanya" as they are variously called among the different black linguistic groups.

The ideology of "the ancestors" is first and foremost an ideology of a pastoral and agricultural economy at the communal stage of development. This fact is reflected in the communal character of the values contained in this ideology as well as by its crisis-oriented nature. More importantly the ideology of "the ancestors" has a structuring effect on all other aspects of the general ideological practices of the communal mode of production. Thus the struggle for liberation under this mode - liberation defined as the liberation of the productive forces of a community - is structured by the communal values of the ideology of "the ancestors".

The other vestige of the communal mode of production is the institution of "bogadi" (bride price). The ideological practice of "bogadi" or "lobola" (bride price) is closely linked to the importance of the labour composition of households. People within households are an important part of the productive forces of the households. For this reason the loss of a constituent part of a household's productive forces to another household through marriage was offset by the exchange of this part of the forces with another part from the receiving household. This was necessary in order to try and maintain equality between households. The ideology of "the ancestors" is involved at every stage of the negotiations and arrangements of this exchange. Besides, the "bogadi" serves also as a symbolic glue by means of which the ancestors of the one household are connected to the ancestors of the other, thus ensuring

solidarity relations for productive, protective and for social purposes. The forming of these solidarity relations enabled otherwise puny individual households to confront the sometimes hostile natural forces as a strengthened unit.

The other institution which originates from the communal mode of production is the "initiation", "boqwera" practice. Here also the ideology of "the ancestors" is pervasive.

This practice, however, represents a progressive development in the evolution of cooperative or solidary social relations as an important force of production in the communal mode. Here household boundaries are transgressed on the grounds that those who are more or less the same age can belong together by virtue of having been initiated together. Setiloane describes the initiation process well, albeit without distinguishing elements that come from other modes of production:

"This (initiation) can be achieved, by boys and girls alike, only through a long and arduous process of initiation which, starting at puberty, may last for two or three years before the final intensive period of between two and six months' training in the 'mophato' (initiation school). One aspect of the initiation period is an intensification of the training of the girls around the home. It takes a more communal nature, being done in groups according to age, the whole community taking the initiative and deciding the direction. The young men still spending much time with the cattle, but now as senior herd-boys, may be put to communal tasks by the 'kgotla' of the 'morafe' - to gathering firewood for some feast, to catching stray cattle which destroy the crops, to weeding the chief's fields... They may be called as a group to the 'kgotla' to be whipped, for a flimsy reason..."(13)

The community could call on the initiation groups/age sets to defend them together, to plough, harvest or weed fields

together, to compete with other age sets in the community in communal practices like letsema (labour gang) by cooperatively undertaking a task on behalf of some household. The solidarity bonds formed during the initiation period were often the strongest co-operative relations among members of the different households. The importance of the initiation practice as an ideological reproduction mechanism is underscored by Setiloane:

"Propriety with regard to sexual relationship and practice in and outside the home is given a very prominent place in the 'mophato' teaching. During this period, people of opposite sex are not allowed even to come near. ... Any disregard of this taboo ... is punished by the initiands themselves, of whatever sex, by inflicting a thorough thrashing on the offender there and then. Socially 'mophato' separates youths from the life of childhood and brings them to the threshold of adulthood. It conditions them emotionally to the mores of the group and moulds them into unified age-sets. ... At the same time it introduces them to the supreme right of adults - that of communicating directly with 'badimo', who play such an integral part in their lives. In contrast, a 'man' who has not been initiated is a perpetual boy, Moshimane, and the woman a Lethisa. ... No such one could marry, nor partake in the councils of men or women. Uninitiated men were spurned by women as incomplete beings and uninitiated women despised by men and other women".(14)

In the context of the communal mode of production, health care - physical and psychological - was the responsibility of whole households, especially the father in the home. Knowledge of herbs, mixtures, and divinations by lot or by dreams was a social property. Each man in the household was at once a priest, a medicine man, a lawyer. That is to say, each man was a "Ngaka", "Nyanga", "nganga" of his own household. Gelfand, although concerned about the "Ngaka" under other modes of production, describes his functions for all times in the black community:

"European society has no one quite like the nganga, an individual to whom people can turn in every kind of difficulty. He is a doctor in sickness, a priest in religious matters, a lawyer in legal issues, a policeman in the detection of crime, a possessor of magical preparations which can increase crops and instill (sic) special skills and talents into his clients. He fills a great need in society, his presence gives assurance in the whole community".(15)

In the communal mode this function was not a specialist activity; it was part of the tasks of each household. In other words households or combinations of households carried out the struggle for liberation from disease, ignorance, disasters, and dependency on natural forces, as households. Various kinds of survival strategies, technical and cultural, were devised. Many of these reappear in other modes of production reflecting the barbaric nature of oppressed people's position within the social relations of these supposedly more advanced modes. The enormous technological advances that have been made in these other modes benefit certain classes only. The reappearance of the communal mode's cultural practices of survival reflects new forms under the dominating practices of, especially monopoly capitalism. They reappear as cultural weapons of struggle as opposed to mere survival strategies. This is necessitated by the nature of the encounter between colonised oppressed people and the colonising oppressing culture of capitalism. John Breukman has aptly characterised this process:

"The capitalist mode of production has evolved by transforming, in two phases, the relation between the economic and the symbolic dimensions of social life. In its first phase, it severed the economic from the symbolic, dissolving earlier social formations and producing the social conditions that Marx analyzed. But this process, which was always incomplete and contradictory, had consequences

which have led to the second phase of capitalism. Now the economy, moving for itself, attempts to subsume the symbolic ...

Wage labor reconstitutes labor as an expenditure of energy productive of exchange value. It separates from this activity all other expenditures of the body's energy, which, having been designated unproductive, manifest themselves in forms of erotic, aesthetic, and religious experience. These then stand in a completely eccentric relation to the dominant structuring force of society, namely, the economy".(16)

The point, then, of re-situating black theology within the cultural struggles of the communal mode of production is to save it from the kind of historical amnesia that disables a liberation movement from recognising its own weapons of struggle when they resurface under different conditions. Stanley Aronowitz recognises this to have been the problem of the new left movement in the struggles of the 1960s in the United States of America:

"Much of the new left was guilty of a kind of collective amnesia, having rejected the idea that historical knowledge and living traditions could prevent repetition of past errors. Action/experience was to take precedence over history and memory. In this respect, one cannot but be impressed by the naivete of the widely disseminated notion 'Don't trust anybody over thirty', the proposition that older people are somehow a priori plagued by memories and beliefs, habits of thought and action, that ought to be buried".(17)

The tributary Mode of Production

Black history and black culture are, like all other histories and cultures, not static. The communal mode of economic production was altered and replaced by another mode around the 14th and 15th century A.D. The new mode was based on the tributary social relations of production. By this is meant an economic system where tribute paying was a basic means of surplus extraction. It is under this mode of

production that the chieftainship developed as the dominant political structure. In this system of production ownership of the means of livelihood (land, cattle, implements) is still largely communal, but the generation of a surplus in economic production has already allowed the beginnings of class and state formation. The relative development of technology and labour organisation in this mode

"necessitates the end of the dominance of kinship (which can continue to exist but only as a vestige dominated by another rationality). The forms of property corresponding to this second step are those which enable the dominant class to control access to the land and by means of this to extract tribute from the peasant producers. The extraction of this tribute is controlled by the dominance of ideology, which always takes the same forms: state religion or quasi religion".(18)

Hence under the influence of this mode the chief rather than the fathers of the households becomes the priest; medical and psychiatric activities are also alienated from the household to a specialist group of "Nyanqas/Dingaka", who are now responsible first of all to the chief. Military service is no longer a cooperative activity of the able-bodied persons of each household but the drafting and mobilisation of age regiments/Mephato under the control of the chief or the chief's deputies. The ancestors of the chief become the chief-ancestors in an hierarchical structure of ancestors. While under the communal system "the central contradictions were between elders and juniors and between elders and women,(19) under the tributary system the contradictions are between the chief, nobility, retainers, on the one side, and the Elders, commoners, foreigners and slaves, on the other side.

At this early stage of the development of tributary relations in Africa, production, was, however, still production of use-values, and not exchange values. As Amin puts it:

"The product kept by the producer is itself directly a use value meant for consumption, in general, for the producer's own consumption. But the product extracted by the exploiting class is also directly a use-value for this class. The essence of this tributary mode then is a natural economy, without exchange but not without transfers (tribute is one) and redistributions".(20)

The contradictions of this social-economic system consist in its practice of the social relations of dominance which were sealed by social and religious ideology. Amin is right in asserting that:

"It is worth recalling that this domination aids in the extraction of the surplus, while the ideology of kinship in the communal mode, where ideology is also dominant, aids in the reproduction of relations of cooperation and domination but not of exploitation".(21)

The early stages of the tributary economic system remain characterised by the persistence of communal values and practices. These exist side by side with new practices peculiar to the tributary mode. Incipient economic exploitation in the form of transfers is offset by the redistributive economic justice. The irony and inherent contradiction of this set-up is, however, captured by Jean Comaroff when she writes:

"The encompassment of the household within the political economy was actually conceived of in terms of the 'natural' progression of kin groups into the nation (morafe); and chiefly extraction was couched in the terms of agnatic seniority, a relationship idealized as one of paternal responsibility as well as authoritative licence. The chief, after all, was the 'father of the people'".(22)

Cooper has identified the material basis that formed the backdrop of the black struggle in the tributary mode of production. Criticising Schapera's theoretically inadequate description of the Ngwato Kingdom in Botswana, Cooper points out that "the allocation of grazing, arable, hunting and residential land" constituted the "fulcrum around which this whole structure revolved".(23)

The precise moment at which the transition from the communal to the tributary mode took place is not known; it could only be deduced theoretically. The change in the control over the means of production and, concomitantly, the forces of production, indicates that wherein the change consists. This is so especially since it is these power relations over the forces of production that dialectically structure and are structured by the relations of production, thus resulting in specific patterns of appropriation of the products of labour.

In line with this development the ideological and political power base shifts from households and homesteads to wards and the nation. Cooper articulates this clearly:

"It must be stressed that within the kingdoms the ward was more fundamental than the family group, which was a residue from an earlier mode. It was to the ward headman that arable land was distributed and he in turn distributed it, via the family group senior, to the different homesteads".(24)

Jack Lewis has correctly identified the fundamental problematic in the study of social struggles in the tributary mode as being the relationship between homestead based units of production and the chief. It would, however,

be more theoretically and empirically accurate to add that the "chief" here must be seen as a symbol of a class, a tribute exacting ruling class.

Thus many of the ideological functions that pertained to the ancestors in the communal mode also shifted to the chief and the chief's ancestors. As Lewis puts the matter:

"The Xhosa economy depended on the availability of land to absorb the conflicts generated by the struggle to control the two most important resources - cattle and people. Both of these were highly mobile... The primary function of the Xhosa chief was to symbolise the attachment of the people to their cattle and their lands. Land, however, is a fixed resource and ensuring the availability of adequate land (both qualitatively and quantitatively) was the most immediate problem confronting the chief in maintaining the political unity of chiefdom".(25)

In the tributary mode the ideology of the chief and the chieftainship replaces the ideology of the ancestors. The ideology of the ancestors is "royalised" in such a way that its basic character as a symbol of how a communally structured society lived its relation to its material conditions is fundamentally eroded. Instead, what emerges is a new ideology, called by an old name, whereby the contradictions between people and nature are over-determined by a hierarchically structured social system. Lewis summarises the nature of the black struggle within the tributary mode when he writes in respect of the Xhosa that:

"The history of the Xhosa may, in large measure, be viewed as the process of the creation of chiefdoms in response to the intensification of the contradiction between the chief and the mass of households. More specifically, it may be viewed as the outcome of the contradiction between the chief (and his supporters amongst the rich heads of households, who enjoyed a close political relationship with him) and the poor indebted members of these households and young men who wished to marry

and establish households of their own".(26)

Thus in the communal mode of production the black struggle took the form of developing the technological and ideological instruments to mediate between producers and the natural environment. In the tributary mode, however, in addition to the ongoing struggle to tame nature for meeting human needs, the black struggle is further characterised by a political and ideological resistance to a ruling class that forever imposes its will on the rest of the populace. A black theology of liberation, therefore, must of necessity, trace the trajectory of the struggle in which it seeks to participate to the fate of the "aristocracy of absence" in this mode and in the mode that predates this one. It is necessary to do this in order to avoid neo-colonial pitfalls which have characterised most African struggles. It is also important to be aware that many of these pitfalls result from theoretical errors inherent in the different readings of the black struggle. Some readings of this struggle, especially within black theology, tend to bracket out black history and culture as the basis of the struggle. The black struggle, however, tends, to falter wherever and whenever it ceases to be informed by a critical reading of black history and culture.

The Capitalist Mode of Production

In South Africa, as in other parts of the world, the advent of the capitalist mode of production was preceded by a historically and logically prior phase which Marx has called "the primitive accumulation phase". This is the historical process whereby the original producers and owners

of the means of production are dispossessed and transformed into the possessors of marketable labour power. As Marx succinctly describes it:

"The capitalist system pre-supposes the complete separation of the labourers from all property in the means by which they can realise their labour. ...The process, therefore, that clears the way for the capitalist system, can be none other than the process which takes away from the labourer the possession of his means of production; a process that transforms, on the one hand, the social means of subsistence and of production into capital, on the other, the immediate producers into wage-labourers."(28)

Marx encapsulates, in this paragraph, a significant theoretical for understanding the black struggle within capitalist South Africa. The importance of this theoretical perspective is in indicating a historical starting point (the primitive accumulation process) for a completely restructured black struggle. Nevertheless, the contemporary character of this struggle cannot be fully understood without bearing in mind its pre-capitalist history, as outlined above.

Guy has studied the process whereby the black struggle was restructured within Zulu society, in Natal at the time of the advent of capitalism. The forces of "primitive accumulation" against which the black struggle was redirected introduced new dimensions and fostered new responses by black people. Jeff Guy calls the entire process whereby this took place "the destruction and reconstruction of Zulu society".(29) According to Guy attempts by colonial capital to separate the Zulu producers from their means of production by direct assault failed in 1879 when the British and colonial troops suffered severe

reverses on the battlefield. Having thus failed to impose a direct military siege on black people in Zululand, the British colonialists sought other means. The history of the destruction of Zulu society by alternative means to military obliteration vindicates Cabral's words:

"The ideal of foreign domination, whether imperialist or not, lies in this alternative: either to eliminate practically all the population of the dominated country, thereby excluding the possibilities of a cultural resistance; or to succeed in imposing itself without damage to the culture of the dominated people, that is, to harmonize economic and political domination of these people with their cultural personality".(30)

Guy argues that the British colonialists chose the second of Cabral's alternatives in their attempts to destroy and reconstitute Zulu society. According to Guy, this choice was rationalised in the following manner:

"The reorganisation of the existing chiefly stratum and the traditional production system would free the people of Zululand from the tyranny of the Zulu dynasty and they would gladly accept the restoration of the 'natural' Nguni system of homestead production under chiefly rule. At the same time, it was said, progress would be ensured by the overall authority of white magistrates and the right of appeal to their courts. The imposition of the hut-tax would substitute the civilising influence of wage labour for the barbaric demands of Zulu military service and would have the added advantage of covering the administrative costs of the colony".(31)

The retention and recognition, however, of pre-colonial black culture was more apparent than real. Guy points out that while the chieftainship, for instance, was a pre-colonial feature, "chiefs and their duties, had to be altered substantially before they could become a feature of the colonial system".(32) This observation is corroborated by Cabral who points out that there is no historical evidence to support the supposition that foreign domination

can be imposed without damage to the culture of the dominated people.(33)

The culture of the colonised people, being both the outcome and a determinant of their history, represents a contradiction to the mode of production of the colonising forces. It has to be distorted first before it can be used against the history and people of which it is a product. But even this process of attempting to distort or subjugate black culture represents an arena of fierce struggles, as the history of the missionaries attests.

Anthony Dachs in a study of missionary penetration of the Tswana group in South Africa demonstrates how culture became the terrain of struggle by black people against colonialism. He writes of how Mothibi, the chief of Bathaping section of the Tswana, refused to allow the missionaries in the 19th century to settle among his people:

"Worse than that, 'the things which (missionaries) teach are contrary to all our customs, which the people will not give up'. Obviously here Mothibe,(sic) knowing of the missionary effects upon the neighbouring Griquas, particularly in the reform of dress and attack on polygamy, feared that the missionaries would subvert tribal religion and custom on which his own authority is based".(34)

The black struggle against colonialism assumed a double form. There was a level of the struggle characterised by the resistance of the pre-colonial ruling classes, the chiefs and their retainers against foreign domination, in order to protect their authority. This aspect of the black struggle tended to vacillate between support for the general values and customs of black people and collusion with those

aspects of colonialism that appeared like they might buttress the power of the traditional ruling classes. The other level consisted of the struggles waged by those members of the black communities who were traditionally oppressed and exploited by the pre-colonial rulers themselves and, were now also about to be subjected to oppression and exploitation by the colonial rulers.

The importance of distinguishing between these two forms of the cultural struggle becomes clear when one considers how inimical the view of a homogeneous (classless) African culture can be to the contemporary struggle for liberation. This is so because often black people appropriate oppressive aspects of the culture whose class origins and functions relate to the struggles of the ruling classes.

The black people of South Africa understood more than the missionaries the subversive nature of foreign religion to the culture and society of the people where it is preached. For this reason the Tswana, for example, held strongly that "the missionaries could, if they wished, reside at the Kuruman and come to Lattakoo 'to trade but not to teach'". (35)

The missionaries, however, understood the subversive character of class on culture more than the black people of South Africa. For as Cabral writes:

"Knowing this reality, colonialism, which represses or inhibits significant cultural expression at the grass roots on the part of the mass of the people, supports and protects the prestige and cultural influence of the ruling class at the summit. It installs chiefs whom it trusts and who are more or less accepted by the population, gives them various

material privileges including education for their eldest children, creates chiefdoms where they did not exist, establishes and develops cordial relations with religious leaders... Above all, by means of the repressive organs of colonial administration, it ensures the economic and social privileges of the ruling class in relation to the mass of the people".(36)

And as Dachs has shown in respect of Mothibi and his retainers, that having initially resisted the missionaries in support of their people and their culture, they finally yielded to their class tastes:

"Playing on Mothibe's appetite for sharing in the missionaries' wealth and skills, Read gradually won over the chief, by showing him 'favours' and making him gifts. By March 1817 he could claim that 'the King is my friend'. Read dealt similarly with the Tlhaping headmen, particularly those who opposed missionary settlement most strongly. Thus he won over Maklak, 'the next chief' to Mothibe and 'the chief opposer of Missionaries'. Politically the shower of gifts and favours paid off for when Read's presence at Lattakoo was challenged in pitso (people's assembly), Mothibe, his brother Molala and many headmen, including Maklak, who were all sharing in the material benefits of missionary settlement, sprang stoutly to his defence".(37)

The primitive accumulation process, however, is usually, historically, unable to overcome the cultural resistance of the indigenous people by using purely cultural mechanisms. In order that this process should be successfully set in motion more repressive measures such as a military and legal siege on the indigenous people is a precondition. Thus the first phase of the forceful subjugation and separation from their means of production of the black people of South Africa had to do with the wars of conquest/resistance between the colonisers and the indigenous people. Lebamang Sebidi has summarised this phase well when he concludes that both in respect of the 17th century struggles of the Khoisan

and the 18th and 19th century struggles of the "African" tribes, the issue was the forceful separation of the indigenous producers from their means of production. He writes:

"There are two points that one would wish to make here, namely, that the Khoisan did not willingly submit to their systematic incorporation into foreign, white rule; and that the Khoisan base - land and cattle - was the bone of contention between these indigenous people and their white foreigners, right from the onset. ...

The land had been foundational to the lives of the indigenous people. When they lost the land, they lost their independence and their ability to shape and determine their history. The natives lost the land, but not without struggling valiantly to keep it. This is what we would refer to as the tribalistic phase of the struggle. It was characterised by the individual African tribes struggling to hold on to their land. ... The beginning of the twentieth century saw almost every tribe or clan in South Africa virtually incorporated into the socio-political and economic system of the white settlers. The conquest was all but complete at the turn of the present century".(38)

The period of transition from pre-capitalist to capitalist societies in South Africa, following the forcible destruction of the material bases of pre-capitalist formations, took place between the 1880s and 1940s. The various forms that this took in the various parts of the country have been documented by historians.(39) The black struggle in this period is characterised by a life which "represented a transitional stage between servitude and independence, between pre-capitalist and capitalist societies and between potential for stock accumulation and the likelihood of poverty or wage labour".(40) The point of the onslaught on black agricultural producers and stock owners was at every stage to create a class of wage labourers on the basis of which capitalist production could be set on its feet. But as Brown has pointed out:

"...most inimical to the development of productive capitalism proper in South Africa was the structural limitations of the state in the Transvaal, and of the division of South Africa into separate states; both of these impeded the large-scale creation and control of a wage labour force. This last constituted the sine qua non of the emergent CMP (Capitalist Mode of Production)".(41)

Until this period of transition the dominant form of capitalist penetration in South Africa had been mercantile capitalism. This form of capitalism is characterised by the dominance of exchange relations as opposed to the productive relations which are the key feature of industrial capitalism. In order to establish an industrial capitalist political economy, South Africa needed a State that could restructure the entire country in such a way as to establish a single political economy.

