

## **TOPIC:**

**Steve Bantu Biko: Politician, 'Historian' and 'Proponent'  
of African Traditional Religion**

## **AREA OF STUDY:**

**African Religious Studies**

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for Masters Degree in Religious Studies.**

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I dedicate all that I have written to my late beloved parents: my mother Joseline Nothoba Sogiba; my father Alfred Mankayi Sogiba.

To my beloved children: Mtombo, Nande and Vuyo.

Also my nephews: Luleko and Bonga.

To "papa" Jeff's children: Doreen, Boeta and Sylvia.

To my brothers: Sivuyile, Phindile, Sonwabile and my only begotten sister, Thozama.

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To all I say, "African Traditional Religion, African culture, African way of life, African norms and values, all these, have to be embraced because they matter". I pose the question: "For how long will Africans continue to live in two worlds – western and African? Is it either, or both? Indeed Black Consciousness also bears African Traditional Religious thought-forms.

May God of our Ancestors – Qamata – Bless you all.

## ABSTRACT

1. The topic is "*Steve Bantu Biko: Politician, 'Historian' and 'Proponent' of African Traditional Religion*". It is known by everybody that Steve Bantu Biko was a politician. This has been revealed by his teachings, what his contemporaries have written and by his commitment to the course of the struggle. He displayed a commitment to the struggle for freedom of the oppressed blacks in South Africa.

His ideology was 'Black Consciousness' which was a threat to the regime and an affirmation and a creation of true humanity for the oppressed. What became clear is the fact that there is a difference between a politician and a freedom fighter. To describe him as a freedom fighter is more appropriate than a politician. He was denied free political activity by the apartheid regime which clamped down on all opponents labelling them as 'un-Christian', 'heretic', 'rebels', 'agitators' and 'terrorists'. The "Black Consciousness" ideology was viewed by the state as subversive.

The question arises, how could a person who encouraged black community programmes and black unity be regarded as a terrorist? Fear from the whites of a black majority government is the cause for such an attitude. He was indeed a man of peace, an activist and not a terrorist. It has been noticeable that politics, history and religion are inseparable. This is a response to those who wonder what politics has to do with religion?

“Black Consciousness” ideology could be viewed as another form of racism, especially by its opponents. But, there was a desperate need for Africans to describe and identify themselves. It is a form of identification rather than racism. It is a terminology of its time.

It is also a general view that Steve Bantu Biko was a historian. This view has been proved by his teachings, and his constant references to leading Africans and important heroes like Hintsa, Ngqika, Ndlambe and others, like Kaunda, Samora Machel etc.

He taught that African history should be rewritten to express the norms and values of the African heritage. It is also noticeable that history, politics and religion are inseparable. Whenever a black person excels in sport or any other field of recreation and education, Steve would use an African saying: ‘Ngumntu la nto’ – this is a true person indeed. This reveals his regard for his roots and background. He was indeed proud to be black. He questioned the type of history taught at schools, colleges and universities.

The view that he was a ‘proponent’ of African Traditional Religion is to my understanding a new exposition. It is the most important part of this dissertation, which is written for the department of Religious Studies. I could conjecture that it is the first of its kind to be written in such a wide and detailed manner. His attitude towards Christianity indicates that he valued the African Traditional concept of God. The constant reference to the fact that Africans reveal their

understanding of God in their drinking of beer, in their way of life, is an argument for being a 'proponent' of African Traditional Religion. The views: 'Black is Beautiful', 'Be Proud to be Black', 'Black Consciousness'; self-reliance, black consciousness as: inward looking, self-examination, his search for true humanity emphasising human dignity and affirmation of everything that is black, all these bear African Traditional religious-thought-forms. An affirmation of African norms and values.

2. I have used Steve Biko's own writings and also material that has been written about him by other scholars. Pre-Christian literature and Christian literature that deals with the colonial era has also been used. The phenomenological method has been used. I have explained the concepts and symbolism used in 'Black Consciousness'.

I have compared his views with literature that deals with the pre-colonial and colonial periods. I have applied information from the modern period of the building of a new South Africa by the newly elected government. References to African Traditional Religion have been mentioned constantly, in comparison with Christian faith.