The British imperial military intervention in South Africa in the form of the Anglo-Boer war 1899-1902 represents an attempt on the part of capital to extend the industrial capitalist productive relations over the whole of South Africa. This entire process has its landmark in the creation of the South African state in 1910. Marks and Trapido make the point well when they write:

"The goal of British policy in Southern Africa - whatever the rhetoric of the war years - had little to do with granting Africans political rights, or with 'freedom and justice'. Imperial goals are determined by imperial ends: in the case of southern Africa, there was no intention to change the property relations already existing in the region, though the war and the reconstruction which followed it were intended to transform the nature of the class structure of the territory by hastening the development of a capitalist state which would be more fully capable of fulfilling the demands of the mining industry".(42)

Thus the Anglo-Boer war, while representing the British finance capital's programme of seeking to establish a political state that could oversee the general development of capitalism in South Africa, also sought to create conducive conditions for large scale proletarianisation. The contradictions of this period have, in terms of the black struggle, been brilliantly captured by Krikler.(43) He points out how black peasant underclasses in the Transvaal attempted to take advantage of the War to advance their own class interests. They spied on the Boers for the British, they plundered the livestock of the Boer, they occupied for themselves the land which had been occupied by the Boers. Krikler makes the point, correctly, that the black peasant underclasses understood what was happening as a reversal of what had happened to them:

"In the aftermath of the war, they were said to be 'preparing to approach' the Government 'on the subject of additional land being given to them in consideration of the services they rendered during the war'. In the north-western Transvaal, tenants evidently 'expected great things in the way of free grants of land after the war'. And, as has already been noted, in the northern Transvaal, rural blacks expected the return of ancestral lands appropriated by the Boers. In the eastern reaches of the colony, the Pedi peasantry sought the extension of its lands at the expense of the property of land companies to whom land had been alienated before the war..."(44)

The black peasant underclasses totally misread the intentions of the British imperialists in declaring war against the Boers. The war was not fought against private property, nor was it an intervention on behalf of Africans in order to reverse their dispossession. On the contrary, the war was fought in order to subjugate and integrate both the Boer landlords and the black proletariat into the newly

created capitalist social formation. This process culminated in the formulation of the Union of South Africa in 1910.

In order thus to reverse the gains that the black peasant underclasses had made during the war, the British capitalist colonial state gave over power to a settler capitalist State whose responsibility it was to take necessary political and legal actions to guarantee the functioning of the new social formation. But even before this time, mechanisms for reconstituting the Boer landlords were set in motion by the British administration. As Krikler points out, however, the restored class was also a mutated class:

"But if the world of the landowners was restored in the aftermath of the Boer War, it was not quite the same world. A series of mutations were engineered within it. The local NC (Native Commissioner), whilst crucial to landlord authority, was no longer simply synonymous with the prominent landowners of a particular area: local policies were now meshed into the much wider programme by which the full development of capitalism in the Transvaal was to be achieved. Within class relations themselves, changes were wrought of momentous importance for the future. The post-war NCs knew well-enough the archaic nature of the regime of the landlords, its dependence upon various forms of unfree labour".(45)

Krikler concludes that there are at least three reasons why the objectives of "the class war of 1899-1902" failed to come to fruition for the agrarian workers. First, the British Administration, by means of coercive measures, did not allow the former black agricultural and pastoral peasants to be reunited to their means of production by retaining the land and stock that they had repossessed from the Boers. Second, the two-level nature of the black struggle - compromising the traditional rulers and the

traditionally oppressed classes - undermined the ability of the blacks to maintain their resistance to proletarianisation:

"it was no accident that the British bribed the village elders with gun-licences to spur them into encouraging their followers to surrender their arms; Stanley Trapido has suggestively argued that one of the reasons for the rapid re-establishment of the rural order in the Transvaal after the war was the re-introduction of labour-recruiting which made 'chiefs more willing to collaborate once more'".(46)

Krikler's third reason why the black struggle failed in its objectives during the war is worth citing at length, because it represents also an indication of why subsequent struggles changed, and especially only about a decade after the war.

He writes:

"Third, rural workers were unable to ensure a final expropriation of their exploiters because their struggle was overwhelmingly unco-ordinated and spontaneous in nature. It was, in fact, this factor which rendered them unable to vault over the two conditions of their failure mentioned above. The underclasses lacked revolutionary organisation and strategy. Only these would have given Agrarian workers - whether on farms or on communal lands - the weapons with which to continue fighting for a world without landlords. That world they temporarily achieved, but often simply by following in the direction that their alienation and spontaneous acts of resistance led them. They could not hold on to that world, or prevent its retreat, without an idea of a new society and the organisation requisite to materialise that idea".(47)

After 1910 the legal and political apparatus existed for further eroding what successes the black struggle might have achieved during the Boer war. One monumental legislative intervention of the new capitalist state was the Natives' Land Act of 1913. The Act was without a doubt aimed at intensifying the process of primitive accumulation, which as noted earlier, is the precondition of capitalist production

proper. The Act was to strengthen the position of the capitalist landlords and to dispossess the independent black peasantry and to turn them into possessors of labour power only. Keegan, has, however, warned against overstating the significance of legislative intervention in the restructuring of class relations:

"If the history of South Africa's countryside demonstrated anything, it is that legislative edict and administrative fiat have little force in shaping the substance and context of class struggle unless the material conditions are also propitious. The struggle was conducted in the countryside, not in parliament. State intervention did, however, alter the power relations implicit in that struggle".(48)

The national onslaught of the national state and economy on the black indigenous peoples of South Africa, in the post Boer War period, provoked the need for a national response to oppression and exploitation. This response crystallised and consolidated in the formation of the African National Congress in 1912. The black response, as an expression of the new form of the black struggle, was, however, heavily framed by the historical defeat of black people by the forces of capitalist expansion. Admittedly, "the struggle was not over, it had only shifted from physical to intellectual plane".(49) Be that as it may, the formation of the African National Congress heralded an era of black political discourse by means of which the past, present and future black political practice would be guided. From this time on, the struggle against colonisation would be waged, like the struggle in pre-colonial times, both at the level of practice and at the level of deliberate discursive articulation. The black struggle in the context of the capitalist mode of production, is, however, more complex, if

only because it is waged against more complex ideologies and practices. The complications and contradictions of the black struggle itself were already evident in the motivations of the early proponents of a national response to capitalist colonialism. Pixley ka Isaka Seme combined, in a curious way, his covetousness of the capitalist civilization with his hatred of its dispossession of his people when he motivated the formation of the National Congress in this way:

"There is today among all races and men a general desire for progress, and for cooperation, because cooperation will facilitate and secure that progress. This spirit is due no doubt to the great triumph of Christianity which teaches men everywhere that in this world they have a common duty to perform both towards God and towards one another. It is natural, therefore, that there should arise even among us this striving, this self-conscious movement, and sighing for Union. We are the last among all the nations of the earth to discover the priceless jewels of co-operation, and for this reason the great gifts of civilisation are least known among us today. I repeat, cooperation is the key and the watchword which opens the door, the everlasting door which leads into progress and all national success. The greatest success shall come when man (sic) shall have learned to cooperate, not only with his own kin but with all peoples and with all life".(50)

The middle class origins and character of the early black political discourse have been documented.(51) This discourse constituted the theoretical weapons for fighting black oppression and exploitation; but it also represented a specific mode of appropriating black history and black culture. The black political discourse is a product of class struggles, a record of class struggles, as well as an arena and a weapon of class struggles. This fundamental class character of the liberation struggle and of the

culture of the people waging it has been aptly captured by Cabral:

"The experience of colonial domination shows that, in an attempt to perpetuate exploitation, the colonizer not only creates a whole system of repression of the cultural life of the colonized people, but also provokes and develops the cultural alienation of a part of the population, either by supposed assimilation of indigenous persons, or by the creation of a social gulf between the aboriginal elites and the mass of the people. As a result of this process of division or of deepening the divisions within the society, it follows that a considerable part of the population notably the urban or peasant 'petty bourgeoisie', assimilates the colonizer's mentality, and regards itself as culturally superior to the people to which it belongs and whose cultural values it ignores or despises... A spiritual reconversion - of mentalities - is thus seen to be vital for their true integration in the liberation movement. Such reconversion - re-Africanization in our case - may take place before the struggle, but is completed only during the course of the struggle, through daily contact with the mass of the people and the communion of sacrifices which the struggle demands". (52)

All black political and cultural discourses and practices since the complete defeat of black resistance to colonialism at the turn of the century, have displayed the one or other of the class choices described by Cabral. In fact the African National Congress represented and continues to represent a particular class discourse. The Pan Africanist Congress, which broke away from the African National Congress in 1959 also represents its own brand of class discourse and practice. Similarly, the Black Consciousness Movement which came into being under the objective and subjective conditions of the late 1960s and the early 1970s, constitutes a particular articulation of class political and cultural discourse. In the case of the latter political

movement the point is clearly shown in item (b)(iv) of the Preamble of its constitution:

"Since class oppression manifests itself in colour terms, the philosophy of Black Consciousness, a dynamic product of objective conditions, has and shall continue to galvanise the people towards our liberation and, as such constitutes an indispensable mobilising force in the struggle for self-determination".(53)

Earlier in this chapter, it was argued that the black struggle manifested itself in a two-fold form during the tributary stage. The one level of the struggle was represented by the efforts and desires of the tributary ruling class and its retainers; the other level expressed itself in terms of the attempts of the "commoners" in the African communities to wrest a living from nature and to resist the impositions of the ruling classes.

The post-1910 political and cultural discourses of the black struggle, especially as represented by the ANC, the PAC, the BCM and recently the United Democratic Front, and the Azanian People's Organisation have expressed the various permutations of the first level of the struggle - the ruling class level, and only very mildly some elements of the second level. It is also the case that the various political movements have contained in their discourses more or less of the one or other of the elements of both levels of the struggle.

The Black consciousness philosophy has been able to give birth to a black theology of liberation because of its identification with the concerns and aspirations of the "commoners" in the black community since pre-colonial times.

It is for this reason that Takatso Mofokeng can argue that Black Consciousness is the philosophy whereby the creation of a new black subject is made possible and by which conformist action is critiqued:

"Here we are concerned with Black Consciousness as a positive negation of any action of the oppressed that is determined by values, culture and history that causes, and perpetuates suffering. The new black subjects undertake concrete action that will open up the future. The discarded history of the oppressed, ... provides symbols that inform and transform their consciousness and dynamize their action. For this to happen this history is interpreted no longer in the light of the value system of the oppressor but in the light of this new Black Consciousness. ... The new subjects re-appropriate this history, translate its lessons into appropriate and effective actions, thereby continuing it". (54)

The reason for raising the question of the class and ideological commitments of the various political and cultural discourses of the various liberation movements is in order to point out that the appropriation of the black struggle as a biblical hermeneutical starting point, is not unproblematic. Class and ideological choices have to be made, because the black struggle is not a homogeneous phenomenon. But whatever choices are made between the various discourses of the struggle, they will at least root the struggle to some measure in black history and culture - the latter two alone being able to provide the weapons for reading the Bible in genuinely liberative terms for black people in South Africa.

As for black theology, in order to be genuinely liberative in its use of the Bible, it will have to identify for itself contemporary forms of black history and culture that will

better situate it so it can reappropriate past struggles of black people in a critical and hermeneutically fruitful way.

The purpose of this chapter was to highlight some of the features of the black struggle which must be presupposed and must inform any attempt to develop a black biblical hermeneutics of liberation. The various forms of appropriating this struggle determine the various uses of the Bible by black theologians. That is to say, how black theologians are located within the longer and wider black history and culture influences the biblical hermeneutical lenses they develop.

The process of liberative biblical hermeneutical appropriation, however, is a long one that begins with a critical appreciation of the history and culture of the hermeneuticians. It then moves on to an appreciation of the historical and cultural struggles of the biblical communities before finally confronting the signified expressions of those struggles in the texts. Thus the next two chapters represent an attempt at a materialist reading of the biblical texts as an integral part of the process of a materialist use of these texts in the black struggle for liberation.

The rest of this study must, therefore, keep in mind the "struggle" contexts which were identified in the various phases and forms of the black history and culture in this chapter. The Communal, Tributary, Colonial and modern Capitalist modes of production represent the "struggle" contexts that informs the contemporary discourses of the

black struggle. The class and ideological choices made vis-a-vis these contexts will determine the specific hermeneutical tools for reading and using the Bible.

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CHAPTER 4

A MATERIALIST READING OF MICAH

Introduction

Biblical scholars have always been aware of the tendency in biblical literature whereby older traditions are reused to address the needs of new situations. The whole question of the reappearance of themes and motifs in different contexts at different times exemplifies this process. This creation of new traditions by means of old ones has in fact been seen as a natural order of things in the internal hermeneutics of the Bible. As Deist put it, "It is the primary function of tradition to explain the new in terms of the old and in that way to authorize the new".(1) von Rad has gone further and drawn attention to the fact that in the biblical literature not only do we have a reapplication of old themes and motifs, but we are confronted with what are in fact historical data alongside a "spiritualising interpretation of these data".(2) According to him there is a unifying principle that keeps the various traditions together:

"In the process the old disassociated traditions have been given a reference and interpretation which in most cases was foreign to their original meaning.... Only the reader is not aware of the tremendous process of unification lying behind the picture given in the source documents."(3)

Until recently, however, the historical-ideological significance of the "unified diversity" of biblical literature seems to have eluded biblical scholars. By this

is meant that although scholars have noticed the disparate character of the material and the manner in which it has been precariously held together by what they have called 'theological interpretative themes', they have nevertheless failed to see the ideological unity that pervades most of the Bible.

In recent times new directions have emerged. Gottwald's monumental book, The Tribes of Yahweh, breaks new ground in a radical way. Amongst other things, Gottwald argues convincingly for the cultic-ideological origins of the texts of the Bible.(4) A number of other scholars follow, mutatis mutandis, a similar procedure to that of Gottwald.(5)

It is to be noted, however, that the ideological unity of a text, notwithstanding the literary and other disparities in that very text, is not discernible as a matter of natural course to every reader. On the contrary, specific kinds of ideological questions put to the text as a result of particular kinds of ideological commitments and practices, are necessary for the detection of the text's own practices. The use of a historical materialist method to reconstruct the social system and practices behind the text of Micah in this chapter is a result of a theoretical commitment that issues out of a concurrent commitment to the black struggle for liberation from capitalism, racism, sexism and imperialism in South Africa. It is salutary to observe that most, if not all, of the materialist exegetical and hermeneutical studies of the Bible that we have seen in recent times share this ideological orientation to real political struggles.

A Materialist method was used to delineate the struggles that produced and inhere in black history and culture. A similar method will be employed to connect us with the struggles behind and in the text of the Bible. It is, therefore, worth recalling the following points in this regard.

How a society produces and reproduces its life is fundamentally conditioned by its mode of production. The legal, religious, political and philosophical spheres of society develop on the basis of the mode of production and refer back to it. Any approach, therefore, that seeks to employ a materialist method must inquire into (1) the nature of the mode of production, (2) the constellation of classes necessitated by that mode, (3) the nature of the ideological manifestations arising out of and referring back to that mode of production.

Material Conditions of the Book of Micah:

The Mode of Production

Given a proper theoretical framework, it does not take much to realise that the Israelite monarchical system was based on a tributary mode of production. Since, however, the concept of a mode of production is a theoretical abstraction, it is important to give historical specificity to the form of such a mode of production in the Israelite monarchy.

The Forces of Production

The most fundamental means of production in Palestine throughout all ancient historical epochs was the land. People needed land to settle in as families (beth 'a voth) and as associations of extended families (mishpahoth). But whatever land they settled in was determined not only by historical factors but also by ecological characteristics. Both agriculture and pastoralism depended for the form they took on the nature of the land as determined by demographical, climatological and topographical factors. The significance of land as a fundamental means of production can be appreciated even more if it is kept in mind that "environmentally, Palestine is a conglomerate of many different ecological zones of dramatic contrast. These essentially geographical differences in the sub-regions of Palestine are reflected in the patterns of settlement, as well as in economic and historical development." (6) Thus the struggle for the occupation and indeed possession of the more favourable portions of the land of Palestine was one of the key motors of historical development in ancient times.

Both demographic and historical factors, however, led to situations where innumerable communities had to make do with naturally unfavourable parts of the land. Settlements have been uncovered by archaeologists in desert, arid and hilly areas which are often long distances away from sources of water. These parts of the land required particular kinds of technological means to mediate between human labour and the means of production, as a way of setting the forces of production in motion. The question of tools, therefore, as part of the means of production, indicates another level at

which the historical struggles of ancient Palestine were waged.

The Israelite community of the period before the monarchy faced with the oppressive reality of the feudal dictatorships of the city states of Canaan, was forced to retribalise/regroup as an alternative egalitarian society. This process took place in the hill country of Palestine under extremely adverse natural conditions. The basic requirements for good agriculture, namely, the soil and water, were for them particularly problematic. De Geus summarises the situation as follows:

"The tremendous efforts of the terracing of the mountain-slopes were undertaken in order:

- (a) To transform a continuous slope into a series of level surfaces or terraced planes.
- (b) To prevent the run-off erosion and enhance the accumulation of soil and water.
- (c) To get rid of the stones and to form a flat upper layer of cultivatable soil. The stones are used for building the terrace-walls and other structures accompanying the terraces.
- (d) To facilitate the transport and distribution of irrigation water in the case of (spring) irrigated terraces." (7)

Gottwald has recently reconstructed the specific combination of the relations and forces of production, that is, the mode of production of premonarchic Israel. He points among other things to the way in which an egalitarian communal society, arranged in large extended families which were relatively self-contained socio-economic units and political equals, took advantage of the recent introduction of iron implements for clearing and tilling the land and of slake lime plaster

for waterproofing cisterns in order to keep reserve water during the annual dry season.(8)

Despite the technological breakthrough that the use of iron implements represented for the Israelite communities of the hill country, it is well to remember that technical difficulties in the local production of iron imposed a slowness in the general adoption of iron for practical use. There were, for instance, not yet any local smiths by the time of the beginning of the monarchy (1 Samuel 13:19ff).

As Waldbaum has put it:

"In 11th century contexts agricultural use of iron appears for the first time. Though most tool types continue to be made exclusively in bronze, such objects as a ploughshare for Gibeah, a sickle for Beth Shemesh, and a hafted axe-head for Tell-el-Far'ah South - all for occupation levels - testify to the advent of iron for practical use in Palestine, though it is still far less commonly used than bronze.

(9)

Archaeological evidence from some Iron Age sites in Palestine indicates that by the tenth century B.C. there was not only a good supply of iron in Palestine, but that some conscious manufacturing of steel was taking place in the area. Stech-Wheeler et.al., make the point that:

"The evidence presented by the Tel Qiri axe tends to confirm observations drawn from the Taanach iron. Although an isolated object from a single site is not sufficient to permit the characterization of a regional industry, it does lend support to the contention that steel was being regularly used in the Jezreel Valley by the tenth century B.C."(10)

There is, therefore, no doubt that agricultural production, which was the basis of the ancient Israelite economy, was optimised by the generalised use of iron technology. But since "the seasonal character of the climate that sets the

boundaries of the agricultural year contrasts with the aseasonal demand for food which knows no boundaries"(11) it is necessary in a discussion of the forces of production to identify patterns of labour utilisation to get a complete picture of the nature of the forces of production.

In premonarchic Israel the basic economic unit was the beth-'av or father's house. The labour of the family was differentiated on the basis of age and sex to accomplish the process of producing the basic means of subsistence. Grain and fruits were grown, limited animal husbandry was practiced where the beth-'av owned some sheep and goats and a few cattle. "The staple crops were barley and wheat, wine and olive oil, which were produced alone or in combinations depending on the variable climate and soil from region to region".(12) Co-operation between the beth-'avoth which made up the mishpaha (extended families networks) (2 Sam.6:6; 1 Sam.23:1; Ruth 3:2 and 1 Kings 22:10) helped to spread risk and to increase productivity, particularly in view of "the great diversity of the agricultural environment created especially by a variegated landscape overlaid by variations in rainfall, soil and vegetation."(13)

The forces of production that took shape on the hill country of Palestine remained fundamentally the same during the period of the monarchy, with differences in the degree of their development. Since, however, the area occupied by Israelites during the monarchy was far wider, covering some of the plains and valleys formerly belonging to the

Canaanite city states, we must refer to the changes brought about by this expansion in the forces.

Chaney has suggested that the expansion of the Israelite land by David's conquest of the alluvial plains and valleys brought about a change in the relations of production and ideology of premonarchic Israel.(14) We concur with him in this matter. The starting point, however, for understanding a change in the social relations and ideology of a social formation is seeing how the alterations in the forces of production necessitates such a change.

The availability of crown lands in the plains and valleys gave King David the political power to instal a system of land tenure in them which conflicted with the older communally owned and communally tilled land of the hill country. The land in the plains and valleys was more fertile, less vulnerable to soil erosion and being on a flat surface, more retentive of water. This situation already represented an advantage concerning land owned in the valleys compared to land owned in the hill country. Thus since "rain agriculture in Palestine was subject to the vicissitudes of periodic drought, blight, and pestilence", the incorporation of the valleys and plains into Israel meant that there were inherent inequalities in the means of production. But however fertile the lands were, wealth was, then as now, a function of human labour. In themselves the crown lands of the plains and valleys could not produce the wealth that the Davidic monarchy required as a material basis of its state power. To do this, the incipient kingdom

required a system of surplus extraction whose presupposition is unrewarded human labour. To be sure, the crown lands were tilled and they yielded surpluses, but the mode of integrating human labour to those means of production must be discussed together with the question of the relations of production in the united monarchy of Israel. To this we shall turn shortly. First, however, we must specify in a little detail the level of development of the forces of production during the 8th century, the latter being the original socio-temporal context of the book of Micah.

The Eighth Century B.C.E. conjuncture in Judah

Historians and archaeologists of the period of the Old Testament are agreed that the eighth century was for Israel and Judah a time of considerable growth, development and prosperity. From the perspective that dominates analysis in this study, this growth and development must be seen as an expansion of the forces of production. It is important to keep this in mind because a study of the relations of production, conversely, will reveal the obverse side of this development, especially as far as the underdevelopment of the majority of the populations of Israel and Judah is concerned. This specific look at the eighth century conjuncture seeks to examine the expansion in the forces of production which is evident in Judah, the geographical context of the prophetic text of Micah.

The expansion and development of the forces of production in the eighth century Judah was due to advances and changes in at least three areas: the geopolitical arrangements;

regional specialisation of productive activities; and labour availability and utilisation.

The first half of the eighth century saw the rise of Assyrian imperialism and the decline of the hegemony of the Aramean states, especially Damascus. Internal problems in Assyria and threats from elsewhere in the imperial terrain, however, weakened the expansionist designs of Assyria. Meanwhile attempts by Damascus to recover from the battering it had incurred from the Assyrians were frustrated by rivalry with Hamoth.

With the ascendancy to power of Uzziah the son of Amaziah, Judah seems to have been able to reverse some of its military losses to Syria and Israel by imposing control over the Edomite lands (2 Chronicles 26:1-8). This allowed favourable geopolitical conditions to obtain for Judah.

Bright describes the situation as follows:

"By the mid-eighth century the dimensions of Israel and Judah together lacked but little of being as great as those of the empire of Solomon. Since full advantage seems to have been taken of the favourable position in which the country found itself, a prosperity unknown since Solomon ensued. The two states being at peace with each other, and the major trade routes - up and down Transjordan, into northern Arabia, along the coastal plain, into the hinterland from the Phoenician ports - all once more passing through Israelite-held territory, tolls from caravans, together with the free interchange of goods, poured wealth into both countries. There was probably a revival of Red Sea trade, as there was of the copper industry of the Arabah. It is almost certain that Tyre - not yet at the end of her great period of commercial expansion - was again drawn into the program by treaty, as in the days of Solomon and the Omrides". (15)

It was, however, the regional specialisation of productive activities which allowed a boost in the economy of Judah in

the eighth century. Chaney and Rainey, independently of each other have argued that a biblical textual evidence of this specialisation is yielded by 2 Chronicles 26:10 - "translated according to the known facts of Hebrew syntax and economic geography.(16) The text is translated:

"He (Uzziah) built guard towers in the steppe and hewed out many cisterns, for he had large herds; and in the Shephelah and in the Plain (he had) plowmen; and vineyard and orchard workers in the Hills and in the Carmel ...".

Premnath suggests that a distinction be maintained between royal and private enterprises in the regionally specialised economic activities of the eighth century monarchy.(17) Presumably the significance of maintaining this distinction is in order to be aware of the factors which, amongst others, would promote specialisation. Be that as it may, Chaney's way of connecting specialisation with the luxury trade as necessitated by the tastes of the ruling classes must not be lost sight of. He writes:

"Here we learn that under royal tutelage, herding was increased in the steppe by means of guard towers and cisterns, plowing - the cultivation of cereal crops, the predominant of which was wheat - was intensified in the plain and piedmont region, and viticulture and orcharding were pressed in the uplands. In each case, the economic exploitation of a given region was specialized to the one or two products by whose production that region could contribute maximally to the export trade and/or to the conspicuous consumption of the local elite".(18)

Premnath argues that the wine industry at Gibeon was a private enterprise. By this it is, here, understood that he means that it was a latifundia/large estate. His argument is based on the fact that the stamped handles from this area bore the name Gibeon as well as the name of the producer.

This is unlike the royal connections that are implied by the Imlk handles.(19)

The Samaria ostraca have also been shown to point to the existence of large latifundary estates for the production of wine and oil in the eighth century. Premnath holds that there are indications also from the Samaria ostraca concerning the existence of royal vineyards.

The eighth century B.C.E. witnessed, also, a proliferation of centres of oil production. Oil was of course an important export commodity. Of particular significance in the eighth century was the introduction of beam presses in the oil industry.(20) About oil, Premnath concludes:

"What was said about the increased production of wine is also true of oil production. The increase in the references to oil in the epigraphic sources, the proliferation of oil presses during this time, and the incidence of storage jars for wine and oil point to the increased production of oil. Moreover, the invention of beam press in the eighth century was a technological innovation which facilitated the production of large quantities of oil".(21)

As to the nature of the state/royal involvement in this expansion of the forces of production, Chaney writes appositely:

"If the processing installations for oil and wine give little hint of who initiated their proliferation, 2 Chron 26:10, when corroborated by the inscriptional evidence for royal vineyards and olive orchards, strongly suggests elements of a 'command economy'".(22)

Specialised use of agricultural land was also a feature of the eighth century B.C.E. A case in point is the agricultural intensification exemplified by the building of

terraces. There is archaeological evidence to suggest that this form of agriculture may have become a significant development in the period under consideration. In this regard, Hopkins writes:

"The most trustworthy determination of terrace age has been made by Edelstein and Kislev at Mevasseret Yerushalayim where 8th century pottery from the terraces is plentiful. Another team headed by Edelstein has investigated 'farms' in Jerusalem's Rephaim Valley and found one of them, Khirbet er-Ras, complete with terraces, buildings, and assorted agricultural installations, to date from between the 8th and 6th centuries B.C.E. Taken together, the terraced sites of Khirbet er-Ras and Mevasseret Yerushalayim demonstrate the presence of terraced culture in the hills surrounding Jerusalem as early as the 8th century".(23)

Further developments in productive forces were in the areas of metallurgy, as evidenced by the copper and iron mines in the 'Arabah South of the Dead Sea'; pottery, indicated by its mass production in response to the need to store and transport wine and oil in large quantities; wool industry, attested at Tell en-Nasbeh, south of Bethel on the border of Judah, and at Lachish which was located in the Shephelah; perfume industry, about which there is evidence of State sponsorship at places like En-Gedi. As Premnath writes:

"En-Gedi was one of the settlements which was consciously developed by the Judean kings. The welfare of the settlement depended upon a strong central administration capable of providing adequate irrigation facilities, economic organization and protection... Correspondingly, the site showed decline during periods of weak governments".(24)

The various means of production which have been enumerated up to this point as an index of expansion, are not in themselves the forces of production. They only become productive forces when the specifically human dimension is added to them. As it was mentioned earlier, it is the

articulated combination of the means of production and human labour that constitutes the forces of production. For this reason a discussion of a development in the forces is only adequate if it accompanies an indication of arrangements in the area of labour.

The most pervasive form of labour utilisation in the period of the monarchy was the corvee system. Major building projects of places like the temple, palace, fortifications and roads were accomplished through the use of this kind of forced labour. Writing about this form of labour use in the eighth century B.C.E. Premnath states:

"The building of palatial mansions, storage silos and administrative centres under Jeroboam II implies the use of a large labor force. In the south, the building of the network of fortresses and system of highways in the Negev and establishment of administrative centres again reflects the employment of a tremendous amount of forced labor force. It is not possible to conceive how else such projects could have been carried out except by the imposition of corvee".(25)

The fighting of wars as well as the preparations for wars consumed enormous amounts of labour. This meant that the labour that should otherwise have been expended in productive activities, especially among peasants, was mobilised rather as a military/destructive force. This was particularly the case in the prosperous period of the eighth century when the ruling classes engaged in war exercises/preparations as a luxury. In this way resources, human and material, were diverted from productive uses and spent on ruling class luxuries such as weapons, horses, chariots and the maintenance of professional as well as

conscript armies (2 Chronicles 25:5-9;26:11-15;Micah 4:3-4;5:10-11). In this regard Premnath writes:

"These professional troops consisting of mercenaries formed a special contingent and were distinct from the troops which the citizens furnished in times of emergency. . . . The conscript army consisted of 'men of war' . . . who were called for military service in times of war and would return home after it".(26)

The Relations of Production

David had incurred debts and obligations to the military mercenaries that fought by his side during the period of his rise to power. It is generally agreed that the capture of the Canaanite lowlands made it possible for him to make grants of land there, by way of meeting obligations to the mercenaries, rather than from the village lands in the hill country. What is more, the surplus derived from the lowlands helped him to avoid the imposition of heavy demands on the villages in order to finance the new state bureaucracy.

Hopkins has isolated four advantages made possible by the economic situation of the period of the monarchy. First, the expansion of the Israelite borders brought about the much needed geopolitical security "conducive to the smooth operations of agricultural systems". Second, the monarchic tax-base was expanded thus lightening the burden on village agriculturalists. In addition, the possession of newly acquired lands "fueled international trade such as that developed with Tyre to supply the court with costly timber". Third, the expansion of borders helped the agriculturalists to be less vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the Palestinian environment. Fourth, "the expansion of borders not only

meant an increase in sources of income and produce for import/export trade, but also could lead, given propitious geopolitical conditions, to an expansion of transit trade." (27)

The above notwithstanding, Hopkins rightly argues further that historically, agrarian states depend more upon surpluses extracted from the agricultural base than on profits from trade. He makes the point aptly that:

"Maintaining secure borders and participating in export/import and transit trade were decisive determinants of the extent of the burden imposed by the monarchy upon the village-based agricultural systems. The literary and archaeological record evidences plentiful royal-sponsored construction relating to these areas of its concern. The fiscal apparatus which supported these and other activities of the monarchy, with its facilities and personnel expenses, must have required an even greater imposition of taxes. On top of taxes of agricultural produce, Chaney is right to emphasize the pernicious effect of royal enterprise on the availability of tools and labour both of which it siphoned away from possible involvement in the agricultural sector." (28)

There are, therefore, three main factors which precipitated changes in the social relations of production during the monarchy. Firstly, the unpredictable nature of the environment and climate of Palestine on the one hand, and the availability of surplus producing alluvial crown lands on the other, created a situation where people incurred debts through borrowing in times of crisis. (29) Secondly, as Gottwald argues, the question of military "call up on rotation to supplement David's professional army on the basis of a twelve tribe-system (1 Chron. 27:1-21)" would have had an impact on the labour needs of the village agricultural systems. This state of affairs, whatever its

extent, would surely have "contributed to the neglect of crops and falling of surpluses".(30) On the basis of exegesis of a number of texts in the books of Samuel and Kings, I have argued elsewhere that the political murders and rebellions during the reign of David were a function of the dislocations brought about by structural changes in the political economy of the monarchy.(31) Thirdly, the imposition of taxes on agriculturalists, especially under Solomon, marked the dominance of a new mode of production: the tributary mode of production. Gottwald summarises the fundamental character of this mode expertly when he writes:

"We can identify the quantum leap in pressure on free agrarians by noting the officers that Solomon added to those of David's administration:

- (1) a chief administrator over the twelve regional areas for the provisioning of an enlarged court establishment with accelerated tastes...
- (2) a large network of officers supervising forced labour operations...
- (3) a head steward who managed the royal household, probably including royal holdings and estates not granted to retainers...

These added officers indicate a more thorough administration of the court proper, and especially a smoother, more regular, and far more abundant flow of resources from the Israelite cultivators to the court and royal bureaucracy, both at Jerusalem and wherever officials were installed throughout the land. In this way Solomon 'rationalized', not 'modernized', the agricultural base of the economy, for his basic strategy was not to improve the means of production but to improve the flow of as much agricultural surplus as possible into the control of his regime."(32)

Thus the stage was set for the development of a tributary social formation. The class structure of this formation was characterised by a social division of labour resulting in antagonistic social relations of production, exchange and distribution. At the top of the class structure of the monarchy was the royal aristocracy made up of the King and

the nobility, the latter consisting of the King's sons and wives. Next to the royal aristocracy but within the ruling class were the sarim (chiefs or governors), the horim (non-royal nobility), nedibim (members of the houses of Assembly by virtue of their wealth and power deriving from their land properties and thus controlling pools of landless labour), gibbore hayil (valiant men, brave warriors, etc.), zeqenim (heads of influential families most probably on the basis of their property). (33) There can be no doubt that the writer of the book of Micah has the behaviour of this ruling class in mind when he writes: "How terrible it will be for those who lie awake and plan evil! When morning comes, as soon as they have the chance, they do the evil they planned. When they want fields, they seize them; when they want houses they take them. No man's family or property is safe." (Micah 2:1f).

Next to the ruling aristocratic and propertied class was the middle class made up of the bureaucratic and state ideologist's sectors, merchants (mainly foreigners), and artisans or craftsmen. 2 Samuel 20:23ff describes some of the elements of this class when they state that: "Joab was in command of the army of Israel; Benaiah son of Jehoiada was in charge of David's bodyguard; Adoniram was in charge of the forced labour; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was in charge of the records; Sheva was the court secretary; Zadok and Abiathar were the priests, and Ira from the town of Jair was also one of David's priests."

Chaney has estimated that the ruling class together with the middle class made up two percent or less of the population while they controlled half or more of the total goods and services produced in the society.(34) The rest of the Israelite population constituted the oppressed and exploited class. They were made up of poor peasants, debtor slaves, captured slaves, prostitutes and criminals. Micah has the lot of the latter groups in mind when he declares against the rulers of Israel: "You skin my people alive and tear the flesh off their bones. You eat my people up. You strip off their skin, break their bones, and chop them up like meat for the pot." (Micah 3:2f).

Premnath and Chaney have put together, in an impressive way, scattered bits of evidence from biblical as well as extra-biblical sources about the different forms of surplus extraction by the ruling classes of the Israelite and Judean monarchies. (35) A more nuanced and systemic articulation of mechanisms of surplus extraction in the monarchic period has been provided by Gottwald. According to Gottwald three forms of extraction can be identified:

- "(a) taxes and tithes imposed by the indigenous Israelite monarchy and priesthood;
- (b) tributes imposed on the Israelite ruling classes by foreign oppressors...both during the period of dependent monarchy and provincial administration;
- (c) rents extracted by the growing numbers of latifundaries, who further stood in diverse and complex relations with the various Israelite dynasties, foreign states, trading partners, etc."(36)

Numerous biblical texts intimate these various forms of surplus extraction directly or indirectly, providing a deliberately socio-economic perspective is applied in their study. Such a perspective must also include a class

analysis component in order to bring out a more holistic picture of the network of social relations. In this respect also, Gottwald provides a more nuanced class analysis of the Israelite monarchic social formation than has been given above. The following is a picture of the social classes and fractions of classes as he sees it:

- "(a) ruling class groups: the Israelite royal houses, during the monarchic period, together with priestly sectors, dependent on taxes and corvees from the peasant communities; the metropolitan ruling classes of the various empires which dominated Israel, dependent on tributes levied on the population and collected by the indigenous ruling classes or imperial administrators; and latifundaries, dependent on rents from more or less private estates.
- (b) middle layers: craftsmen, functionaries, and lower clergy dependent on benefices which do not provide income sufficient to maintain an aristocratic style of life, and independent craftsmen and merchants.
- (c) exploited classes: two principal kinds of peasantry - peasants protected by redistributinal land tenure and other community guarantees, - tenant farmers on the estates of latifundaries, and marginated rural people who have no regular access to the land".(37)

These forms of surplus extraction together with the social classes and class fractions of Israelite society appear in the texts of the Bible in a signified form that needs to be decoded by an appropriate exegetical and hermeneutical method. They necessarily appear in this form in the Bible because the text of the Bible was not written as a sociological manual whose purpose would have been to provide straightforward explicit sociological information. (38)

The book of Micah, therefore, arises out of the tributary mode of production represented by the Israelite monarchy. The structural elements of this mode are inscribed in a

signified form in the texts of the Bible. David inaugurated this social formation, Solomon pushed it to its logical conclusion and the rest of the Israelites and Judean rulers took it to its grave. For as Marx writes: "History is thorough and goes through many phases when taking an old form to the ground".(39) In the book of Micah as in other prophetic texts we find some of the evidence pointing to the material conditions out of which these biblical texts came.

Ideological conditions of the text: Class origins of the text and class interests of the text - General Remarks

The route to this point has been a long one. But as Marx wrote in response to a request to publish the translation of Das Kapital into French as a serial in order to make it more accessible to the working class: "There is no royal road to science, and only those who do not dread the fatiguing climb of its steep paths have a chance of gaining its luminous summits".(40) A reconstruction of the material conditions of the text was a necessary first step before an analysis of the ideological conditions could be carried out.

While the text of Micah offers sufficient indications as to the nature of the material conditions, the configuration of class forces, and the effects of class rule, it is nevertheless itself cast within an ideological framework that at the same time creates contradictions within the book and distorts the usefulness of its text for struggling classes today. The ideological character of the text has much to do with this.

Ideology is not a lie. It is rather a harmonisation of contradictions in such a way that the class interests of one group are universalised and made acceptable to other classes. Also, ideology is not a selection process or filter through which certain facts only pass. On the contrary, it is a process by which the presence of certain facts is constituted by their absence.

Thus making scientific sense of the ideological condition of a text means knowing that text in a way in which it is incapable of knowing itself. Eagleton makes this point expertly when he says:

"The task of criticism, then, is not to situate itself within the same space as the text, allowing it to speak or completing what it necessarily leaves unsaid. On the contrary, its function is to instal itself in the very incompleteness of the work in order to theorise it - to explain the ideological necessity of those 'not-saids' which constitute the very principle of its identity. Its object is the unconsciousness of the work - that of which it is not, and cannot be, aware". (41)

The text of Micah is eloquent about certain issues by being silent about them. Biblical scholars have long been aware of the literary disjunction between Micah 1-3 and Micah 4-7. Broadly speaking, the first three chapters have been said to be genuinely Micah passages, while the others have been considered later additions. The issue that has not been faced squarely is what kind of additions are they?

Looked at ideologically these chapters fit well into the royal Zion ideology that started during the time of David, was made more sophisticated and began to be the dominant self-consciousness of the nation in the later reigns, culminating in the ideological activity of the priestly

class during the Babylonian exile. Bourgeois biblical scholarship has long been aware of this development, but has been unwilling or unable to perceive the political significance of such an ideological set-up. Brueggemann was among the first biblical scholars to grasp the political and ideological character of the Bible. With this in mind, he has isolated two different covenant traditions representing two different social, political and ideological tendencies in the Bible. These are the Mosaic covenant tradition which is revolutionary, and the Davidic covenant tradition which is status quo oriented. According to him, the "Davidic tradition... is situated among the established and secure. (42) Brueggemann summarises the tension in the biblical traditions when he says:

"The David-Solomonic tradition with its roots in Abrahamic memory provides an important alternative theological trajectory. We may identify two theological elements which are surely linked to this movement and which are important to the subsequent faith and literature of the Bible. First, it is generally agreed that the emergence of creation faith in Israel has its setting in Jerusalem and its context in the royal consciousness. The shift of social vision is accompanied with a shifted theological method which embraces more of the imperial myths of the ancient Near East and breaks with the scandalous historical particularity of the Moses tradition. The result is a universal and comprehensive world-view which is more inclined toward social stability than toward social transformation and liberation". (43)

The central themes of this monarchic ideology are stability, grace, restoration, creation, universal peace, compassion, salvation. They contrast radically with the ideology of pre-monarchic Israel which would have themes like justice, solidarity, struggle, and vigilance.

The book of Micah, therefore, is eloquent in its silence about the ideological struggle waged by the oppressed and exploited class of monarchic Israel. Apart from making available an otherwise unsuppressable body of information about the material situation of oppression, it simply luxuriates in an elaborate ideological statement of self-comfort by dwelling on issues like the Lord's universal reign of peace (Micah 4:1ff); the promise of return from Exile (4:6ff); God's promise of a ruler from Bethlehem (5:2ff); the Lord's salvation (7:8ff) etc. These are the dominant ideological themes of the book.

It is little wonder that dominant traditional theology has found the Bible generally politically and ideologically comfortable, notwithstanding the unsuppressable evidence of a morally distorted material situation. The book itself, as indeed most of the Bible, offers no certain starting point for a theology of liberation. There is simply too much de-ideologisation to be made before it can be hermeneutically usable in the struggle for liberation. In short, viewed as a whole and ideologically, it is a ruling class document.

Be that as it may, there are enough contradictions within the book to enable eyes that are hermeneutically trained in the struggle for liberation today to observe the kindred struggles of the oppressed and exploited of the biblical communities in the very absence of those struggles in the text.

In chapter 6, hermeneutical appropriation of the biblical texts of Micah will be undertaken, exploiting more specifically the contradiction inherent in the text. The presupposition of such an activity will be the black struggle, historically and in its contemporary form, as outlined in chapter 3. This more nuanced analysis of the text, will be done with Mafeje's counsel for theoretical precision in mind, that "identification of the issues is as important as fighting in the streets or in the mountains".(44) In point of fact, any fighting in the streets or in the mountains which does not presuppose a clear identification of the issues is inimical to the very goals of such fighting. The experience of the so-called "black-on-black violence" in South Africa recently, together with the destruction of KTC squatter communities in Cape Town, represents a tragic case in point. Hall underscores this fundamental need for a rigorous theoretical response in addition to activist involvement when he comments on the Tottenham, England, black revolt, that:

"Exactly what are the forms in which the black political response can be made remains extremely difficult to forecast. But it seems to me undeniable that the crisis of Tottenham is now also a crisis of and for black politics. Keeping faith with the people who, in the teeth of relentless oppression, spontaneously resist, is all right on the night. But it is not enough when the next day dawns, since all it means is that, sooner or later, the frontline troops, with their superior weapons and sophisticated responses, will corner some of our young people on some dark night along one of these walkways and take their revenge for Tottenham. There has never, in my view, been so urgent a need for the most radical and searching black political response as there is now, as the kick-back on the Broadwater Farm estate begins and the 'law and order' juggernaut rolls back into place".(45)

A radical and searching black theological response, like the political response that Hall is calling for, must not simply venture out into the streets and mountains to fight without clarity as to which ideologies and struggles in the Bible it is hermeneutically connecting with.