I have given an analysis of the disregard of African Traditional Religion, culture and philosophy of life, from what missionaries have said and written concerning African religious-thought-forms. I have synthesised that Steve Bantu Biko through 'Black Consciousness' ideology was a politician, 'historian' and 'proponent' of

African Traditional Religion. He was eager to refer Africans in South Africa back to the value and significance of African heritage, culture, identity, past and religion. Through the language and symbolism used in "Black Consciousness", he was emphasising a religion of Africanism or "Black Consciousness".

3. The literature used is in support of the hypotheses. But it is not clearly indicated that he was a 'proponent' of African Traditional Religion. This has been argued through by analysing language and symbolism. As far as I know, 'Black Consciousness' has not been widely analysed as bearing African Traditional religious-thought-forms.

There is a need to decolonise Christianity. I also recommend a reconstruction of politics, history and religion. Black theology is a component of African Traditional Religion. "Black Consciousness" concepts have religious implications.

There are similarities between 'Black Consciousness' and the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) as envisaged by the ANC government. There are similarities between 'Black Consciousness' and 'African Consciousness'. Politics, history and religion are interrelated.

'Black Consciousness' was concerned with material things as well as with spiritual upliftment. It also touches on the whole being of a person. It forces all Africans to look critically at multi-racialism. Biko expressed a wish to revive the African spirit as well as the body. He wanted to start a renaissance of African customs,

traditions and religion. One would compare this to the renaissance of art and literature in Europe in the 14th to the 16th centuries. There is an urgent need to revive our own culture.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

I have chosen to write on this topic: "Steve Bantu Biko: A Politician, 'Historian' and 'Proponent' of African Traditional Religion." I have traced the years 1970 to 1990. I am interested in this because I did not have an opportunity to be exposed to this kind of material and information due to the repressive stance of the state taken towards Biko. I have a deep feeling within me that I have missed something which is part of my politics, history and religion. This is also out of a concern about a disregard of African Traditional Religion, African Culture and African Philosophy of Life by missionaries.

In this thesis I am arguing that Biko was a politician deprived by the repressive laws of the regime of the ability to exercise free political activity. He was a man of peace, an activist and not a 'terrorist', using the language and labels of the state to refer to black people engaged in, and committed to, the struggle and liberation of blacks. He was a 'historian' eager to refer Africans in South Africa back to the value and significance of African heritage, culture, identity and past.

1.1 I further argue that Steve Bantu Biko was a 'proponent' of African Traditional Religion. That through his ideas, symbols, language used he was calling black people back to regain their identity as a nation with its culture, its norms, values and African Traditional Religion. I intend referring extensively to terms such as

'Black Power', 'Black is Beautiful' and 'Black Consciousness'. I wish to argue that he was not a racist, but was attempting to empower, to give meaning, dignity, and identity to blacks (Africans). He wanted to affirm and restore human value to the dispossessed.

I further wish to argue that he was encouraging African Traditional Religion as a contending religion with Christianity. I wish to prove that his ideas inspired him, and us, to raise important political, historical and theological questions.

I wish to argue that though Biko is dead, his spirit and ideas are still relevant as we search for a new identity in the new South Africa. I reflect on the question: "If Steve Bantu Biko was alive would he align himself with the African National Congress, PAC or Azanian People's Organisation?" I constantly reflect on this question because Biko was engaged in uniting all blacks. This, of course, would be one of the questions for the people I intend interviewing, and other questions would also be raised.

1.2 Chapter 1 is a brief outline of this thesis. Chapter 2 deals with pointers to the fact that Biko was a politician. The argument that he was a man of peace, an activist and not a 'terrorist' is highlighted. A critical evaluation of his ideas as a politician is mentioned.

1.3 Chapter 3 deals with pointers to the fact that Biko was a historian. This is done using his ideas on African culture, identity and past. The historical background

and implications of his ideas are highlighted. The period of colonialism is briefly referred to.