Notes for Chapter 4

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CHAPTER 5

A MATERIALIST READING OF LUKE 1 AND 2

This chapter, like chapter 4, will undertake an analysis of the material conditions of production of the text of Luke 1 and 2. The purpose of such a study is to identify the configuration of socio-historical and economic forces and forms of struggle out of which the text arose. The aim is also to identify the ways in which these forces and struggles are ideologically signified in the text. In doing so, it is worth remembering that the entire study undertaken here, is informed by a perspective that sees biblical texts not simply as objects, but as practices.

The Material Conditions of Luke 1 and 2

The social-historical context of Luke 1 and 2 is no doubt the colonial occupation of Palestine by Rome. Palestine is, therefore, characterised by the articulation of two tributary modes of production at this time. The Palestinian tributary mode of production of the first century C.E. was over-determined by the Imperial tributary mode of production of the Roman colonial power. It is necessary to reconstruct briefly these two tributary social formations and their relationship to each other. Such a reconstruction will

enable us to see how the social history of that world was constituted ideologically through the discursive practice of the Luke 1 and 2 text.

The Forces of Production of First Century Palestine

The fundamental means of production in Palestine had been, since antiquity and was, during the first century C.E.D., the land, and especially the arable land. De Ste. Croix makes the point succinctly that

"Wealth in the Greek world, in the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic periods, as in the Roman Empire throughout its history, was always essentially wealth in land, upon which was conducted the cultivation of cereals... and of other agricultural products, especially those of the olive and the vine and also the pasturing of cattle, sheep and horses". (1)

The other key means of production were the lakes and seas and probably rivers of that Palestine. With respect to the lakes Joseph Klausner writes:

"The Sea of Galilee contained all manner of fish, including certain very choice varieties... So plentiful were the fish that they were salted and sold in Palestine and abroad; this accounts for the fact that a town on the lakeshore which apparently bore the Hebrew name Migdal... was in Greek called by the name 'Tarichaea' from the word salted fish. The newly built Tiberias became the fishing centre and fish market of Galilee." (2)

Minerals such as salt, bitumen, phosphorous and tar were sometimes found in such places as the Dead Sea. (3) Furthermore, in the Hellenistic period, the construction of artificial irrigation schemes such as terraces, pools and canals contributed to the improvement of agriculture. The evidence of Rabbinic literature point to an even more intensive agriculture, trade and commerce than in the Old Testament times. (4) However, first century Palestine seems

not to have witnessed any significant development of the forces of production. Sufficient and balanced technological progress is not evident during this time. The setting in motion of the forces of production through the tilling of arable land seems to have followed ancient ways of labour organisation. Peasant family labour appear, as in the olden times in the absence of slave labour, to have constituted the basic economic production unit in agriculture and in the fishing industry. In fact, the colonial social relations of Palestine, from the Persian through the Ptolemaic, Seleucid and Roman periods, imposed constraints on the development of the national productive forces. The colonial economy of Palestine was designed, primarily, to provide tribute for the colonial powers. Thus the Palestinian forces of production remained relatively undeveloped despite the thriving of commerce and trade during the same period. Further, the diversification of agriculture, and the introduction of certain technical improvements, such as better forms of oil and wine presses, the treadmill, the irrigation wheel and the plough, seem to have failed to propel the overall Palestinian productive development to qualitatively higher levels.(5) There is an area of social and national life, however, which did benefit from the few technical advances of this time. It is instructive to note the connection between this area and the needs and interests of the ruling classes of the period. Writing about the Hellenistic rule under which some developments took place, Hengel states:

"The technical progress of the Hellenistic period accordingly manifested itself above all in the construction of astonishing machines of war, of increasingly large warships and in types of

fortification". (6)

The war industry is not, for the majority of the population of a class-stratified society, a constructive development. The situation is worse in a colonial set-up such as Palestine was at this time. War industries function to reinforce the internal divisions while at the same time keeping a check on external threats to internal domination. War industries are ruling class instruments par excellence. It has already been noted how in the Old Testament a prophetic critique captured the real nature of this phenomenon (Micah 4:3). Thus the contribution of this kind of industry to the overall development of an area leaves much to be desired.

The Relations of Production of First Century Palestine

The specific expression of the forces of production in a society is a function of the existing social division of labour. In Palestine in the first century C.E. the principal social contradiction was between the Roman colonial state and the dependent colonised Palestinian social formation. By virtue of its colonial domination, Rome extracted a surplus from the population of Palestine through a comprador Palestinian royalty, nobility and priesthood. This contradiction between Rome and Palestine, however, was over-determined by an internal social division of labour out of which issued a tributary class formation.

The surplus which was extracted from the peasants in agriculture and other industries through land taxes, animal taxes, tithes, etc., functioned to finance the resident

alien armies, the local ruling classes, and the Roman colonial state. There seems no indication that the surplus was ever invested in productive activities that could help raise the capital needed for developing the forces of production and consequently increasing productivity for the purpose of meeting the overall human needs. The Roman colonial tributary social formation was a dead end for the majority of the local Palestinian people. It functioned to farm out surpluses for the ruling classes of Rome at the expense of the overall development of Palestine itself.

External trade tended to focus on luxury items such as oil and wine. Internal trade assumed the form of internal regional barter:

"The Palestinian towns exchanged their agricultural produce. Sharon in Judea sold its wines and bought bread. Jericho and the Jordan Valley sold their famous fruits for bread and wine. The Judean Shefela had a superabundance of bread and oil, and Galilee of corn and vegetables. Palestine also exported its surplus of oil, wine, wheat and fruit, while it imported a considerable number of commodities". (7)

First century Palestine was a complex colonial social formation with a complex class structure. This does not mean that the class forces of this social structure cannot be delineated with reasonable precision. It simply means that the forms of surplus extraction that existed in this society were not confined to the relations represented by the principal contradiction. There were, for instance, historically accrued traditional Palestinian ideological mechanisms of surplus extraction which the Romans did not tamper with but certainly benefitted from their use on the peasants of Palestine. Clevénot provides a terse

characterisation of the relations of production of the social formation which formed the material conditions of production of the Gospel of Luke. He writes:

"In short, First Century Palestine was a class-structured society at every level. At the economic level the masses were fiercely exploited by the privileged. In politics the priestly class, supported by the great landowners, held the mechanism of the state in their hands. Ideologically the ruling class imposed its ideology (essentially the system of purity), which was passed on in diverse ways by the groups, sects, and parties". (8)

Freyne has recently provided an instructive delineation of ownership relations in respect of Galilee. He points out the importance of grasping the principle of "land won by the spear" as a key to understanding the situation of landownership outside the cities. This principle, indicates how private ownership of land was increasingly replaced by the establishment of large holdings of land belonging to the royal house. The power of the royalty was predicated in large measure on the accumulative and distributive control of these latifundia. These could be parceled out as "bequests of land".(9) Hengel makes the point more succinctly in relation to Ptolemaic administration. He writes:

"The starting point here was the conception that the whole land was the personal possession...of the king. The titles of the Ptolemaic administrative officials therefore often derive from the terminology used in large private estates in Greece. The king 'managed the State as a plain Macedonian or Greek would manage his own household'". (10)

The evidence points to the fact that the royal estates were under the supervision of managers. Among the duties of these managers were the collection of rents and taxes from those peasants who owned their own land.(11) The notion

of all the land belonging to the king refers to the political control of an area or village by the king and not necessarily the total absence of private peasant holdings.

As Freyne indicates

"the villagers were certainly free and may even have owned, or at least permanently leased, their own lots, so that the owner of the village was rather a mediator between the villagers and the royal administration, and 'the rent' which was paid to him was their share of the ... (phoros) to the central bureaucracy". (12)

Nevertheless, the economic domination of Palestine throughout its colonial period and including the Herodian era is well attested. This domination took the form of royal monopolies being worked solely to produce for the royalties, foreign and local, on the one hand. On the other hand, heavy taxes and rents were imposed on independent lands and industries as a means of extracting tribute for the benefit of the ruling classes. The Herodian ruling classes followed the example of the previous regimes in their monopoly and exploitation of the best lands as well as the oppression of peasant labour. (13)

Thus the colonial social formation of Palestine in the Graeco-Roman period is characterised by a complex class structure which may be simplistically represented as follows:

1. The ruling classes, comprising the colonial royalty and nobility; the colonial civil servants (stratagogoi and dioiketes) - many of these would be beneficiaries of royal land bequests; Comprador Palestinian royalty and nobility - e.g. the Herodians; Comprador economic and political ruling

classes - Sadducees, fractions of Pharisees, Scribes/priests.

2. The Dominated Classes, consisting of artisans, peasants, lower stratum priests, lower stratum pharisees and poor peasants. It is this class which Freyne describes as the laoi and says that they are "free but dependent, and their condition can deteriorate with the changing economic or agricultural situation which makes it impossible for them to meet the demands of the ... (phoros) or royal tribute".(14)

3. The Underclasses, made up of casual labourers, bandits, petty criminals, prostitutes and beggars. These groups were super-exploitable politically, economically and ideologically. Politically they could be drawn into mercenary activities which for the most part were not in their own interests (Mark 14:10-11). Economically they could be pitted against one another as when in the parables of Jesus they complain about one another's wages (Matthew 20:1-16). Ideologically they could be the target of moral and religious hypocrisy (John 8:1-11).

Ideological Conditions of Luke 1 and 2

What then is the nature of the movement from history as we have described it above to a reconstitution of that history in a gospel discourse? In examining Luke's ideological production of the historical situation of First Century Palestine we shall avoid the empiricist problematic that plagues most biblical historical critics.(15) We shall rather concur with the view that "the notion of a direct, spontaneous relation between text and history...belongs to a naive empiricism which is to be discarded".(16) Equally,

the idea of a possible neat division between the ideological, which is hard to trap with scientific tools, and the historical, which is accessible through formal quasi-scientific methods, is regarded here as epistemologically doubtful. Following Eagleton we shall assume that:

"History...certainly 'enters' the text, not least the 'historical' text; but it enters it precisely as ideology, as a presence determined and distorted by its measurable absences. This is not to say that real history is present in the text but in disguised form, so that the task of the critic is then to wrench the mask off its face. It is rather that history is present in the text in the form of a double-absence. The text takes as its object, not the real, but certain significations by which the real lives itself - significations which are themselves the product of its partial abolition: ...
 "History...is the ultimate signifier of literature, as it is the ultimate signified. For what else in the end could be the source and object of signifying practices but the real social formation which provides its material context?". (17)

Luke's gospel has been described variously as universalist, concerned about the poor and outcasts, and as a social gospel. The reason for such descriptions lies in the subject matter of this gospel which covers these areas of social life more extensively than the other gospels. No attempt has been made, however, to determine more precisely what the social class perspective is from which Luke addresses these issues and how it determines the nature of "the historical" in Luke. Such a process of inquiry would lead not only to the class position of Luke but also to the class and ideological interests that frame Luke's discursive practice.

In what follows a critical evaluation of some of the recent literary, political and social readings of Luke's gospel will be made. It will then be argued that a hermeneutical appropriation of Luke's texts which takes seriously the material and ideological conditions which produced them and which they signify, leads to very different conclusions about Luke's discourses.

A recent major study on Luke's social and political description of Jesus argues that the picture of Jesus that Luke draws is one of someone who was dangerous to the Roman Empire.(18) This study argues that Luke's Jesus "espouses a concern for persons and groups from all social levels and backgrounds, but especially for the poor and the sick, for women and Gentiles".(19) What this study does not do is to scrutinise the class character of a position that portrays Jesus in this way. Cassidy illustrates Luke's description of Jesus as being concerned for groups and persons of all levels by drawing attention especially to his attitude "to the use of material possessions".(20) According to Cassidy "Luke indicates that Jesus adopted an extremely strong position against surplus possessions. Jesus himself lived simply and sparingly and he praised others like Zaccheus when they took steps to do likewise".(21) It is difficult not to sense in Cassidy's argument hermeneutical assumptions that derive from contemporary liberal humanist ideology. We will argue later that a different set of hermeneutical assumptions that derive from not only a different ideology but also a

different cultural and political agenda detects a vastly different ideological manoeuvre on the part of Luke.

Karris, by contrast to Cassidy, states more categorically that the "poor and rich" constitute what he calls "the Lukan Sitz im Leben". According to Karris:

"Luke's community clearly had both rich and poor members. Luke is primarily taken up with the rich members, their concerns, and the problems which they pose for the community. Their concerns ...revolve around the question: do our possessions prevent us from being genuine Christians?". (22)

Karris is undoubtedly correct in his focus on the rich as Luke's primary preoccupation. What Karris does not do is to draw the hermeneutical implications of Luke's discursive employment of the story of Jesus to address a problem that fundamentally arises out of and concerns a community of rich and powerful people. What happens to Jesus when he is ideologically coopted into the struggles and concerns of the dominant classes of society? We will suggest later that one has "to read the text, as it were, backwards - to examine the nature of its 'problems' in the light of its 'solutions'", (23) in order to be able to transcend the ideological limitations of the text.

For Wolfgang Stegemann "the gospel of Luke is a sustained call to repentance - and it is addressed to Christians of wealth and repute".(24) It is absolutely clear to Stegemann that Luke tries to turn into a virtue for the rich and powerful what is a necessity for the poor and powerless majority of the Palestinian people, namely their poverty and homelessness. The experience of starvation, sickness, imprisonment, homelessness, separation from family and friends and persecution from authorities and indeed of being a single mother was an inescapable reality for the majority of people in first century Palestine. Luke, in his gospel, turns this experience into an ethical choice with which the rich and powerful men who make up his audience are faced. The ideological effects of this kind of discursive practice which Luke is engaged in are hinted at by Wolfgang Stegemann when he writes:

"What would it mean for us theologically if the historical Jesus movement had in fact drawn its recruits from among the lowly? What if the followers of Jesus, like their master, were from the poor and hungry, not as the result of renunciation of possessions but because in fact they possessed nothing? What if the desired goal of their criticism of the rich was that in the kingdom of God present relationships would be reversed?...Would this kind of radicality, which has nothing to lose but much to gain, still win our sympathy?". (25)

Luke's ideological production of the story of Jesus within the historical context of first century Palestine has made available a gospel that is acceptable to the rich and the poor of Luke's community, but in which the struggles and contradictions of the lives of the poor and exploited are present by their absence. By turning the experiences of the

poor into the moral virtues of the rich, Luke has effectively eliminated the poor from his gospel.

The dominant exegetical practices, however, seem incapable of penetrating the ideological practices of Luke in order to reach to the radical story of Jesus and his followers which Luke produces in such a way that it is "acceptable" to the rich and the powerful. In a frenzied attempt to defend the ruling class interests of Luke as revolutionary - of course "responsibly revolutionary" - recent studies of political issues in Luke have colluded with the ideological interests of the texts at the expense of the oppressed and exploited people of first century Palestine as well as their contemporary world descendants.(26) The issue, therefore, is not that these scholars misunderstand Luke. They do not. Rather they collude with Luke. In social class terms this is perfectly understandable even though critically indefensible.(27)

By employing the ideological concerns and aspirations of the oppressed and exploited black people of South Africa as a hermeneutical structuring pole we hope to cause the text of Luke 1 and 2 to yield greater secrets than it has so far done. In this we follow Eagleton when he cogently argues:

"It is not, in other words, simply by virtue of ideology being forced up against the wall of history by the literary text that it is terrorized into handing over its secrets. Its contradictions may be forced from it by its historically determined encounter with another ideology, or ideological sub-ensemble; indeed it is possible to claim that it is in such historical conjunctures that the moment of genesis of much literature is to be found". (28)

Black theology must attempt to transcend the ideological limits that Luke imposes, through his particular production of the Jesus story, by using the history, culture and struggle of the black people as a hermeneutical tool. It must be recognised in black theology that claims of political neutrality in relation to texts in fact represent the furtherance of certain political ends by pretending not to. (29)

Even more importantly, black theology needs an ideological suspicion in its approach to texts based on the understanding that

"Discourses, sign-systems and signifying practices of all kinds, from film and television to fiction and the languages of natural science, produce effects, shape forms of consciousness and unconsciousness, which are closely related to the maintenance or transformations of our existing systems of power. They are thus closely related to what it means to be a person. Indeed 'ideology' can be taken to indicate no more than this connection - the link or nexus between discourses and power". (30)

Thus in order to situate properly within the wider nexus of power relations what Luke, through the stories of Chapters 1 and 2 of the gospel, signifies ideologically black theology must retreat hermeneutically to black history, black culture, and the black struggle as sources of concepts for decoding the text.

Black theology's point of focus is an economically, politically, culturally and morally dispossessed people. It carries with it the morality and social assumptions of a people who have suffered the hypocrisy of a supposedly superior civilisation. An important component of the

struggle for the liberation of black people is relentless resistance against the totalising hold of modern capitalism. With Dixon, black theology must begin from an awareness that

"Capital leaves not the tiniest corner of society free of its domination. A simple juridical review of marriage, divorce, custody, bastardy, and welfare laws, and of the laws related to sexuality, prostitution, and moral life in general, amply demonstrates capital's direct concern with marriage, the family, children, sexuality, and so-called 'morals'. The supervision by the state of the moral life of the working class is directly related to the role of that class in commodity production, including the production of labor power itself, without which the entire capitalist society would cease to exist". (31)

Thus armed with this understanding of oppression and of struggle against it, and like the Caribbean Rastas whose appropriation of the Bible is necessarily selective and partisan, black people of South Africa must be "mindful of the long and bitter struggles master and slave fought across its (Bible) pages".(32) The question, therefore, of whose side in the political and moral struggle inscribed in the pages of Luke 1 and 2 Luke the writer takes, is of pivotal importance to black theology.

Viewed from a black theological perspective, the juxtaposition of the story of the birth of John the Baptist with the birth of Jesus has far-reaching ideological implications. This juxtaposition is seen as an ideological solution to a fundamental politico-moral problematic facing the religious sector of the comprador Jewish ruling class. The analysis of the social structure of colonised Palestine done above has shown that the Roman Empire ruled Palestine by proxy of an indigenous comprador class consisting among others of the priestly sector. The Lukan discourse, in an

attempt to depict Jesus as an acceptable figure to the ruling class, produces a discursive practice in which the priestly class has given its legitimation of the birth and subsequent mission of Jesus. This is not to imply that there were no members of the priestly sector who were ideologically and politically opposed to both the Roman and Palestinian tributary oppression of the nation. It is significant, however, that this class plays no part in the rest of Luke's work outside the birth narratives. The contention here, therefore, is that the story of Mary's visitation to Zechariah and Elizabeth is intended to deal with the embarrassing social class origins and position of Mary. Luke's attempt to sell the story of Jesus to the Jewish priestly groups must have floundered on the rocks of Jesus' family background which was not socially acceptable. Brown hits the nail on the head even though he does not draw the implications of this when he writes:

"The marriage situation envisaged in Matthew and (seemingly in Luke where Mary has conceived or will conceive before [living with Joseph]) implies that Jesus was born at a noticeably early period after his parents came to live together. This could have been a historical factor known to Jesus' followers and opponents...The Jewish opponents of Christianity eventually accused Jesus of being illegitimate...but Christians rejected any implication of sin in Jesus' origins...". (33)

As the custodians and administrators of what Fernando Belo has called the "symbolic order" - comprising the pollution and debt system, the priestly class would have questioned the messiahship of Jesus on specifically "priestly-morality-class grounds". It is part of the brilliance of Luke as a signifying practitioner to address this aspect of the opposition to Jesus in his writing. Only, he must

necessarily do it from the perspective of what he regards, in class terms, as significant.

The point is not to impute any conspiratorial motives on the part of Luke. Rather, it is to recognise that

"like private property, the literary text...appears as a 'natural' object, typically denying the determinants of its productive process. The function of criticism is to refuse the spontaneous presence of work - to deny that 'naturalness' in order to make its real determinants appear". (34)

Mary, probably a single mother from the ghettos of colonised Galilee, needed the moral clearing of the priestly sector of the ruling class, that is the target of Luke's gospel. Essentially her class origins were too unbecoming for the eyes of the class for which Luke is writing. How can the saviour of the world emanate from the ghettos of Crossroads and KTC in Cape Town rather than the wealthy white suburbia of Johannesburg? Luke could not sell that kind of messiah to his ruling class audience. His ruling class perspectives inscribe themselves even in his choice of places. As Redalie so perceptively observed:

"But to pay attention to locality, land, squares, places, is to be faithful to the way Luke writes his story. For him the writing of the Gospel occurs within a geography that goes 'toward Jerusalem' in his Gospel and 'from Jerusalem to Rome' in Acts. The story he tells takes shape within a definite route in the heart of the Greco-Roman world". (35)

In the Gospel, where he is dealing more directly with the Jewish colonial comprador ruling class, Judea and especially Jerusalem serve the function of legitimation for Luke. The gospel of Luke moves dialectically from talking about the oppressed and exploited to addressing the concerns of the

local ruling class and how they might receive the message and ministry of Jesus. In this he is careful not to contradict their class position. What is required of them is that they should use their possessions to support the movement. Their class position is dehistoricised and turned into a virtue for the benefit of the incipient christian church. The movement of Mary from Galilee to Judea should be viewed in the same context ideological legitimations and harmonisations.

Thus Luke is not a mere distorter of facts or traditions; he is a shrewd ideologist, who writes for his class in the sense of Gramsci's "organic intellectuals".(36) He is true to his facts. The only difference is that the presence of facts in his text is constituted at the same time by a certain incompleteness. Luke's fidelity to history is represented in the birth narratives by his inclusion of nationalistic revolutionary hymns which reflect the social revolutionary mood of the period he is describing (Luke 1: 46-56; 67-79). He draws, however, on the nationalist revolutionary traditions whose ability to liberate the really poor had already been tested and found wanting during the Hasmonean dynasty. Ford aptly illustrates the connection with the traditions of struggle when he writes:

"Our examination of the infancy narratives has shown that the war angel, Gabriel, appeared to Zechariah and Mary. John the Baptist was to work in the spirit and power of the zealous prophet Elijah. The names Jesus (Joshua), John, and Simeon are names found among Jewish freedom fighters. The annunciation to Mary and the Magnificat have political and military overtones. The words of Elizabeth and Mary echo the beatitude pronounced over Jael and Judith. The shepherd verses have imperial overtones, and a heavenly army appears to them..." (37)

And then in a strange turn of thought Ford continues:

"From now on in his Gospel, Luke will take almost every opportunity offered him to show that Jesus, contrary to all expectations as seen in the infancy narratives, is a preacher with an urgent message to his generation and to the generations to come, the powerful message of non-violent resistance and, more strikingly, loving one's enemy in word and deed". (38)

The way in which the birth narratives have functioned in the churches of Western Christianity, including those that are geographically situated in the Third World, is an eloquent witness to the success of Luke in his ideological suppression of the social revolutionary class origins of Mary, the mother of Jesus. She has been appropriated theologically more as the priestly "First Lady" than as a key symbol of a revolutionary movement to overthrow the dominant oppressive structures of church and society. The hope that Mary might have inspired in the hearts of millions of single mothers under conditions of modern monopoly capitalism was dashed first by Luke in his gospel. That hope only lingers on in Luke's gospel by its effective absence. It remains for the questions of contemporary single mothers, given discursive articulation by a militant black theology of liberation, to reclaim the gospel's histories, cultures and moralities of the oppressed.

It is not only the priestly apology that Luke needed to integrate into the otherwise embarrassing moral background of Jesus, at least from the point of view of the colonial ruling class. He also needed to tamper with the class background of Jesus. In other words, Luke not only had to address the problem of the moral circumstances of Jesus'

birth, he also had to specifically face the problematic - for his ruling class audience - of Jesus' class origins.

Again we have to get to this problem by reading the text backwards. For as Eagleton argues:

"It is criticism's task to demonstrate how the text is thus 'hollowed' by its relation to ideology - how, in putting that ideology to work, it is driven up against those gaps and limits which are the product of ideology's relation to history. An ideology exists because there are certain things which must not be spoken of. In so putting ideology to work the text begins to illuminate the absences which are the foundation of its articulate discourse. And in so doing it helps to 'liberate' us from the ideology of which that discourse is a product". (39)

In the annunciation of Jesus' birth Luke puts ideology to work in a way that successfully establishes the absences which are the foundation of his discourses. The relevant verses in the text are 1:27 "He had a message for a girl promised in marriage to a man named Joseph, who was a descendant of King David. The girl's name was Mary"; 1:32f "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him a king, as his ancestor David was, and he will be the king of the descendants of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end!"; 1:34 "Mary said to the angel, 'I am a virgin. How, then, can this be?'".

The problem underlying this part of Luke's discourse is clearly hinted at in verse 34 where the writer makes Mary protest that she is a virgin and that the angel's story does not make sense. Luke has tried to anticipate this contradiction by beginning the annunciation with an

explanation that the "girl was promised in marriage to a man named Joseph". It is quite clear, however, that Luke knew the problem was not really solved since the bounds of historical credulity could not have been stretched beyond asserting a betrothal between Mary and Joseph. As an ideological creation, Joseph could not be made to serve the function of a biological father because that would be moving beyond ideology to history. The real function of Joseph in this part of the text is to help invoke a royal connection for Jesus. And since the historical context of this story is the national colonisation of the Jews, Luke appropriately invokes the Davidic royal connection. Brown draws attention to the fact that this angelic pronouncement in Luke "clearly echoes the promise of Nathan to David (2 Sam.7:8-16), the promise that came to serve as the foundation of messianic expectation".(40) The David connection, therefore, plays a double role in this story. On the one hand, given the national oppression by the Romans, the return of the Davidic kingship, symbolised by the birth of Jesus, could be intended to herald the national liberation which the David that Robert Coote calls "the early David" brought for ancient Israel. Coote writes, in relation to a similar use of David in the C-stage of the book of Amos, that:

"the reference is to the early David, the folk hero, the protector of the disenfranchised, the David of the byways and caves of the Judean hill country, sprung from the country town of Bethlehem, the ruler who knew his subordination to Yahweh, and who delayed the building of the temple that would serve in folk memory as the functional symbol of despotic royal power". (41)

On the other hand, there is the David who was an accomplice in the political murders of the early monarchy, who used his royal power against Uriah in an act of adultery with Uriah's wife, who deprived a poor man of his small possession in order to feed his royal visitors, who rationalised his economy by attempting to impose a census - that instrument of political and economic exploitation.(42) Even more importantly, there is the David who reinterpreted, through his royal ideologists, the Yahwist faith into a political ideology that served as a glue for keeping the interests of the monarchic ruling class together (2 Sam.7:8-16).(43)

Given the fact, therefore, that Luke's audience is undoubtedly the dominant groups of first century Palestine - even though the subject matter is the conditions and struggles of the poor - there seems no doubt that Luke's invocation of the Davidic royal connection was meant to suppress the unacceptable low class origins of Jesus.

From the point of view of the oppressed and exploited people of the world today Luke's ideological cooptation of Jesus in the interests of the ruling class is an act of political war against the liberation struggle. Black people, and other oppressed groups, recognise in Luke's discursive practice a social class struggle in which Luke has taken a definite side. In their appropriation of the Lukan discourse black people must raise their own class sights beyond what Luke wants to permit them, and they must make, through their own struggle, a hermeneutical connection with the struggles of the poor that Luke compromises so much for his own purposes.

In an attempt to construct a biblical hermeneutics of liberation, black theologians must draw inspiration from the conclusions that Mansueto draws in his proposal of a new exegesis. He writes:

"Together the results of a materialist history and of historical criticism allow us to read scripture in the light of the real struggles of those who forged the tradition: to reappropriate the real, objective significance of these books which have weighed so heavily in our cultural heritage. The results of such a reading, which has only begun to take shape (Chaney: oral presentation; Gottwald, 1979) suggest that those who have found an affinity between our present struggles for national liberation and an end to exploitation, domination, and mystification of all kinds, and the struggles which gave birth to the Jewish and Christian traditions have not erred. We speak with justice when we say that the same God who delivered Israel from Pharaoh, and struck Midian at the rock of Oreb, has even now stretched out his right hand over the battlefields of the revolution from Kronstadt to Yenan, and from Mozambique to Morazon". (44)

Black oppressed and exploited people must liberate the gospel so that the gospel may liberate them. An enslaved gospel enslaves, a liberated gospel liberates.

The purpose of this chapter was to expose the material and ideological conditions of production of the text of Luke 1 and 2. This was done with the issues and questions raised by the black struggle for liberation as outlined in chapter 3 in mind. A number of socio-economic and ideological contradictions have been identified as forming part of the absences and incompleteness which constitute the foundation of the text's discourse. In chapter seven the question of the hermeneutical appropriation of a text as fraught with these kinds of contradictions as this one is will be

addressed. The question will be raised with especially the black struggle for liberation in mind.

Notes for Chapter 5

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PART III

CHAPTER 6: THE CASE OF MICAH

"How is the troubled passage between text and reader to be smoothed, so that literary consumption may be facilitated", Eagleton.

Eagleton's words, above, express aptly, the nature of the hermeneutical exercise. They refer to the space between the reader and the text as an arena for a hermeneutical engagement. It is argued here, however, that the cultural, historical and ideological baggage from both the side of the text and that of the reader, provides the hermeneutical weapons for battling through that "troubled passage", they also provide the hermeneutical lenses for reading one's way through it. The contention of this study, therefore, is that the social-ideological location and commitment of the reader must be accorded methodological priority. For this reason the category of "the black struggle" - from precolonial times to the present is seen as representing an important hermeneutical factor.

Thus in chapter three an attempt was made to locate the biblical hermeneutics of liberation within a particular discourse of the black struggle. In the light of the theoretical presuppositions inscribed in that discourse of the black struggle, the texts of Micah and Luke in chapters four and five were subjected to a critical reading. In this

way the cultural and ideological presuppositions inherent in the texts were drawn out in order to be bounced off those of the history, culture and class of the reader. This specific activity takes place in that space which is between the text and the reader. It is argued, therefore, that the best way to smooth the "troubled passage" between text and reader is by unleashing the forces of struggle that each brings in their encounter with each other. In this way, the struggle of the communities behind the texts as well as that of the communities this side of the texts is relived as a new practice.

It is, however, important to realise that the struggles of the biblical communities do not appear in the Bible as mirror reflections of the real. Rather they have been produced as new textual practices; they come to us as signified practices. This understanding is crucial in order to circumvent the empiricism that has bogged down the historical critical method for many years.

The biblical texts, therefore, do not represent an unproblematical record of historical events and struggles. On the contrary, they represent particular productions of historical and social events and relations. In this chapter and the next the nature of the productions that the texts of Micah and Luke 1 and 2 represent, will be examined.

No biblical scholar illustrates and provides the clue for understanding this process of signification of reality in the prophetic texts better than Coote. In a monumental book entitled Amos Among The Prophets: Composition and Theology,

Cooté undertakes an illuminating analysis of the nature of the text of Amos and the process of its production. According to him, however, "it is important to remember that Amos is just an example. To understand the process by which the book of Amos came into being is to learn an approach that will be useful with all prophetic literature".(1)

More importantly, Cooté has given intelligibility to what has thus far been an elusive trait of scriptural texts: their class and ideological nature.

This quality of the biblical texts has tended to hide behind what appeared to be purely logical, historical and literary inconsistencies and contradictions. The recent use of sociological and ideological analyses of the bible, has reposed the question of the nature of the biblical literature and opened up new possibilities of understanding and appropriation.

Cooté rightly warns, however, against the danger of creating the notion of an original prophet surrounded by secondary additions. This is the danger of an empiricist-historicist approach which leads to the implication that the original words are truer than those of subsequent editions or recompositions. Such an approach would be inadequate because it would imply a hermeneutics of "selection" by which certain parts of the Bible would be chosen as appropriate and others simply dismissed.

Cooté has raised the fundamental question of the class nature and commitments of the various editions or recompositions of the prophetic texts - especially by his

division of Amos into Amos A, B, and C. He falls short, however, of providing an adequate hermeneutical appropriation of these texts in class and ideological terms. Such an appropriation would seek to avoid a selectivism which amounts to an ideological avoidance tactic. It would be an appropriate and adequate biblical hermeneutics of liberation because it would raise the question of "struggle" as a fundamental hermeneutical factor in the text, as indeed in the communities behind the text and those appropriating the text presently.

Thus Coote's isolation of the different editions or recompositions of the text put in a framework of biblical hermeneutics of liberation has as its purpose not the selection of one edition and the dismissal of others. On the contrary, the aim is to resurrect and identify the forces of struggle inherent and dominant in each edition. This process then leads to an engagement with these texts which would be framed by the class interests and commitments of the readers. Put simply, the value of all the editions of the texts is acknowledged. But it must be argued forcefully that such value is variable; it could be positive or negative; it is fundamentally framed by the nature of the social and ideological struggles in the text as well as of similar struggles in the life of the readers.

Explaining his method of identifying the various editions of the text, Coote writes:

"Suppose author A composed some separate short works (oracles, for example), which we can call 2, 4, and 6. Later editor B, to some extent making use of prophetic tradition (perhaps even some of other A

material), composed a similar group - lets call them 3, 5, and 7 - to express the concerns of his own person and time. Appropriating A's 2, 4, and 6, B preserved them (possibly modifying them slightly) by joining them to his own words, and composed a new work, 2b - 3 - 4b - 5 - 6b - 7, in which 2b stands for A's 2 as preserved or modified by B, 3 for B's 3, and so forth. Then came editor C, who rewrote this work with the addition of an opening and closing, which we'll call 1 and 8. ...This new work gives a third slant to the words of A and another to the words of B. It can be schematized as 1 - 2bc - 3c - 4bc - 5c - 6bc - 7c - 8, in which 1 stands for C's 1, 2bc for B's 2b as preserved or modified by C, 3c for B's 3 as preserved or modified by C, and so forth."(2)

The following, therefore, is a structural reclassification of the text of Micah on the basis of the criteria suggested by Coote and on historical materialist exegetical considerations being proposed in this study:

Micah A	Micah A B	Micah B	Micah C
1:10-16	1:8-9	1:5(b)-7	1:1-5(a)
2:1-5,8-9		2:6-7,10-11	2:12-13
3:8-12		3:1-7	
	4:3-4		4:1-2,5-13
5:9-14		5:1,4-6	5:2-3,7-8
6:9-15		6:1-8,16	
		7:1-7	7:8-20

The Black Struggle and the signified practice of Micah C-texts

Micah C-texts

Micah 1:1-5(a)

1. The word of Yahweh which came to Micah the Moreshite in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.
2. Hear, O peoples, every one; listen, O earth, and all who are in it; that Lord Yahweh may be a witness against you, The Lord from his holy temple (palace).
3. For, behold! Yahweh comes forth from his place he descends and treads upon the high places
4. The Mountains melt under him the valleys burst open like wax before fire, like water pouring down a slope
5. All this because of the crime of Jacob, because of the sins of the house of Israel.

Micah 2:12-13

12. I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of you
 I will surely gather the remnant of Israel.
 I will unite him like a flock in the fold,
 like a herd in the midst of a pasture
 And that will cause a disturbance
 13. The breaker will ascend,
 they will break out before them,
 they will cross the gate and go out of it
 their king will cross before them,
 Yahweh in front of them/at their head.

Micah 4:1-2

1. And it shall come to pass in the latter days,
 the mountain on which the house of Yahweh stands,
 will be established at the top of the mountains,
 be exalted above the hills.
 Peoples will stream to it,
 2. And many nations will come.
 They will say,
 Come let us go up to Yahweh's mountain,
 to the house of the God of Jacob,
 That he may instruct us about his ways
 and we shall walk in his paths;
 For from Zion instruction goes out,
 the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem.

Micah 4:5-13

5. For all the peoples walk,
 each in the name of its God;
 but we will walk in the name of Yahweh our
 God forever and ever.
 6. On that day,
 Oracle of Yahweh,
 I will assemble the lame;
 I will gather the banished,
 those whom I have caused evil to fall on.
 7. I will make the lame into a remnant,
 and those who are scattered afar (beyond) into a mighty
 nation
 Yahweh will reign over them
 in Mount Zion
 from now on and forever.
 8. But you, Migdal-'eder,
 Ophel of Zion's daughter,
 to you shall come
 the former realm
 the kingdom to Jerusalem's daughter.
 9. Now, why do you cry alarm?
 Is there no king with you?
 Or has your counsellor perished
 that you should writhe and twist like a woman
 in labour
 10. Writhe and twist
 daughter of Zion like a woman in labour
 for now you shall go forth from the city,
 and dwell in open country.
 You shall go to Babylon
 there to be delivered,
 there Yahweh shall redeem you

from the grip of your enemies.

11. And now many nations assemble against you,
They say: Let her be desecrated
Let our eyes gaze on Zion

12. But they do not know
what Yahweh is contemplating
nor do they discern his plan,
For he will gather them like sheaves to the
threshing floor.

13. Rise up and trample/thresh, daughter of Zion
for I will make your horn into iron
for I will make your hoofs into bronze
and you shall crush many peoples
You shall devote their booty to Yahweh
their wealth to the Lord of all the earth.

Micah 5:2-3,7-8

2. Therefore they shall be handed over until the time
when she who is in labour has given birth
and the rest of his brothers return
to the children of Israel.

3. He shall stand and pasture in the safety of Yahweh
in the exaltation of the name of Yahweh his God
They shall dwell (safely) for now he will be great
to the ends of the earth.

7. The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many
peoples
like a lion among the beasts of the forest,
like a young lion among flocks of sheep,
which claws when it passes
when it tears there is no rescue
8. May your hand be lifted against your enemies
and may all your enemies be cut off.

Micah 7:8-20

8. Rejoice not over me my enemy!
Though I have fallen, I shall arise.
Though I sit in darkness,
Yahweh will be my light.

9. Yahweh's anger I bear
because I have sinned against him
until he pleads my case
and gets me acquitted
He will bring me out to the light;
I shall see his righteousness.

10. My enemy shall see
and shame shall cover her
who says to me
Where is Yahweh your God
My eyes shall see her;
Now she will be trampled like mud in the street.

11. A day of building your walls!
That day the boundaries will be extended

12. The day when they shall come to you
from Assyria to Egypt
and from Egypt to the river
from sea to sea and mountain to mountain

13. The earth will become desolate because of its
inhabitants as a result of their deeds.

14. Shepherd your people with your staff,

the flock of your inheritance,
 who dwells alone in the forest
 in the midst of the fertile slopes
 Let them graze in Bashan and Gilead
 as in ancient days.

15. As in the days when you went forth from the land
 of Egypt,

Let us see wonders.

16. May the nations see
 and refrain from all their power.
 Let them lay their hand on their mouths,
 their ears be deaf:

17. Let them lick dust like a snake
 like things that crawl on the earth.
 Let them come trembling from their strongholds
 to Yahweh our God;
 Let them dread and fear you.

18. Who is God like you,
 taking away guilt,
 and passing over crime
 for the remnant of his inheritance
 He does not persist for ever in his anger
 for he delights in mercy

19. He will again have compassion on us,
 will subdue our iniquities
 he will cast into the depths of the sea
 all our sins

20. You will show faithfulness to Jacob
 mercy to Abraham
 as you have sworn to our fathers
 from days of old.

These texts, scattered throughout and interspersed with others in the book of Micah, have been isolated and grouped together here so that they may be read together. It is held that in this way they give a coherent flavour of their concerns and rhetorical structures. A similar approach will be followed in respect of the other editions of the text of Micah, Micah B, A, and A/B.

A black biblical hermeneutics of liberation should interrogate the Micah C-texts in more or less the following way: what is the nature of the challenge of these texts? Whose class, gender and race interests does this challenge exist to serve? Who is making the challenge, where and

when? What are the ideological and literary mechanisms whereby the challenge is formulated? And more fundamentally, what effects, then and now, are these texts having on the social classes, genders and races on whose behalf they were NOT produced?

The C-stage texts provide the dominant ideology of the Micah prophetic discourse. The perspective of these texts frame the various other layers of meaning of the discourse in such a way as to relegate these layers of meaning to a secondary position. In fact, the ideology of Micah-C represents a new production of the discursive practice of Micah. The C-editor of Micah is surely of the same class and ideology as the C-editor of Amos. For here, as in Amos,

"Having already said, through the inclusion of the A and B stages, if you do wrong you will die and I urge you to do right, the C-editor looks to the future, asking, who will hear the message? Who will obey God's stipulations? For the C-editor and his readers, the world of meaningful action lies in the future, not the past or the present. With a view to the future, God judges attitude, not action. God is looking for what people today might call 'readiness for justice'". (4)

Thus Micah 1:2-5(a) describes the impending action of Yahweh by means of which a new community will be created. This textual unit can only have the effect of engendering an attitude, the presence or absence of which, will be the basis of God's judgment. The text represents an important part of the core of the ideology of Micah C material: the shift on the part of God's demands from action to attitude, from concrete relations to abstract principles.

The God of the C-stage material is the deity of restoration (Mic.2:12-13). Thus this God reconstructs the citadel of power of the former ruling classes of Judah and transforms it into an international meeting place (4:1-2). The theology of the C-stage material feeds on the Zion ideology of the Davidic empire (5). It is fundamentally imperialist in character (7:11-12).

In this edition of the Micah text, Babylon is the new Egypt. The former oppressors of peasants and casual labourers and declasses in Judah are now seeing themselves as the oppressed in relation to their captors. More importantly they rewrite the traditions of struggle of ancient Israel to apply to their situation. Thus instead of the rich and the powerful, it is the nations and the pagans who become targets of Yahweh's judgment. In this tradition the enemy changes:

"My enemy shall cover her
and shame shall cover her
who says to me
Where is Yahweh your God
My eyes shall see her;
Now she will be trampled like mud in
the street" (Micah 7:10)

By the time the text of Micah reaches this edition, this production, this signification of reality, vague and generalised descriptions have replaced concrete and specific references to evil. Consequently, this articulation of the enemy in the sight of God does not resonate with the contemporary oppressed and exploited people's knowledge of evil in their situations.