- 1.4 Chapter 4 deals widely with pointers to the argument that he was a 'proponent' of African Traditional Religion. The language and symbols he used are clearly defined. For example: "Black Power", "Black is Beautiful", "Black Consciousness" and many others. The African Traditional Concept of God is again briefly mentioned. The argument that he was not a racist, but was empowering the dispossessed, the down-trodden and dehumanised, is emphasised.
- 1.5 Chapter 5 deals with empowerment. The emphasis is that 'Black Consciousness' was aimed at empowering the oppressed. 'Black Consciousness' is linked with the RDP. The context of the two is different but the ethos is the same. The interviews also occur in this chapter. The interviewed people have expressed wonderful and constructive ideas. The analysis of the interviews is also done in this chapter.
- 1.6 Chapter 6 is the conclusion. The truth that Biko is dead – but his spirit and ideas are alive – is the main theme. The slogan: "Long live the spirit of . . ." is used in political rallies and its theological significance is mentioned. I further argue that his ideas are still relevant for the creation of a new South Africa by those involved in negotiations for a lasting political solution and stability in South Africa. I relate my ideas based on the arguments raised in the thesis. I further

argue that the politics, history and religion of black people in South Africa demand serious recognition and a sympathetic approach.

The question is raised: "For how long will Africans live in two worlds? Is it either? OR both and? The interviews from Steve Bantu Biko's associates are mentioned and related critically to the trend of argument in the thesis. The main concern also, is to analyse the concepts used by Biko. In this dissertation a phenomenological method is used to analyse ideas and concepts, bearing in mind that religion consists of concepts and gives meaning to those concepts. According to Ninian Swart:

The phenomenology of religion illuminates the necessity for the rather heavy contextualisation of religious utterances.

The concept of religious phenomena is not a simple one and needs unravelling, as is the case in my attempt to explain the religious connotations embedded in Biko's ideas. Ninian Swart also explains, for example, the concept of Eucharist in an Anglican setting. He puts an emphasis on the notion of the Eucharist, what an observer or set of observers might see while attending Eucharists. He traces the intentionality of the Anglican Eucharist. In the process, explaining the concepts is of uttermost importance.

I appeal to anyone, who will be exposed to reading this work to bracket at times his or her own position in order to perceive African Traditional Religious thought-forms in Black Consciousness. Why I appeal for bracketing is because Ninian Swart says:

Phenomenology requires also to be evocative, to contain bracketed expression. What people feel, the impact of the focus upon them, the performative and expressive nature of the language of worship and prayer, etc. – these are central features of say, the Eucharist. This is the reason why it is often said that the practice of religion involves

sympathy, so that the religionist can enter into the 'feel' and the values of the phenomena he is studying.

This is what van der Leeuw refers to as the interpolation of the phenomenon into our own lives. (ibid p.67)

In the implementation of the phenomenological method, it is important to suspend one's judgement and theological conviction for a while in order to discern this hypothesis: "Steven Bantu Biko, politician, 'historian' and 'proponent' of African Traditional Religion".

According to Robert B. Macleod:

The word 'phenomenology' is derived from the Greek 'phainein', 'to show', from which came 'phainemenon', meaning 'that which appears'. Thus, phenomenology in a general sense could be literally the orderly study of phenomena, or appearances, and could as such encompass much of traditional philosophy and science. In its restricted sense, however, it refers to the study of phenomena as phenomena and more specifically to a twentieth century movement in German philosophy centred loosely on Edmund Husserl. A good English introduction to Husserl's philosophy has been provided by Marain Farber (1943) and the whole phenomenological movement has been reviewed by Herbert Spiegelberg (1960). (Macleod, 1968:68)

## CHAPTER 2

### 2. Politician

The struggle that confronted black people was very central in Biko's ideas. Like Robert Sobukwe, he was full of revolutionary ideas that were, indeed, a threat to the regime. He was perceived by many people as a unifying person between the ANC and the PAC. He gained very wide support, especially from the youth. He really forged a link between the defiance of the past and the determination of the youth of the seventies to be free.

He created an environment which promoted a process of change. He mobilised and conscientised the black people for political action. To the whites, this was indeed a threatening atmosphere. They were also encompassed with fear and doubt concerning their privileges. He was indeed sure of the support from his black brothers and sisters. He was determined to search for and preach about an appreciation of the fullness of human dignity. He inculcated among his followers a concept of liberation and a political ideology. He formulated and taught the 'Black Consciousness' ideology. He strongly addressed the question of treating fear among the oppressed.

Millard W. Arnold says about Biko:

. . . had an uncomplicated vision, an intrinsic appreciation of the essence of the struggle confronting black people. He bridged the difference between resistance and apathy . . .