Thus black working class people of South Africa do not recognise this enemy. It is not an enemy which their badges

of slavery - the passbooks - epitomise; it is not an enemy that torture and death in their detention cells reminds them of; it is not the enemy of ignorance, meaninglessness, and abject poverty in the various squatter camps of their country which they have to deal with daily. This enemy is too abstract and too religiously defined. The enemy in this text, as well as the God who is at war with it, are not trappable.

The hermeneutical code with which black working class christians operate, which issues out of the struggle for survival in the black ghettos, refuses to appropriate the text of Micah in the code in which it is cast. Micah C represents the dominant code in which the whole prophetic practice of Micah is cast. It fits the description of dominant definitions as provided by Stuart Hall:

"The dominant definitions ... are hegemonic precisely because they represent definitions of situations and events which are 'in dominance', and which are global. Dominant definitions connect events, implicitly or explicitly, to grand totalizations, to the great syntagmatic views of the world: they take 'large views' of issues: they relate events to 'the national interest' or to the level of geo-politics, even if they make these connections in truncated, inverted or mystified ways. The definition of a 'hegemonic' viewpoint is (a) that it defines within its terms the mental horizon, the universe of possible meanings of a whole society or culture; and (b) that it carries with it the stamp of legitimacy - it appears coterminous with what is 'natural', 'inevitable', 'taken for granted', about the social order".(6)

The process of grand totalization and syntagmatic viewing of the world is nowhere more evident than in the theology of restoration which pervades the C-stage ideological practice:

"And it shall come to pass in the latter days,
the mountain on which the house of Yahweh stands
Will be established at the top of the mountains,
be exalted above the hills,

Peoples will stream to it,
and many nations will come" (Micah 4:1)

This imperialist theology is more suited to the interests of a formerly powerful class whose pride has been hurt by exile than to a previously oppressed class whose real interests lie in the building of democratic structures to guarantee its protection and liberation. C-stage theology cannot provide inspiration to oppressed peoples because it is inherently a theology of domination and control. The practice of the oppressed cannot draw its hermeneutical weapons of struggle from this theology. On the contrary it has to engage in struggle with it for a recovery of the suppressed traditions of liberation in the bible.

The Black Struggle and the signified practice of Micah 8-
texts

Micah 1:5(b)-9

5(b) Whose is the transgression of Jacob
Is it not Sammaria's
And whose is the sin (following LXX) of Judah?
Is it not Jerusalem's?
6. I will mete out punishment to Samaria
I will make her into a vineyard field for planting
I will pour her stones into the valley
and I will roll away her foundations
7. All her idols will be crushed
All her takings (wages) from prostitution will
be burned by fire
All her idols I will put to desolation
For she collected them as fee for prostitution
So to the fee of a prostitute they shall revert

Micah 2:6-7,10-11

6. "Stop dripping (prophesying)",
They drip, Let them (the prophets) not drip about these
things
Disgrace shall not overtake us
7. Is the house of Jacob accursed
Is Yahweh impatient
Or are these things his deeds?
Do his acts not benefit
the one who walks uprightly
10. Arise and go,

for this is no place of rest.
 Because of uncleanness you shall be destroyed
 by ruinous destruction
 If a man come in the spirit (inspired/intoxicated)
 and lied deceptions - "I drip for you in
 wine and beer (intoxicating drink)!" - he would
 be the "dripper" (prophet) for this people.

Micah 3:1-7 (Translation follows Mays pp.76f)

1. And I said,
 "Hear, you chiefs of Jacob
 and Magistrates of the house of Israel
 Is it not your duty to know justice,
 2(a) O haters of good and lovers of evil?
 3. They eat the flesh of my people,
 and strip their skin off them,
 and break their bones.
 They chop (them) up as if for the pot,
 like meat to put in the cauldron.
 2(b) Their skin will be torn off them,
 their flesh off their bones.
 4. Then they will cry out to Yahweh
 but he will not answer them.
 He will hide his face from them in that
 time,
 Since they've turned their deeds to evil
 5. This is what Yahweh said against the prophets:
 who mislead my people
 When they have something to chew on, they
 proclaim "Peace".
 Let a man fail to put something in their
 mouth
 and they sanctify war against him.
 6. Therefore it will be night for you without
 vision,
 darkness for you without divination
 The sun shall set for the prophets
 The day go dark for them.
 7. The seers shall be confounded,
 and the diviners in consternation.
 All of them will cover their beard
 because there is no answer from God.

Micah 5:1,4,5(b)-6

1. But you, Bethlehem of Ephratha,
 small among the clans of Judah
 From you shall come forth for me
 one to be ruler in Israel.
 His origins are from old times
 from ancient days.
 4. This shall be peace from Assyria
 because he came into our land
 and he marched against our fortified palaces.
 We will raise against him seven shepherds
 and eight human chieftans
 5. They shall shepherd the land of Assyria with the
 sword,
 the land of Nimrod with a drawn sword.
 5(b) He will deliver us from the Assyrians

When he comes into our land
 and when he walks within our borders
 6. The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of
 many peoples
 like dew from Yahweh
 like raindrops upon grass
 which does not wait for a man
 nor await the sons of human kind.

Micah 6:1-8 (For textual emendations see Mays p.128)

1. Hear what Yahweh is saying:
 Arise! Make a case with the mountains;
 Let the hills hear your voice
 2. Hear, O mountains, Yahweh's case
 and listen O foundations of the earth
 For Yahweh has a case with his people,
 With Israel he argues
 3. "My people what have I done to you?
 How have I wearied you? Testify against me!
 4. For I brought you out from the land of Egypt;
 from the house of slavery I ransomed you
 I sent Moses before you,
 Aaron and Miriam (5) with him
 Remember what Balak King of Moab advised
 and how Baalam, son of Beor, answered him
 ...from Shittim to Gilgal
 in order to know the righteousness of Yahweh.
 6. With what shall I meet Yahweh
 humble myself before God above?
 shall I meet him with burnt offerings
 with year-old calves?
 7. Would Yahweh be pleased with thousands of rams,
 with innumerable streams of oil?
 Shall I give my first-born for my crime,
 the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul
 8. He has told you, man, what is good,
 What Yahweh requires from you is
 nothing but to do justice, to love mercy,
 and humbly to walk with your God.

Micah 6:16

16. You have followed the practices of Omri,
 every deed of Ahab's house;
 you have walked in their counsels.
 So I will turn you into a cause of horror,
 and her residents into an object of derision;
 You shall bear the scorn of the peoples.

Micah 7:1-7

1. How I sorrow!
 For I am like the gatherer of summer fruit,
 like the gleaners of the vintage,
 when there are no grapes to eat,
 none of the early figs I crave.
 2. The faithful have vanished from the earth,
 not one human being is upright.
 All lie in wait to shed blood,
 each hunts his brother with a net.
 3. Their hands are good at doing evil;
 the official demands a favourable decision,

and the judge decides to get the reward;
 the great speak only of what they want.
 4. They twist their good like a briar bush,
 their uprightness like a thorn hedge.
 The day of their punishment has come;
 now their confusion is at hand.
 5. Don't rely on a neighbour;
 don't trust a friend.
 Even with her who lies in your bosom
 be guarded in what you say.

This group of texts are cast in what Stuart Hall calls the "negotiated code". They represent a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements. In line with the social class practices of its proponents the negotiated code is shot through with contradictions. As Hall puts it, succinctly,

"Negotiated codes operate through what we might call particular or situated logics: and these logics arise from the differential position of those who occupy this position in the spectrum, and from their differential and unequal relation to power". (7)

This assessment of the B-stage prophetic materials is supported by Coote's similar study of Amos. According to Coote, the B-stage material or material cast in a "negotiated code" as Hall would put it, exhibits certain distinctive features:

1. It addresses a general audience. In the case of Micah this means all the people that are associated with Jacob or Judah, or Samaria or Jerusalem (Micah 1:5(b)-9). The closest specific description of the B-stage addressees in Micah is in 3:1; this concrete description is, nevertheless, quickly neutralised by a more general and vaguer description in a parallel line in 3:2(a). The tendency to speak in general terms on the part of this code is congruent with its blending of adaptive and oppositional elements within the same discourse. In fact this is a structural trait, with

class and ideological roots in the middle classes of all social formations. It is the inherent contradictory tendency of a historically marginal but spiritually central class position. Eagleton describes the historical and ideological dilemma of this group within a capitalist social formation when he asserts:

"Committed by its nuclear social and economic conditions to a framework of overarching authority, to 'standards' and 'leadership', the petty bourgeoisie rejects at once the democratic 'anarchy' it discerns below it and the ineffectualness of the actual authority posed above it. ... Though empirically decentred, largely excluded from the ruling academic caste, it nevertheless laid claim to be, spiritually, the 'real' elite".(8)

Thus the non-specific description of the addressees is a function of the historical and class contradictions attendant upon the proponents of the B-stage material. Because of their differential relation to power, especially in the historical context of Josiah's reform and of the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem, the B-stage ideologists broadened the indictment against the Jerusalemite and Judean ruling classes "to include a comprehensive notion of cultic and political idolatry - the practice of pagan religion and trust in military security".(9) It is from this that the material derives its feature of generality concerning its addressees.

2. On the basis of 3:2,4-7 and 6:8 it seems reasonable to argue with Coote that the basic message of B-stage prophetic oracles is: "perform justice or else".(10) This means that the tradents of this stage offer the ruling classes of Judah a chance to survive. But even if the survival option was not available, the fate of these classes seems bearable and

they are not beyond redemption: their vision will be darkened, they will be confounded. There will be no answer from Yahweh (3:4-7).

3. The B-stage material is characterised by a propensity for abstract rather than concrete description. Coote writes:

"B-stage phrases tend to be wordy rather than terse, vague rather than specific, abstract rather than concrete, and stereotyped rather than fresh. ...In the B stage one does not 'sell the needy into debt slavery for a pair of sandals'; instead one 'does wrong'. There is ultimately no specific authoritative rationale for the pro-Jerusalemite stance; so the B editor calls it, in effect, 'good'."(11)

4. Ambiguity is another feature of the B-stage prophetic oracles. This quality is certainly present in 1:5(b)-7; 2:6-7,10-11. It is in 3:1 and 6:6-8, however, where it comes through more clearly. Here the text avoids clarity of statement by posing rhetorical questions on issues that are unambiguously asserted in the A editions of the prophetic material. The effect is to give the appearance of addressing similar issues as the A edition while the concern is weakened by the language structure in which it is cast.

5. The prophetic rib, the suit or litigation, with its implication of open-endedness, defines another set of B-stage oracles. "Other forms found in the B-stage include chastisement, exhortation, call to worship, the narrative describing the commissioning of the prophet, the speech in the divine council, prophetic visions, and theophanies".(12) Certainly Micah 6:1-4 represents a perfect example of this feature of the B-stage material. The confidence of the B-

feature of the B--stage material. The confidence of the B-stage editors in the justice of the open-endedness of the legal system is betrayed in this text. The politics and the sociology of the law courts as well as those of the cultic systems are not an issue for the B-editors.

6. The B-stage text offers an open future. In the case of Micah it is represented unambiguously by 5:1,4,5(b)-6. The method of "exhortation" is used to communicate this future.

According to Coote the B-stage material is largely the product of a scribe or scribes who are at the service of a ruling elite.(13) The features of the oracles of this stage are a function of the class and ideology of this scribal group. It has already been pointed out that the discursive productions of this group reflect, unavoidably, its differential and unequal relation to power. The vagueness of the B-stage material, its generality in terms of its addressees, its abstractions and ambiguity and the openendedness of the future which it offers, represent the extent and nature of the ideology of the class that put it together.

The B-stage oracles derive their identity from a certain kind of incompleteness: they are eloquent by their silence on the struggles of poor and exploited peasants in the Israelite monarchy. Although these oracles condemn evil and injustice and exhort people to good and justice, the actual actions of oppressors are not named except vaguely and, the resistance of the oppressed is present by its absence.

The task of a biblical hermeneutics of liberation is to theorise the ideological necessity of this incompleteness, this absence. Black theology as a discursive practice that is rooted in the progressive dimensions of black history and culture, should provide the basis for a critical appropriation of these texts.

The first point to make is that this part of the prophetic text of Micah, as seen from the perspective of the hermeneutics of liberation, has a negative identification with the concerns of the poor and the oppressed. It helps to point to the behaviour and ideology of a social class that needs careful watching in the liberation struggle. The B-stage prophetic texts, by virtue of their class character, appeals more to their counterparts in modern society, the petit bourgeoisie, than to the working class people, the really poor and exploited members of contemporary societies. The modern middle class people, who are similarly differentially and unequally related to power structures, display a similar vagueness, abstractness, generality, ambiguity as the proponents of the B-stage texts in relation to oppression and justice. Cabral had this in mind when he wrote in relation to this class that:

"We must, however, take into consideration the fact that, faced with the prospect of political independence, the ambition and opportunism from which the liberation movement generally suffers may draw into the struggle individuals who have not been reconverted. The latter, on the basis of their level of education, their scientific or technical knowledge, and without losing any of class cultural prejudices, may attain the highest positions in the liberation movement. On the cultural as well as the political level vigilance is therefore vital. For in the specific and highly complex circumstances of the process of the phenomenon of the liberation movements, all that glitters is not necessarily gold: political

leaders - even the most famous - may be culturally alienated".(14)

A similar dynamic seems to have taken place in the B-stage texts. There seems to have occurred a cultural alienation of a concrete, direct, specific, clear message. The original message of Micah against the ruling classes of Judah has been reified in the B-stage. Mottu describes reification as, among other things, a process of recurrence and a process of stealing. He writes in relation to the conflict between Hananiah and Jeremiah:

"To the degree that reification as a general phenomenon is 'grounded in historically recurrent circumstances of human existence in society', one can say that Hananiah operates upon the belief that God's fidelity is simply a recurrent fact. 'Recurrence' is a procedure of demonstration that consists in extending to all terms of a series what is valid only for the first two terms. This is exactly what he does: he extends the events of 701 under Sennacherib to the events of 594/3 under Nebuchadnezzar without seeing those events in terms of the historical activity of Babylon and Judah".(15)

The nature and orientation of the B-stage prophetic oracles indicates that Hananiah symbolised a whole tradition with firm ideological and social class roots. In relation to reification as 'stealing', Mottu states:

"Reification occurs when certain people 'steal' the praxis of others, which is the case when Hananiah 'steals' (Isa.9:4) from Isaiah and simply transfers a word said in a given situation into a quite different one. This process of 'stealing'; is a far-reaching one and covers many different situations, as illustrated by the German peasants who saw their praxis being 'stolen' from their hands by the princes and Luther. ... so the text of Isaiah 9 becomes a 'thing', even a commodity, at the disposal of anyone at any time. Jer.23:30 speaks pointedly against this 'reification' of the words of God".(16)

Thus while black theology shares the sentiments expressed in the message about justice in the B-stage texts, it cannot identify with the abstract context in which this message now appears. In these texts, both oppression and justice have been "thingified", appearing now as vaguely good and evil. The original message of Micah which was directed at the ruling classes of Judah in the eighth century B.C.E., has now been stolen from its concrete situation where it concerned the condition of the poor and exploited. The message is now being applied to the Judean ruling class in their relation with their foreign oppressors. The more basic contradiction between exploited peasants and exploiting latifundaries in Judah has now been replaced by the secondary contradiction between Babylon and Judah or other nations and Israel.

The Black Struggle and the signified practice of Micah A-texts

Micah 1:10-16

10. Declare it not in Gath
Weep, only weep.

In the streets of Beth-aphrah
roll in the dust.

11. The Shophar they sound for you,
Rulers of Shaphir.

From her city she comes not out
Nobilities/Rulers of Zaanah
I will make a lamentation, Beth-ezel.
I will take from you your standing place.

12. Who can hope for good
Nobilities/Rulers of Maroth
For evil has come down from Yahweh,
to the gate of Jerusalem

13. You harness the chariot to the team
Nobilities/Rulers of Lachish
That was the chief sin for the daughter of
Zion, that in you were found the crimes
of Israel.

14. To you they give parting gifts
Moresbeth-Gath
Nobilities/Rulers of Achzib have become a failing brook
to the kings of Israel
Shall still the heir come to you,

Nobilities/Rulers of Mareshah?

Micah 2:1-5,8-9

1. Woe to those who contemplate wickedness,
who do evil upon their couches/beds,
At morning's light they carry it out
because they wield power.
 2. They covet fields and expropriate them,
houses and carry them away,
They oppress a man and his household
A producer and his fundamental means of
production.
 3. Therefore thus says Yahweh
Behold I devise evil against these homesteads
An evil from which they cannot withdraw their
necks,
and in relation to which they cannot walk upright
for it shall be an evil time.
 4. In that day a taunt-song shall be raised
over you; a lament shall be sung, saying:
"We are utterly ruined".
The property of my people is exchanged/moved to and fro
There is none to remove it, to return our field through
redistribution
 5. Therefore there will be no one to divide property
by lot in the assembly of Yahweh
- ...
8. But you! against my people
you arise as enemy. (Following Mays p.67)
From them (in front of them) their garment,
(their cloak you strip off,
(taking away security)
Causing those who return from war,
to bring over security.
 9. The women of my people you drive out,
from the houses they delight in
from their children, you take their
honour forever.

Micah 3:8-12

8. But indeed, I am filled with the spirit of
the Lord, with justice and power;
to declare to Jacob his crime,
to Israel his sin.
9. Hear this chiefs of the house of Jacob,
and magistrates of the house of Israel -
the ones who pervert justice
and twist the straight thing
10. building Zion with bloodshed/murder
Jerusalem with violence
11. Her chiefs judge for a bribe
Her priests give instruction for a price
Her prophets divine for money.
And they still trust in Yahweh, saying,
"Is not Yahweh near us?
Evil will not come upon us!
12. Therefore because of you
Zion shall become a ploughed field
Jerusalem will be a ruin
and the mount of the house wooded heights.

Micah 5:9-14

9. It shall be in that day, says the Lord,
I will cut off your horses from your midst,
10. I will cut off the cities of your land
and I will tear down all your fortresses.
11. I will cut off sorceries from your hand,
and you will have no soothsayers.
12. I will cut off your idols
and your sacred pillars from your midst.
You shall not fetishise again
the works of your own hands.
13. I will root out the Asherim from your midst
and will exterminate your cities
14. I will take vengeance in anger and in
wrath
upon the (nations) which have not heard.

Micah 6:9-15

9. The voice of Yahweh calls to the city
(and he who hears your name is well-advised)
'Hear, O tribe and those who assemble in the
city
10. Shall I forget the house of
Wickedness where treasures of wickedness are stored
and the despicable use of an ephah that is
too small?
11. Shall I approve anyone with false scales,
with cheating weights in his pouch
12. The rich ones are full of violence
The rulers speak with deception
all their speech is treachery.
13. So I have begun to smite you
to lay waste because of your sins.
14(a) You shall eat, and not be satisfied
14(b) Semen into your womb you will take
and not bring forth;
and the ones you bring forth I will give
to the sword.
15. You shall sow and not reap.
You shall tread olives and not anoint yourself
with oil,
grapes, and not drink wine.

This group of texts is specific about the class of people it is addressed to. In 1:10-16 the addressees of the A-stage material are described as the "rulers/nobilities/landlords/authorities" of the various cities listed in the lament. The translation of yoshev as "ruler, authority" in contexts like the one in this text has been cogently argued for by Gottwald who builds on the arguments

of Alt as well as Cross and Freedman. Concluding his study of the use of yoshev as referring to political and/or socio-economic rule Gottwald writes:

"When referring to the leaders of a region which we otherwise know to have been divided into several political sovereignties, such as Canaan with its independent city-states, the plural views all the heads of state in those several political units as a collectivity sharing similar values, attitudes, policies, or strategies. Therefore, while I incline to view most of the enemy leaders called yoshev/yoshevim in the premonarchic sources as kings or princes, I do not agree with Cross and Freedman in restricting the meaning of the term to 'reigning princes'. The functional import of the general designation is something like this: yoshev/yoshevim are leaders in the imperial-feudal statist system of social organization, with primary reference to enemy kings but embracing other functionaries in the statist system. As Israel developed statist sociopolitical organization of its own, the term was increasingly applied to Israelite functionaries in the state apparatus and, on occasion, referred to persons of power in the upper socio-economic strata irrespective of their political office".(17)

Understood in this way, the lament in 1:10-16 is addressed to rulers of towns/cities who may or may not have held political power in a specific office. They do, however, wield power (economic or social) and the behaviour and practices which are commensurate with their position is being lamented as the cause of the disaster that has beset Judah. Mays argues that the historical context for this lament of Micah is the destruction and suffering which flowed over Judah following Sennacherib's military campaign along the eastern Mediterranean coast in 701 B.C. Mays writes further that:

"Sennacherib moved against Judah from the west, overwhelmed Lachish and other 'strong cities' according to his count forty-six in all. The defence system of fortified cities in the Shephelah was certainly a focus of his attack. He also claimed countless villages. Two hundred

thousand of the population were said to have been deported. Hezekiah was driven inside Jerusalem, held there as though in prison, and finally was spared only by submission and the payment of an impoverishing tribute".(18)

In this lament, however, Micah does not simply bewail the destruction which the Assyrians inflicted, but more importantly the pain which the population of Judah has been caused as a result of the practices of the powerful classes of the cities of Judah. They were the ones who were exacting tribute from the peasants and squandering it in luxurious life-styles. It is they for whom the "shophar" has been sounded (vs.11), much like it is sounded for the propertied classes and the slave-masters on the day of Atonement (repossession, restitution, restoration) in the Jubilee year (Lev.25:8ff).