'Black Consciousness', Biko's most significant contribution, provided a framework for political emancipation. (Arnold, 1987:12-14)

It is clear from Arnold's views concerning Biko that he saw <sup>him</sup> as a person of vision, dreams and a future full of hope, peace, freedom and stability for South Africa. His vision was clear and full of bright ideas. Politicians are people of visions concerning their country. He could discern similarity between a committed struggle for freedom and the fears of the oppressed. He was a person that could unite people; the youth, members of the ANC, PAC and AZAPO. He had clear cut ideas – the seeds to sow a radical revolution in South Africa, and inspire some of the present day political ideas. This is a further indication that although he is dead, his ideas and spirit are alive. In other words, his ideas are still applicable in the new South Africa.

Doctor Mamphela Ramphele confronting the editor of the Daily Dispatch, Donald Woods, posed the following questions which intimate that Biko was a politician:

Why do you give all the headlines to sellouts like Buthelezi and Matanzima? Why don't you get to know the real black leaders? When are you coming to talk to Steve Biko? You know he is banned and can't come to you, so why don't you go to him? What's the matter with you? (Woods, 1978:47)

In the field of politics, Steve was regarded by his associates and comrades as not comparable to Buthelezi and Matanzima. He was regarded as the true leader of the black people. There were many who thought of themselves as leaders, but he was the real leader of the oppressed masses. The fact that he was banned also reveals his involvement in politics and the liberation of the oppressed.

Ramphela's informed view of Biko, as a gifted leader, was later supported by Woods.

This is the impression Woods had of Biko after they had met for the first time:

That was my first meeting with Steve Biko, and it was enough to convince me that I had met an unusually gifted man. His quick brain, superb articulation of ideas and sheer mental force were highly impressive. He had the aura and stature of a leader, and on my way home I concluded that in a journalistic career in which I had met and interviewed some of the great figures in British, Canadian, American and German politics, this man Biko might conceivably be the most impressive of them all. In the months and years that followed, in which we became close friends, I soon lost all doubt on that score. Steve Biko, I later came to realise, was the greatest man I ever had the privilege to know. (Woods, 1978:56)

If a journalist of Donald Woods stature could utter such words about Steve, indeed he was a politician in the superlative degree. The words, "unusually gifted man", "he had the aura and stature of a leader", and the fact that he was compared to international figures in Britain, Canada, America and Germany and found to excel, is a clear indication of his outstanding capabilities.

The 1976 Soweto uprisings were fuelled by Biko's political ideas. The first wellknown victim of these riots was Hector Pietersen. His death and the death of hundreds of others that followed, liberated blacks from fear. Fearlessness became part and parcel of black resistance. Biko uttered the following words to ward off the fear of his followers:

The lack of fear is a very important determinant in political action. We must remove from our vocabulary completely the concept of fear . . . You have to say that there were no fears expressed . . . (Arnold, 1987:XVI)

Biko was frequently detained by the Security Police. They were very suspicious of his activities. This is clear from Bruce Haigh's interview with him. In the interview he gave

what he felt were the reasons for his detention. It had become apparent after the first few interviews with the security police that they were trying to find out how many students had fled the Soweto riots, and what they were doing there. The police knew very little, and Biko had been unable to help them in their enquiries. He claimed that several thousand students had fled to Botswana and Swaziland and that many had left for other African states, where they were receiving scholastic and military training.

Biko said he thought the students in the townships were gradually becoming better organised. It was their intention to avoid unnecessary bloodshed. He believed that in future demonstrations would be smaller in order to avoid loss of life.

Given the attitude of the nationalist government, Biko felt the prospects for peaceful change in South Africa were not good. He believed, however that protests and boycotts had helped to some extent, and he cited the sport policy adopted by most countries towards South Africa as an example. Despite National Party statements he believed they were sensitive to outside pressure, although a lot more was needed before they would consider making the basic changes necessary to remove the system of apartheid. (See notes) He listed contact with diplomats and visiting world figures as sources of protection for himself against the security police (See notes – Woods, 1978:94-95).

These notes recorded by Woods of Bruce Haigh's interview with Biko reveal that he was vigorously involved in politics. This is demonstrated by his consistent detentions

by the security police. The fact that he expressed no fear of detention. His reluctance to reveal all facts to the security police was clear. He was aware of the impact of 'Black Consciousness' on the students. The methods of protest and its variations were all known to him.

Because of what he symbolised, fifteen months after Hector Pietersen was murdered, Biko died brutally in police custody. He was wholly prepared to die for his search for freedom. Physically he was gone, psychologically he was everywhere.

As a consequence of the impact of the ideology of 'Black Consciousness', the Soweto riots erupted in 1976. Hector Pietersen, and many other school children died because of their quest for freedom, true humanity and dignity. Fear of death at the hands of the security force was not felt by the youth. The deaths of many young people, during this period, created a long wave of martyrs. To die for political activity was to die in honour and one was assured of martyrdom. Killing young black students was 'daily bread' for the security forces. The death of black people in the South African prisons symbolised black resistance. The blood that was shed in the streets of South Africa, prisons and in solitary confinement sowed seeds of freedom that are germinating in the new South Africa. It is, indeed, amazing how the question of fear was vanquished in the thoughts of many people in their drive for freedom and human dignity. Biko's death at the hands of the security police is a living sacrifice, that has gone down in the history and nation-building of our country. He was not afraid to die for freedom. It was death that could be compared to the death of Jesus Christ, at the hands of unsympathetic people, for whom black life was simple and easy to destroy and erase.

Although he is dead, his teachings are alive in the struggles of those committed to freedom.

Protest and defiance have been the hallmark of black politics since the founding of the African National Congress in 1912. It is indeed part of our history that the generation of the fifties and sixties were the early pioneers of protest. Their children, the generation of the sixties and seventies were deeply involved in further political consciousness. And now their grandchildren, the generation of the seventies and eighties, are on the cutting edge of a struggle for political liberation. This was also a consequence of the ideology – “Black Consciousness”, especially when the ‘leaders of the people’ were still languishing in prisons. In the seventies the townships were politicised to the extent that they were seen as incubators of unrest. The spread of school boycotts, rent boycotts, bus boycotts, consumer boycotts, labour unrest and child detentions were noticeable. Political awareness in the townships was high, and I remember reading in a newspaper an article stating that the ‘pain of Soweto became the pain of the whole world.’ In other words, what started simply as a reaction against Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in Soweto schools became an international issue of sympathy and concern. Only a politician such as Biko could enhance and inculcate such awareness and following. It was noticeable that black politics had changed irrevocably. It had moved in stages from resistance, to protest, to defiance, and is now moving from insurgency to revolution. The idea of a revolution is inherent in Biko’s ideas. He continually voiced and explained the itching discontent that all blacks felt about their situation in South Africa. He did so in a way that provided focus and direction for political action. His accomplishment was to constructively channel

black rage into a purposeful vehicle for black liberation. His death was the ultimate sacrifice in achieving those objectives.

The two interviews that Steve Biko agreed to do outside the borders of South Africa were given to Bruce Haigh and John Burns. These interviews clearly outlined his political thinking and reveal a deeper understanding of Biko – the politician. It is amazing how well informed he was about the political and economic situation in Australia. His analysis of the political events in southern Africa and neighbouring countries, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and Namibia was wonderful and revealed his deep interest in what was happening around him.

In these interviews Biko gave what he felt were the reasons for his detention. It had become apparent after the first few interviews with the Security Police that they were trying to find out how many students had fled to Botswana and Swaziland after the Soweto riots and what they were doing there. This bears witness to a huge following and support that he enjoyed among his people. He was also in touch with what was happening among the students in the townships. He listed contact with diplomats and visiting world figures as sources of protection for him against the Security Police. His approach to protect his life, against the defenders of apartheid, indicates his international stature and the diplomacy he employed, in fighting the evil forces of apartheid. Nevertheless, he could not do this forever, for he met his untimely and brutal death in detention. Untimely death: because he was still very young and a promising politician, fit to be a president of his country. His country denied him his

basic democratic rights. His expression of his people's desire for freedom caused him to suffer torture and a brutal death.

'Black Consciousness', as a political ideology, gained momentum, but its supporters were mainly students and graduates. This is evident in the following question which was asked by Bernard Zylstra to Biko and his response:

Bernard Zylstra: where is the evidence of support among the younger generation for Black People's Convention?

Steve Biko: In one word: Soweto! The boldness, dedication, sense of purpose and clarity of analysis of the situation . . . all of these things are a direct result of Black Consciousness ideas among the young in Soweto and elsewhere. This is not quantitatively analyzable, for the power of the movement lies in the fact that it can indeed change the habits of people . . . (Woods, 1978:98)

This quotation reiterates the evidence of support of "Black Consciousness", especially among the youth.