The A-stage oracles are unambiguous about the crime of the ruling classes. The latter are economic exploiters who accumulate wealth to themselves by treacherous means: "They covet fields and expropriate them, houses and take them; They oppress a man and his household; A producer and his fundamental means of production" (Mic.2:2,8-9). This class consists also of judicial authorities (communal leaders and magistrates), religious functionaries (priests and prophets) who participate in the injustices of the ruling classes by perverting the judicial system in the one case and commodifying religious services while invoking the egalitarian religious ideology of Yahwism in the other case (3:8-11).

The message of the A-stage oracles is equally direct: Yahweh devises evil for this class. The position of power of the

ruling classes together with their pride shall be destroyed (2:3-5). Similarly, all the symbols of oppression and exploitation will fall prey to the wrath of Yahweh: "Zion shall become a ploughed field, Jerusalem will be a ruin" (3:12). The oracles in 5:9-14 and 6:9-15 represent a vivid and dramatic depiction of the forms and instruments of oppression and exploitation against which Micah A speaks.

Thus the class or group of people on whose behalf the Micah "A" oracles are speaking is not sympathetic with the economic, political and ideological interests of the class under attack. It prophesies the destruction of this class, and its political and ideological structures. It represents the God who sees fundamental disruption of the status quo as the only solution to the violence and corruption of the ruling classes.

Radical as the oracles of Micah "A" are, they, nevertheless, lack a dimension which would qualify them as revolutionary. The absence of this dimension is discernible only through a hermeneutics of liberation which is rooted in the struggles of the oppressed and exploited people today.

While identifying fully with the judgment meted out against the ruling classes by the A-stage oracles, the black working class people of South Africa would experience an absence of the voice of the labouring and under-classes of Micah's Judah in these texts. This is so because the Micah text as a whole is a curious mixture of A-stage condemnation of injustice with C-stage eschatology. There is a glaring absence of oppressed people's eschatology which constitutes

the incompleteness of the Micah text as a signifying practice. The text lacks a vision of the future as seen from the perspective of the poor. It does not even summon the poor people to action. There is thus a serious ideological lacuna in the text which can only be filled from our side of history. By this it is meant that contemporary struggles for liberation having encountered a void in terms of the actual struggles of the poor and exploited in the text, have to offer their struggles, hermeneutically, to complete the text. In this way, the Micah discourse is liberated to enable contemporary victims of injustice to do what Eagleton has termed: staging one's "own signifying practices to enrich, modify or transform the effects which others' practices produce".(19)

It is at this point of thinking about creating alternative discourses and practices that it is appropriate to turn to a minority set of texts in the wider discourse of Micah, namely, the "A/B" texts.

The Black Struggle and the signified practice of Micah A/B

Micah 1:8-9

8. Against this I will mourn and wail
I will go stripped and naked
I will make a lamentation like jackals,
a grieving like the young of an ostrich
9. because I am sick from her wound
for it has come up to Judah
it has reached the gate of my people,
right up to Jerusalem.

Micah 4:3-4

3. He will judge between many people (refer Is.2:2)
and decide against the strong nations
up to a distant one
They will beat their swords into ploughshares
their spears into pruning knives.
Nation will not raise sword against nation
Nor will they learn war again
4. Each man shall sit under his vine,

under his fig-tree,
 And no one will be terrified
 For the mouth of Yahweh of Hosts has spoken.

This group of texts occupies a position on the border between "A" stage and "B" stage material. In fact it could be said that the group represents the kind of "A" stage texts that have been none too successfully edited by the B-stage signifying practitioner.

The first of these is Micah 1:8-9. This unit of material describes the mourning of the prophet for the state of Judah because of the wrath that Yahweh allows to befall the area. As Mays correctly states, "The historical event interpreted by this theological language is Sennacherib's attack on Judah and conquest of many of its cities, leaving King Hezekiah shut in Jerusalem. The situation suggested by the verse (9) is the time when the conquest of the Shephelah and hill country is complete, and only Jerusalem remains".(20)

Notwithstanding some vagueness, indirectness and a certain air of abstractness in this text there is a concreteness that only the experience of solidarity can signify. It is a concreteness and a directness which only tears can express.

Brueggemann makes the point succinctly:

"Tears are a way of solidarity in pain when no other form of solidarity remains. And when one addresses numbness clearly, anger, abrasiveness, and indignation as forms of address will drive the hurt deeper, add to the numbness, and force people to behaviors not rooted in experience".(21)

Even more importantly "grieving" under certain circumstances may constitute a revolutionary practice. The funerals of the victims of police and army violence against black people in South Africa are a case in point. The revolutionary

effects of the "grieving" of black masses for their daughters and sons who fall in struggle has forced the powers that be to impose legislative, political and military restrictions on the freedom of blacks to weep/lament for their dead. For as Brueggemann correctly states:

"Such weeping is a radical criticism, a fearful dismantling, because it means the end of all machismo; weeping is something kings rarely do without losing their thrones. Yet the loss of thrones is precisely what is called for in radical criticism". (22)

The second group of the Micah A/B texts is 4:3-4. There can be no doubt that vs.3(a) is a "B" text. It addresses "people" and "nations" in general. This verse has replaced an originally "A" material which addressed itself to specific classes within the tributary social formation of monarchic Judah.

This "B" material, however, provides a new hermeneutical framework for what must be the most revolutionary part of the entire biblical discourse (3(b)-4). The latter redirects attention to the sphere of production of material life. Verse 3(b) points to an aspect of the productive activity which is destructive not only because the technology it produces is for war, but because it is a luxury which consumes resources, human and natural, which might have been usefully invested in activities that supported the life of the entire community. For the first time a vision of an alternative society is projected as a result of this realigning and redirecting of production processes: "Each man shall sit under his vine, under his fig-tree, And no one will be terrorised, For the mouth of Yahweh of Hosts has spoken". (vs.4)

Thus while the oppressed and exploited peasants, artisans, day-labourers, declasses of Micah's Judah are entirely absent in the signifying practice that the wider text of Micah represents, something of their project and voice has almost accidentally survived in the form of an A/B-stage text. The survival of contradictory texts like these in a discourse that is dominated by contrary perspectives exemplifies the working of ideology. As I argued in chapter four of this study and elsewhere:

"Ideology is not a lie. It is rather a harmonisation of contradictions in such a way that the class interests of one group are universalised and made acceptable to other classes. Also, ideology is not a selection process or filter through which certain facts are constituted by their absence". (23)

There are, therefore, aspects of the texts which provide hermeneutical links with the struggles and projects of the oppressed peoples of biblical communities. These aspects of biblical discourses serve also as a critique of present day cultural and political discourses of the oppressed. The absences in the text concerning the experiences of the oppressed in ancient society, also reopen the canon of scripture, in some sense, to the extent that they stimulate the production of new liberative religious discourses that enrich, modify or transform existing practices. Thus black culture and history as hermeneutical factors in black theology in South Africa asks questions of the biblical text that seek to establish ties with struggles for liberation in the biblical communities. Similarly the liberative aspects of the biblical discourses interrogate black culture and history in the light of the values and goals of struggling

classes in biblical communities. A theological hermeneutic that brings out this dialectic in the appropriation of biblical texts operates with a clear recognition of the fact that usually in ideological discourses "only the successful ... are remembered. The blind alleys, the lost causes, and the losers themselves are forgotten".(24) Differently put, this hermeneutics is informed by the perspective that recognises that:

"The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the areas of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it".(25)

The task of a biblical hermeneutics of liberation is to go behind the dominant discourses to the discourses of oppressed communities to link up with kindred struggles. In South Africa a common mythological expression of the role of biblical discourses in the dispossession of blacks runs like this: "When the white man came to our country he had a Bible and we had the land. The white man said to the black man: 'Let us pray'. After the prayer, the white man had the land and the black man had the Bible". The task now facing a black theology of liberation is to enable black people to use the Bible to get the land back and to get the land back without losing the Bible. In order for this to happen black theology must employ the progressive aspects of black history and culture to liberate the Bible so that the Bible may liberate black people. That is the hermeneutical dialectic.

In order for that to happen, though, a theoretically sound and an ideologically clear approach to the text of the Bible is a prerequisite. The above study of the book of Micah is an example of how this might be done. The point of the study of this text was to confront the class and ideological conditions of production and existence of the text with the class and ideological position and commitment of the reader. In the specific circumstances of the racist and sexist oppression and capitalist exploitation of black people in South Africa, Micah A and A/B texts provide a positive hermeneutical connection with the struggles of black workers, on the one hand. The B and C texts of Micah serve the struggles of oppressed peoples negatively, on the other hand. These latter texts represent forms of domination and the interest of dominant social classes that are not dissimilar to those of contemporary oppressors and exploiters. Through an appropriation, albeit a negative one, of these texts, the category of "struggle" is once again brought to the fore.

Notes for Chapter 6

1. R.B. Coote, Amos Among the Prophets - Composition and Theology, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, (1981), p.2. No attempt will be made in this study to rehearse the traditional studies on Micah. Many of these have been debated and adequately assessed by scholars like Mays in his commentary on Micah quoted below. Suffice it to simply make reference to some of the most useful: S.J. Schwartes, "Critical Notes on Micah 1:10-16", Vetus Testamentum, vol.14, (1964), pp.454-461; E. Cannawurf, "The Authenticity of Micah IV:1-4", Vetus Testamentum, vol.13, 1963, pp.26-33; B. Stade, "Bemerkungen uber das Buch Micha" BZAW: Zeitschrift fur Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, 1881, pp.161ff; A.S. Van Der Woude, "Micah in Dispute with the Pseudo-Prophets", Vetus Testamentum, vol.19, (1969), pp.245-260; and an even more useful study is Kund Jeppesen's article: "New Aspects of Micah Research", Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 8, (1978), pp.3-32; D.R. Hillers, Micah - A Commentary, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, (1984).
2. Op.cit., p.5.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid, p.120.
5. J.J.M. Roberts, "The Davidic Origin of the Zion Tradition", Journal of Biblical Literature, 92, (1973), pp.340ff.
6. Hall, op.cit., (1973), p.23.
7. Ibid.
8. Eagleton, op.cit., (1976), p.14.
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10. Coote, op.cit., p.62.
11. Ibid, p.63.
12. Ibid, p.64.
13. Ibid, p.74.
14. A. Cabral, "National Culture", Unity and Struggle, Heinemann, London, (1980), p.145.
15. Henri Motbu, "Jeremiah vs. Hananiah: Ideology and Truth in Old Testament Prophecy", in N.K. Gottwald (ed), The Bible and Liberation, Orbis Books, New York, (1983), p.242.

16. Ibid.
17. Gottwald, The Tribes of Yahweh, (1979), p.532.
18. Mays, op.cit.; p.53.
19. T. Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, (1983), p.212.
20. Mays, op.cit., p.41.
21. W. Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, (1978), p.59.
22. Ibid, p.61.
23. I.J. Mosala and B. Tihagale (eds), The Unquestionable Right to be Free, Skotaville Publishers, Johannesburg, (1986), p.194.
24. E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, Penguin Books, Middlesex, (1963), p.13.
25. K. Marx and F. Engels, The German Ideology, Lawrence and Wishart, London, (1970), p.64.

Notes for Chapter 6

1. R.B. Coote, Amos Among the Prophets - Composition and Theology, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, (1981), p.2. No attempt will be made in this study to rehearse the traditional studies on Micah. Many of these have been debated and adequately assessed by scholars like Mays in his commentary on Micah quoted below. Suffice it to simply make reference to some of the most useful: S.J. Schwartes, "Critical Notes on Micah 1:10-16", Vetus Testamentum, vol.14, (1964), pp.454-461; E. Cannawurf, "The Authenticity of Micah IV:1-4", Vetus Testamentum, vol.13, 1963, pp.26-33; B. Stade, "Bemerkungen uber das Buch Micha" BZAW: Zeitschrift fur Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, 1881, pp.161ff; A.S. Van Der Woude, "Micah in Dispute with the Pseudo-Prophets", Vetus Testamentum, vol.19, (1969), pp.245-260; and an even more useful study is Kund Jeppesen's article: "New Aspects of Micah Research", Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 8, (1978), pp.3-32; D.R. Hillers, Micah - A Commentary, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, (1984).
2. Op.cit., p.5.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid, p.120.
5. J.J.M. Roberts, "The Davidic Origin of the Zion Tradition", Journal of Biblical Literature, 92, (1973), pp.340ff.
6. Hall, op.cit., (1973), p.23.
7. Ibid.
8. Eagleton, op.cit., (1976), p.14.
9. J.L. Mays, Micah - A Commentary, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, (1976), p.25.
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12. Ibid, p.64.
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CHAPTER 7

BLACK HERMENEUTICAL APPROPRIATION OF THE SIGNIFIED PRACTICE OF LUKE 1 AND 2

The Lukan text does not have the same long history that the Micah text has. Consequently it does not reflect a process of recompositions that is discernible in this latter text. Coote's method of isolating editions of the text cannot, therefore, be applied in the study of Luke. The ideological and theoretical questions put to the Micah text, especially in relation to its hermeneutical use value in the black liberation struggle, however, remain pertinent. In this sense, a similar hermeneutical appreciation of the text is undertaken in this chapter.

Luke 1:1-4 represents the introduction to the entire gospel of Luke. It has no particular relationship with the infancy discourse that follows from verse 5. No understanding of any part of Luke-Acts, however, can be wrenched off this introduction without losing an important part of its rhetorical framework. It is this introduction, looked at from the point of view of the struggles of the oppressed, which exposes its social class base. The upper class form, conventionality and interest of this portion, addressed to

"Theophilus, His Excellency", is unmistakable. For as Mayer writes about the class base and commitment of Luke:

"Als Historiker aber tritt er, unabhängig von seinen persönlichen Interessen, in den Dienst der Oberschicht, die Geschichte stets als ihre Domäne betrachtete. Sie hat Zeit und Kraft, sich von der Aktualität zu lösen, so wie der Unterschicht nichts anderes übrigbleibt, als sich in ihre gegenwärtige Not zu fügen." (1)

Luke's desire to write "an orderly account", for the consumption of the ruling class in whose service he obviously is, reflects the "Ordnungstheologie"(2) which is the ideological framework whereby he is to signify the Jesus movement and practice. Such a theology subjugates and subsumes the cultural discourses of subordinate classes under those of the dominant classes. This, a black working class biblical hermeneutics detects ab initio, because it arises, itself, from the praxis of a people whose movement and struggles have constantly lost its values and symbols. These values and symbols the black struggle has constantly lost to the dominant signifying political, cultural and economic practices that steal them under the guise of promoting the interests of black people. The hidden agenda has of course subsequently been found by critical analysts to have been tied to "law and order" concerns. These concerns amount to the maintenance of the status quo, rather than the struggle for liberation and justice. The ideology of Apartheid in South Africa, for instance, was inaugurated under the guise of enabling black people not to lose their "culture". The Bantustan system is promoted by its black appointees as an instrument through which black "values and culture" can be promoted, signifying the independence and

autonomy of blacks. Monopoly capitalist advertising practices, whereby the black working class is further undermined and exploited by capitalists, now uses African or black culture and experience to universalise the dominance of the commodity-form. For an example, a current commercial advertisement of Xtra-strong sweets/candy, steals a black mine worker's oppositional discourse which is expressed in the form of a song, and uses it to strengthen capital's dominance over labour. The song in question is the famous "Chocholoza kwezintaba, setimela sivela eRhodesia". This is a song about the experiences of migrant mine workers in South Africa returning from the mines in Rhodesia. It has now been turned into a commercial advert and retranslated: "Di-Xtra strong, Di-Xtra strong ...". Hegemonic discourses thrive on the theft of the struggles, symbols, and values of the movement or people they seek to contain and eventually subjugate. It is argued here that this is also true of religious texts such as the Bible. The "stories" recorded in the Bible are as ideologically problematic as those in other secular discourses.

Although Luke, in his gospel, deals with what can only have been a subversive movement in Palestine and Rome in the first century, his purpose, as inscribed in his introduction, seeks to contain that movement. Thus the "black struggle", as a hermeneutical category of black theology, begins a reading of Luke's discourse with a drawing of daggers against Luke's ideological intentions. It refuses to be drawn into an appreciation of an "orderly" presentation of Jesus and his movement. Luke seeks to clean

Jesus up; to make him one of the heroes, a cult-leader rather than the failure that his death represented in the face of the repressive and murderous State machinery of "law and order".

Biblical scholars have hinted at this tendency on the part of Luke to promote Rome and its agents - the latter being strewn all over the empire, including Jewish religious and secular nobilities. The ideological commitments of many contemporary scholars, however, have prevented them from drawing out the hermeneutical implications of this propensity.

Fitzmyer, for instance, correctly points out that Luke differs from the other evangelists because of "his desire to relate the story of Jesus not only to the contemporary world and culture, but also to the growth and development of the nascent Christian church".(3) He also locates the writing of Luke's gospel in the crucial period C.E. 80-85. Nevertheless, none of these issues seem to evoke any social-historical and cultural implications for Fitzmyer. It does not even seem to occur to Fitzmyer that the period C.E. 80-85 may be connected with the time of the deepest division between the Jesus movement and the dominant forces of Roman society, as illustrated by the severity of Christian persecution under Emperor Domitian.(4)

Perrin exhibits a greater sensitivity to the socio-political character of Luke's signification of the Jesus movement. He constantly points to the tendency in Luke to seek normalisation of the relations between the church and the

Roman Empire. He adds, however, that it should also be remembered that Luke "also uses the earlier traditions of Hellenistic Jewish Mission Christianity".(5) The point of this is that Luke wants to ground his message in the religio-cultural traditions of the Jesus movement, and Jewish history and religion. This is the basis on which his message is legitimated.(6) The real purpose, however, of his message is to accommodate the gospel of Jesus and its movement to the Roman Empire. Nevertheless, while the Jewish origin of the gospel is an important factor in Luke, it is also the case that the Jews are blamed for the death of Jesus as well as the destruction of Jerusalem. As Perrin aptly describes the situation:

"...in Luke-Acts persecution is only part of the whole problem of relations between the Christians and the Empire. ... As long as Christians expected the world to pass away shortly, they could revile Rome and its Empire in anticipation of its imminent destruction, as John of Patmos does in Revelation 18 ... the author of Luke-Acts consistently presents Roman authorities as sympathetic to the Christian movement ... The Christians' difficulties are not the hostility of Roman authorities but the machinations of the Jews (Acts 13:28; 14:2, 19; 18:12 etc.) ... Thus the author attempts to present Roman authority to Christians, and the Christians to Roman authorities, in the best possible light, in the hope of fostering good relations between them." (7)

Perrin, however, seems unable to draw the real political hermeneutical implications of Luke's ideological practice. On the contrary, he timidly interprets the issue of this practice as a matter of realpolitik.(8) The question that he fails to put is, on which side in the social class struggles of the Roman Empire was Luke's discourse? This question raises the further question whether it mattered to Luke, if it is true that realpolitik was his concern.

whether in the process he destroyed the raison d'être of the very movement he is trying to save.

A black biblical hermeneutics of liberation, nurtured in the knowledge that struggles and images of struggles get stolen ostensibly to promote the interests of the oppressed, but in reality to serve the cause of the ruling classes, departs from Norman Perrin's explanation of the reason for the Lukan practice.

The position of a black biblical hermeneutics of liberation in this respect, approximates that of Nickle. It is, firstly, a polemical appropriation of the text. It seeks to expose the rhetorical structures of the text by which discourses produce politically undesirable effects. In other words, it joins the class struggle of which the biblical text is a signified practice. There are two important points, for instance, that Nickle argues ought to be kept in mind when dealing with Luke 1:1-4. The first point relates to the fact that Theophilus calls to mind a special category of people in Greek society of the time. These were Gentiles who were attracted to the Jewish religion. According to Nickle, this group would have been receptive to the gospel on account of their acquaintance with Jewish traditions, especially the traditions of the Messiah.

The second point is that the term "most excellent" was commonly used to address high officials. Nickle writes:

"Possibly Luke was concerned to correct any misunderstanding Theophilus had about the nature and intent of the Christian movement. . . . He seems to have been sensitive to that segment of the society in which his community lived." (9)

Concerning the first point, Nickle comes close to exposing the ethnic reductionism that characterises most scholarship of this period. The essence of this reductionism consists of tendencies to artificially separate Jewish ethnicity from Hellenistic Greek or even Roman cultural orientations. It is this separation which posits the non-Jewishness of Luke on the grounds simply that he was culturally Greek, and was from Antioch in Syria. Scholars do not, however, cease to puzzle over Luke's predilection for the Jewish scriptures, albeit the Greek version of the scriptures.

More importantly, however, is the ideological suppression of the hermeneutical significance of the Palestinian persecution of the Jesus movement. Luke, as was pointed out earlier, blames the "Jews" for the death of Jesus and the destruction of Jerusalem. But surely the oppressed and exploited Jewish peasants, day labourers, unemployed, prostitutes and various kinds of other sub-classes cannot be made to share in this blame! Rather, it was the Roman ruling classes in collusion with their Jewish ruling class agents who combined to crush the movement in Palestine and in other parts of the Empire.

Thus the persecution of a largely, but probably not exclusively Jewish movement, such as the Jesus movement was, was no new phenomenon. The Maccabean revolt was a consequence of similar repressive measures as faced the Jesus movement. Luke, by collapsing all social configurations under the encompassing terms "Jews" and "Gentiles" deliberately obscures the objective class

divisions that cut across ethnic cleavages in the Empire. When biblical scholarship uses these terms also, it colludes ideologically with the Lucan discourse.

The second point made by Nickle raises the possibility that Luke might have been an employed ideologist for a government official in some magisterial area in some province of Rome. While the point cannot be pressed too far, it is plausible. Nevertheless, whether or not, historically, Luke worked for such an official he in fact wrote for the social class to which such an official would belong. Nickle writes:

"Luke made a considerable effort to exonerate the Roman Empire from any direct guilt for the execution of Jesus (Luke 23:4,7,13-16,22,47) and for the persecution of the Christian church (a frequent motif in Acts). He was concerned to portray Christianity as an apolitical movement. It was not a subversive sect of revolutionaries intent on overthrowing Imperial Rome. Luke even hinted that since God was at work in the Christian church, governmental authority was incapable ultimately of suppressing the Christian faith." (10)

Luke 1:5-25

Fitzmyer, following Burrows, makes the point that to call "the infancy narratives 'imitative historiography' means that whatever historical matter has been preserved by the two evangelists has been assimilated by them to other literary accounts ... Luke's story of Jesus not only parallels his story of John in part, but has unmistakable resonances of the story of the childhood of Samuel in the Old Testament (1 Samuel 1-3)". (11) Sanders, in contradistinction to Fitzmyer and many other biblical scholars, draws attention to the hermeneutical significance of these story parallels. To others these parallels appear to be simple objects of empirical literary discovery.

Sanders asserts, however, that "the true shape of the Bible as canon consists of its unrecorded hermeneutics which lie between the lines of most of its literature".(12)

Rooted in the history of struggle that requires of it to develop, inter alia, a hermeneutics of suspicion, a black theology of liberation recalls in its reading of Luke 1:5-25, what has recently been termed a "war of images". Hilton-Barber in an article entitled "Images of War, War of Images" describes how black South Africans who are involved in the revolt against the Apartheid state and society have come to learn what the government knew for much longer: "That once you lose control of the images that have been taken of you, you are open to exploitation on a grand scale".(13) This is so because the subsequent forms of any struggle are shaped and determined, to a very large extent, by the signification of that struggle in extant discourses. As Hilton-Barber points out in relation to South Africa:

"It doesn't help that the world's media are portraying the country as a seething pit of revolutionary and reactionary violence. However, conflict is the staple diet of news, and where there's conflict, there's room for rich trading in images. This has put foreign correspondents at the forefront of the government's ire. Security legislation in the wake of the Emergency is being designed to put a halt to the flow of embarrassing images of human rights violations that are being hung up for all the world to see. Losing control of the image of one's self is tantamount to losing control of one's self altogether". (14)

Thus Luke 1:5-25 is appropriated in black theology, firstly in a political way. Using the category of "the black struggle", part of whose experience is the defense of and against images, black theology must interrogate the annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist as part of

Luke's discourse on the Jesus movement. In other words, it is asked, what is the role of this section of the text in the signification of the Jesus practice? This question takes us back to Fitzmyer's point that that parallel of the Jesus story with John the Baptist and Samuel's childhood is unmistakable. The hermeneutical question, however, must inquire as to the ideological effects intended by Luke in framing the Jesus story on the basis of the discourse concerning John the Baptist.

In order, however, to make historical, sociological and ideological sense of this hermeneutical technique on the part of Luke, it is appropriate first to recall the general socio-historical context out of which Luke's discourse arises and in which it represents a determinate ideological intervention.

Almost all biblical scholars of the early Christian period tend to underplay, if not ignore, the social conflict characteristic of the centuries just preceding the birth of Jesus. Consequently the significance of this conflict for understanding the New Testament discourses is lost. Horsley and Hanson's recent study of the popular resistance movements at the time of Jesus promises to provide a real sense of the mood and processes at work. It is, however, Gottwald who provides the most illuminating perception of the struggles and conflicts in the period leading to Jesus' birth.

He points out that in the second century B.C.E.,

"The national situation that generated sharply defined factions was the major realignment of socioeconomic, political, and religious forces set in unrelenting motion by the abortive attempt

to Hellenize Judaism radically and by the reactive emergence of an independent Jewish state that ironically took on a decisive Hellenistic character in spite of its anti-Hellenistic beginnings. The radical minority coup to displace traditional Judaism by submerging it in a syncretistic Syro-Hellenistic cult failed totally. ... With Hellenistic religious syncretism excluded by an overwhelming Jewish consensus, the key question now had to do with whether and how Jewish society and state should appropriate the internationally operative Hellenistic socioeconomic and political structures and assumptions". (15)

In order to understand, properly, the importance for Luke of the priestly traditions he invokes in 1:5-25, it is necessary to go back to the situation facing the Jewish population under Hellenistic colonial rule as described by Gottwald.

The Hellenizing programme of the Hasmoneans increasingly caused the emergence of factions and parties among the Jews. The Hasidian group of devout Judahites who had supported the Maccabean revolt, became progressively dissatisfied with the Jewish rulers who played the role of Hellenistic princes. This group was the forerunner of the later Pharisees. Another faction of devout Judahites which felt even more strongly about a strict practice of the law was the Essenes. This group "decided to pull away from the corrupt society into rural communes where they could live out their religion uncompromisingly".(16) At the same time, another faction developed out of the commercial opportunities offered by the wars of expansion of the Hasmonean state. Gottwald describes the situation succinctly:

"The rising commercial sectors formed an aristocracy of 'new wealth' that openly vied with 'old wealth' aristocrats for political and economic power, for instance for control of seats on the

national governing council, for influence on royal policies and appointments, and for control of the temple economy. It was this new aristocracy that came to be known as the Sadducees, stemming largely at first from lay circles, although in time they gained ascendancy in the priesthood at the expense of the old aristocrats. By Herodian times it appears that 'old' and 'new' aristocracies reached an accommodation based in large part on their common need to block and counterbalance the rising influence of the 'populist' Pharisees". (17)

Given this configuration of social, political and religious forces how did Luke make his choices and from which specific tendencies did he pick his images of the Jesus movement? What ideological interest shaped his hermeneutics? Using varying pre-existing traditions of struggle from the earlier period of Israelite history (1 Samuel 1-3) as well as from the more recent history of resistance under home colonial rule, Luke fashions a discourse whose class and ideological interests are specific. Given the nature of the resistance in the period preceding Jesus' birth it seems reasonable to argue that the image which Luke finds amenable to his purposes from this period is of a tradition of pious priesthood which obeyed fully all the Lord's commands and laws (1:5-7). Out of this tradition will come one to whom the following will apply:

"You are to name him John. How glad and happy many others will be when he is born! He will be a great man in the Lord's sight. He must not drink any wine or strong drink. From his very birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, and he will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God ... he will turn disobedient people back to the way of thinking of the righteous; he will get the Lord's people ready for him" (1:13-17).

The Essene-like features of this image of John the Baptist's mission is unmistakable. It is also an image that is tainted, like that of the Qumran community, with some

apocalyptic visions. This image could form a socio-religious discourse in the second century B.C.E. that sought to deal with the cultural-political oppression and economic exploitation of the Jewish population by opting out of what it saw as a corrupt community. That John the Baptist is to be located within this tradition can be seen not only from Luke's identification of him with the pious priestly group here but also by how he is portrayed in Luke 3:1-20; Matthew 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-8; John 1:19-28.

Thus Luke selects the "withdrawal" image of resistance against cultural, political and economic domination as a hermeneutical lense for appropriating the Jesus movement.

Black theology, secondly, engages the text of Luke 1:5-25 "appropriatively". By this is meant that the black working class christians, using the weapon of black theology, must interpret the text against the grain. They must refuse to allow the text to limit the hermeneutical options to Luke's choice of images of struggle. Black working class christians, drawing from their own history of struggle against hostile natural forces in the precapitalist mode, and against hostile social forces, the chiefs and their entourage in the tributary stage, and white capitalists and their lackeys in the capitalist mode, must bounce off the Lucan discourses against their own. The significance of this encounter between discourses is underscored by Willis and Corrigan in their study of contemporary working class cultural forms. They write:

"It is when 'discourses' are brought together, or contextualized in real situations which always have other bases of meaning, that their partiality

and contradictoriness is exposed - through the very resources of those 'discourses' and the complex juxtaposed patterns of what each does not say or renders non-contradictory through omission". (18)

To the black theology of liberation it is the absences in Luke's discourse that speak more eloquently. Similarly the Lukan discourse interrogates the silences of the black working class struggle, questioning its lack of support for specifically ruling class values and practices. Of course Luke can interrogate the black struggle's orientations because he first interrogated and contained the Jesus movement, as evidenced by his gospel.

Thus, explaining how ideology functions in the texts through discourses bouncing off each other, Willis and Corrigan write:

"'Ideology' is not only the 'content' of these 'discourses' but the particular 'preferred' relation of their silences to each other as well. It is working class culture, or its cultural praxis, which makes this silence speak - but not in words, or not in words with the verbal 'discourse' of its meaning at their centre. The various 'discourse' positions which to a greater or lesser extent base themselves on language thus write out working class meaning, destroy the real agency of its subjects, and banish sense and knowledge from all but bourgeois 'discourses' - we have the largest social tautology masquerading as science: and its cost is the eradication of the working class from history". (19)

It is through those social forces and processes about which Luke's gospel is silent, as illustrated by the omission in the text of other responses to Hellenistic and Roman domination, that black working class Christianity seeks to speak. The "presences" of the the black struggle have to interrogate the "absences" of the biblical text. The black

struggle, with its broad variety of responses to domination and exploitation exposes the contradiction between the cognitive and emotive structures of the text. That is to say, through its cognitive structures the text would have us believe that its choice of the priest Zechariah represents an enforcement of historical truth; that the historical situation concerning priests as a social category in First Century Palestine is exhausted by what Zechariah stood for. Through its emotive structures, however, the intentions, wishes, dislikes and commitments of the text come to the fore and the ostensibly historical mention of Zechariah is shown to express a particular "'lived' relation to the real which may be neither verified nor falsified".(20) Thus a critical black biblical hermeneutics of liberation is soon aware that the invocation of the priestly connection through the use of Zechariah, represents a particular emotive enunciation, not a historical statement. It is, however, the contradiction between "the historical" and the use of "the historical" in an ideological discourse which provides a lever for a hermeneutical appropriation of that text in spite of itself.

The black theology of liberation appropriates Luke 1:5-25, thirdly, in a projective way. It interprets it in ways that intends effects conducive to the victory of the liberation struggle. This is done notwithstanding the class character and ideological commitments of the text. For as Willis and Corrigan have argued concerning the encounter between discourses, that:

"Having once opened up their territories of meaning to struggle, the same meaning can never be recouped. The dominant class might 'choose' the terrain, but

not always the outcome". (21)

With the agenda of the text laid bare, hermeneutical connections with similar agendas in the contemporary setting may be made. The usefulness or otherwise of the agenda of the text cannot be decided a priori. It has to be tested on the basis of the demands and experience of the struggle of the black working class people.

The points made above confirm one of the hypotheses of this study - that the texts of the Bible are sites of struggle. The extent to which such texts may be used against goals other than middle and ruling class ones indicates the non-neutral character of the texts themselves. Luke 1:5-25 constitutes a study in ruling class discourses, their form, intentions and possible effects. But again as Willis and Carrigan so poignantly assert in relation to appropriations of discourses for socialist construction:

"Starting points, ... are not finishing points. Precisely, in fact, because they are not finished, final, completed, fixed, they represent possible starting points for the socialist project. In the course of the latter's long construction they will be transformed. But just as the seemingly impermeable 'discourses' of capitalist hegemony are the raw materials through which working class culture comes to know its difference, so too are the cultural forms of resistance won and sustained by the working class, the raw materials for the knowledge and practices of socialist construction. Taking culture seriously means taking it not as we would like it to be - neat, parcelled, correct, ready (fast food socialism) - but as we find it, and that finding requires more than a single glance. It requires a profanity and a willingness to be surprised by the orders of experience. 'Theory is good', said Freud's teacher Charcot, 'but it doesn't prevent things from existing'. 'Discourses' are bad, we are saying, but they do not stop cultural forms of resistance from existing". (22)

Ruling class biblical discourses, therefore, should not, by their preponderance among the basic christian religious texts, stop the existence of religio-cultural forms of resistance. The black working class culture and history should press the silences between itself and the dominant biblical discourses to speak in favour of the victory of the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed and exploited.

Luke 1:26-2:51

The discursive structures of the infancy narrative have already been exposed on the basis of a polemical criticism/oppositional code derived from a black theology rooted in the black struggle. The ruling class interests and morality of the text as it now stands was pointed out. The question now, is how does a biblical hermeneutics of liberation appropriate the discourses of Luke against the grain and in such a way as to intend the effects that are conducive to the liberation struggle. The only way to do this, is by penetrating beneath the texts and going beyond the texts to their silences.

Luke 1:26-2:51 provides a terrain of struggle for the black working class people. As a ruling class discourse it cannot be used as a weapon of the struggle for liberation, except negatively. Black working class people encounter in this text the alienation and conflict that they have to do battle with in contemporary cultural struggles. Thus a politically conscious community of struggle, instead of appropriating the text unproblematically, chooses rather to struggle with the dominant forces within the text to get beyond them to

the suppressed oppositional forces. In this way the struggle against contemporary ruling class cultural, political and economic discourses is continued on the battle-ground provided by the signifying practices of the text.

In the black working class religious situation in South Africa, the real import of the liberative hermeneutics of the birth narrative comes into its own during Good Friday. The "seven words on the Cross" tradition which is the highlight of the Good Friday services in the black churches in South Africa, includes Jesus' words to Mary, his mother:

"But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdelene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved, standing near, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home".

(John 19:25-27 R.S.V.)

When black preachers expound on this text they invariably raise the issues that cause tears to be released in the eyes of the so-called "illegitimate" sons and daughters and their unmarried mothers. A great deal of weeping and sorrow cover the congregations at this point. It is important, however, to know that the sadness that is experienced at this time is not over the so-called 'moral' problem of illegitimacy. Rather, the sorrow is over the economic disinvestment imposed on a single parent family by the death of a son or a daughter. Consequently, the emphasis of the preaching invariably falls on the disciple's response: "And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home" (v.27).

Black working class religious people experience the message of this text (John 19:25-27) like people who have not read the infancy narrative of Luke. Their own historical and cultural discourses, circumscribed by the fact that the majority of black young women under Apartheid capitalism are single mothers, pushes them beyond Luke's Mary, the wife of Joseph of the Davidic house, to Mary the single parent and possibly member of the under-classes of Galilee. The black working class historical and cultural discourses operate on the basis of the fact that if Jesus had been of the royal blood, there would have been no need to find a disciple to look after Mary in the absence of her real son.

Thus through struggle with the dominant forces inscribed in the text itself the oppressed and exploited people today can seek to discover kin struggles in biblical communities. These biblical struggles, then, serve as a source of inspiration for contemporary struggles, and as a warning against their co-optation.

The category of the "black struggle" as a hermeneutical factor draws its poetry from a future which in this struggle's collision with the text of Luke 1 and 2 is experienced as an "absence". The visions and ideals of the black struggle are eloquent in the Lukan text by the text's silences about the struggles and aspirations of the oppressed and exploited people of First Century Palestine.

Be that as it may, the dominant class character of the signifying practices of the biblical text does not guarantee the outcome of the struggles. As Eagleton succinctly asserts:

"...nothing secures the securing: those privileged signifiers thus become the space of a struggle, so that we are cursorily to define ideology as 'the class struggle at the level of signifying practices'. The transformation of those signifiers may well take the form of a refusal of closure itself, an unleashing of plurality, transgression, and contradiction which dissolves 'narrative' into 'text'; but its other moment, necessary if we are to avoid a formalistic, essentialist valorizing of 'plurality' and 'heterogeneity' in themselves, and a consequent reversion to some debased Lebensphilosophie, is the fight for the instalment of alternative, socialist significations, and thus for an alternative, if always provisional, kind of closure". (23)

It is this question of the production of alternative significations which should be at the heart of a biblical hermeneutics of liberation. Within the Christian tradition it strikes at the crucial area of the canon of scripture. It raises the question of the class character and ideological basis of the canon of scripture. Also, it points to an already ongoing process of the reopening of the canon of scripture as represented by the interpretations and uses of the Bible in the light of popular experiences of the oppressed. Above all, it calls for a "projective" appropriation of biblical texts in such a way that the absences and silences in these texts may serve as spaces from which the thrust of alternative significations and discourses may be launched.

Notes for Chapter 7

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7. Perrin, op.cit., p.200.
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16. Ibid, p.451.
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18. P. Willis and P. Corrigan, "Orders of Experience: The Differences of Working Class Cultural Forms", Social Text, (Spring & Summer 1983), p.94.
19. Ibid, p.94.

20. T. Eagleton, "Ideology, Fiction, Narrative", Social Text, (Summer 1979), p.65.
21. Willis and Corrigan, op.cit., p.98.
22. Ibid. p.103.
23. Eagleton, op.cit., (1979), p.79.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS

There are two major conclusions which emerge from this study. The one is that in a black history and culture characterised by class, gender and age contradictions and in relation to which some contemporary blacks are contradictorily located, there is not likely to emerge only one black theology of liberation. This conclusion is based on the analyses made in the first three chapters of this work. In chapter one it was shown how the class and cultural-ideological identifications of black theologians have kept them enslaved to the biblical hermeneutical assumptions of the very white theology they criticise and seek to replace. It was further argued that even the new sociological approaches, as outlined in chapter two, would not represent a step forward as most of it is still rooted in bourgeois white ideological assumptions. More importantly, it was demonstrated in chapter three that black history and culture from the precolonial period to the present has never been monolithic. Black theologians, as products and inheritors of black history and culture, are differentially inserted into this history and culture. Thus the need for ideological and theoretical vigilance cannot be overstated. For in black theology, as in other discourses of liberation, not all that glitters is gold. This study

has underscored the importance of recognising that a plurality of black theologies of liberation is a reality of the contemporary South African situation as influenced and shaped by black history and culture in addition to bourgeois society.. Some black theologies of liberation will be bourgeois in orientation, seeking to fight for the restoration of former black ruling class positions. The religious roots of such black theologies of liberation are likely to be traceable to such historical movements as the Ethiopian Church. Nationalist in character and royalist in ideological perspective, this Ethiopian religious discourse is likely to continue to inspire certain brands of theological opposition among black South Africans. The biblical hermeneutical appropriations of such brands of black theology are likely to coincide with the ideological and political interests of their royalist counterparts in the Bible - such as for example, many texts in the Psalms.

Other black theologies of liberation will represent more middle class cultural, ideological and political perspectives. This strand of black theological opposition has roots historically in the phenomenon of diviners and prophets in black society. More recently this tradition has been represented by the black intellectual element, many of them products of christian mission education. It is a religious discourse and an opposition movement that found explicit political culmination in the philosophy of black consciousness in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The discourse that officially came to be known as black theology of liberation in South Africa in the 1970s and 80s is

represented by this particular trajectory of the black struggle.

Yet another brand of black theology of liberation adopts consciously black working class perspective. The historical foundations of this strand lie in the struggles of the lowest and, often times, poorest members of the black community from precolonial times to the present. In contemporary times and especially under conditions of monopoly capitalism in South Africa, the non-discursive sociological expression of this religious practice has been in terms of the Zion-Apostolic African churches. The biblical hermeneutics of this religious practice, in the absence of a theoretically well-grounded theological discourse, is a subversive non-systematic working class distortion of the Bible in favour of the struggles of its members.

It is held that this latter brand of black theology is potentially the most genuinely liberative. It has been argued, however, that it first needs to relocate itself more systematically and critically in the broad black working class struggle and in an ideological and theoretical framework that is capable of bringing about the material liberation of black working class people. Hopefully this study contributes to such a project. Basing itself on an understanding of the concept of "struggle" as a hermeneutical tool, this brand of black theology, in its systematic and critical form, proceeds to apply it to the reading of the Bible. In this way it participates in the struggles of the texts, and thus empowers people for

participation in the struggles of contemporary communities of faith.

The second major conclusion of this study which is related to, and in some sense follows from the first, is that in a society divided by class, race and gender there must certainly be a plurality of biblical hermeneutics. These hermeneutics function to reproduce or to rationalise or to transform the social-economic and political status quo. South Africa is probably the best, though not the only, modern example of a country in which the ruling political group has consciously developed a biblical hermeneutics that reproduces and sustains its ideological and political interests. The theoretical tragedy in South Africa has been that black theologians, in opposing the theology of the white dominant groups, have appealed to the same hermeneutical framework in order to demonstrate a contrary truth. According to black theologians, the contrary truth they wish to assert is the claim that God is on the side of the oppressed and not that of the oppressors. This study has tried to show, however, that an ideologically, epistemologically and theoretically different biblical hermeneutics is needed.

Thus an approach to the Bible which reads the texts of the Bible backward has been opted for. That is, a biblical hermeneutical method which seeks to discover the questions of which the texts are answers, the problems of which they are the solutions. Such a biblical hermeneutics of liberation eschews the intellectual laziness or the deliberate ideological option that simply colludes with the

text without much ado. Rather a mutual interrogation between text and situation in the light of the struggles which both represent, is allowed to take place.

These two conclusions more than confirm the hypotheses that this study set out to test. It may now be stated that the Bible is the product, the record, the site and the weapon of class, cultural, gender and racial struggles. A biblical hermeneutics of liberation that does not take this fact seriously can only falter in its project to emancipate the poor and the exploited of the world. Once more, the statement rings true that the poor and exploited must liberate the Bible so that the Bible may liberate them.

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