It was felt that the movement needed to be broadened to encompass the masses of our people. "Black Consciousness" did not develop because many leaders were in jail and in exile. "Black Consciousness" would have surfaced any how: African nationalism was strong and growing all over Africa since the inception of colonialism.

His foreign policy can also be deduced as clear and definite. The USA had supported the colonialists in Angola, Mozambique and Rhodesia. He stated that Russia was as imperialist as the USA. He was a thinker, analyst and a brilliant politician who mastered the art of rhetoric. Apparently, there were differences of opinion among his followers and supporters regarding Russia. Some thought that Russian imperialism could be accepted as purely an interim phase, while others, like himself, doubted

whether Russia was really interested in the liberation of the black people. As a politician, he was a thinker and an analyst very committed to a negotiated settlement. But also did not discount armed struggle as a possibility. He also gave clear predictions of violence. This is backed by the question asked by Bernard Zylstra to Biko:

Zylstra: In the light of all these factors . . . which are certainly not exhaustive . . . what can one expect of the government?

Biko: As I said, I expect an escalation of conflict, also on the part of the police. And if the Afrikaner regime becomes even more intransigent, we as blacks will have to reassess our strategy . . . all of these factors combined may well make the Afrikaner regime change its minds. Once people begin to flex their muscles, they won't stop. (Woods, 1978:101)

He was not a violent person. He merely analysed the situation and predicted that it was fermenting a possibility of violence in the near future. He was a politician and an analyst. Even Donald Woods giving an introductory remark prior to Biko's interviews agrees that he was sometimes portrayed as a violent person. In reality this was a grotesque picture of Steve Bantu Biko:

Much has been alleged by Steve Biko's persecutors in their attempt to portray him as a man of violence, and this seems an opportune stage of this account to set out his view on a number of subjects. I had access to these views, not only through our long personal conversations, but also through tape recordings and notes made by others to whom he spoke candidly . . . (Woods, 1978:93)

If one could be exposed for long conversations on various topics with Biko, one would be assured of his stance on non-violence. He was only alleged to be violent by those who did not know him.

I have supported Biko as a patriot and a politician. I share his sentiments on African nationalism because I am a South African. Those who were opposed to his views regarded him as a 'rebel', 'agitator' or 'terrorist'. This was the response of the apartheid regime to all those who did not share its racist policies.

## **2.1 A Man of Peace, an Activist, but not a 'Terrorist'**

Having surveyed the ideas of Biko as a historian and a politician: I come to an analysis that he was a man of peace, an activist and not a terrorist. All opponents of apartheid were declared as and assumed to be terrorists, by the state. The South African government after 1948 began to use the media as its propaganda channel. People were asked to report anyone who looked suspicious or was spreading anti-government information. Replicas of weapons supposedly used by 'terrorists' were displayed in revenue offices, post offices, hospitals, banks, libraries and police stations. Anyone who raised his voice and questioned government law or actions was regarded as a 'traitor' and an enemy of the state.

As a man of peace, Biko encouraged black community programmes. The most ambitious project which took shape in 1974 was the Zanempilo Community Health Clinic established at Zinyoka, five kilometres outside Kingwilliamstown. Through the establishment of such a clinic, Biko and his fellow workers hoped to show a typical 'grassroots' rural community what their own people could do by way of providing essential health services, independent of government control, except for the health

inspections required by the state. Biko and his followers planned to instill a sense of community, to 'conscientise' people to the facts of their situation, not so much by talking, as by doing, that is, by example. Zanempilo Community Health Centre was the incarnate symbol of 'Black Consciousness'. Through the ideas of Biko, in 1976 Kingwilliamstown became a centre for all those committed to the 'Black Consciousness' movement. The BPC (Black People's Convention), the political wing of the movement was growing in strength. The BPC was the nearest thing to a national political party for blacks – all blacks, including Indians and coloureds – to exist since the banning of ANC and PAC. Because Biko was a man of peace, an activist and not a terrorist – a closeness of trust and relationship developed between him and Reverend Father Aelred Stubbs. One could say: "If you were with them you were in, and everything was given and taken. If in any way you were furthering your own ends, or trying to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds, you were out". As a man of peace, an activist and not a terrorist – he encouraged shared ministry among his followers. This is indicated by Aelred Stubbs saying:

If Steve had been the kind of leader who kept everything in his own hands the organisation would have collapsed. (Stubbs: 1978,155-186)

A question comes to mind: how is it possible to regard a person who encourages a good quality of life among his own people as a 'terrorist'? Biko introduced community programmes which encouraged people to live a good quality of life. For this he was constantly harassed, detained, tortured and ultimately murdered. I suggest that these actions were the actions of Christians who instinctively adhered to the norms and values of the kingdom of God. He was a person who gave ideas and motivation to the building of a health clinic. A clinic that would bring improved health conditions,

improve and reduce the rate of fatalities among the people. But to the sick, frightened and shortsighted apartheid regime, this man was a 'terrorist'. Whilst the racist regime did everything to belittle and dehumanise the blacks, Biko wanted to uplift them and give them back their self-respect. He instilled in them a philosophy which required reflection, inward-looking and self-examination. Only a person who has decided to be an instrument of peace, an activist and not a 'terrorist' would have a vision of such reconstructing and developing programmes.

According to Aelred Stubbs, because of the care, love and protection, Biko gave to his own people and his colleagues, he parallels him to Jesus himself:

But I would have to go back to Jesus himself to find a parallel to this extraordinary pastoral care Steve had for his own, I suppose this is why I was prepared to commit myself so wholeheartedly to the care of his leadership. In this particular area I trusted him with the same kind of trust I have in Jesus. (Stubbs, 1978:193)

This may sound idolatrous to a Christian believer but as far as Reverend Stubbs was concerned – he could not help himself – but compared Biko's leadership qualities to the wonderful care of Jesus for his people. He commends Biko for the freedom he allowed his followers, a freedom to be themselves, and for the correctness of his judgements and dispositions:

A rightness which flowed from his intelligence and from his essential revolutionary selflessness. Whereas other leaders tend almost insensibly to become leaders with a capital L, Reverend Stubbs never saw any sign at all of this happening with Steve. He remained to the end on all fours with us, an example of what we all could be, above and beyond us only in his vision, and in the depths of his commitment as his death in detention showed. (Stubbs, 1978:193)

How can a terrorist, activist, agitator and a 'communist' be compared to Jesus Christ? This could indeed be a question that could come from those who supported and worked for the regime. The people who enjoyed privileges while others were languishing in prisons. Biko a good Shepherd who knew his flock by their names. His care, consideration, love and concern for his people reveal to us now the loss of a leader who could be contributing to the RDP of the ANC. It is strongly believed by Reverend Stubbs that "whatever his non-belief in the Christ of the historic churches in his style of leadership, Steve became an authentic disciple of Jesus of Nazareth" (Stubbs, 1978:193).

## **2.2 A Critical Evaluation of his Ideas as a Politician**

There is no doubt in my mind that Steve Bantu Biko was indeed a politician. This came out clearly in his ideology – 'Black Consciousness'. To those who are not black this concept could drive them away, threaten and force them to feel out of place. This could result from a mere face value reading of the concept of 'Black Consciousness'. The emphasis is on blackness. One has to read and analyse 'Black Consciousness' in order to understand this ideology. Those who are not black could think that it is just another form of racism which intends to sow the seeds of lasting enmity between black and white people. 'Black Consciousness' attempts to uplift black people spiritually, physically and mentally.

When coming to grips with 'Black Consciousness', one is thrilled and affirmed by the wisdom that engulfed those who discovered this penetrating ideology. I am indeed impressed and feel well-informed by the illustrated difference between those who are black and who are termed non-whites. This clearly comes out in the definition of 'Black Consciousness':

We have in our policy manifesto defined blacks as those who are by law or tradition politically, economically and socially discriminated against as a group in the South African society and identifying themselves as a unit in the struggle towards the realisation of their aspirations. This definition illustrates to us a number of things:

1. Being black is not a matter of pigmentation – being black is a reflection of a mental attitude.
2. Merely by describing yourself as black you have started on a road towards emancipation, you have committed yourself to fight against all forces that seek to use your blackness as a stamp that marks you out as a subservient being. (Biko, I write what I like, 1978:48 – Edited by Stubbs)

From the above observations, therefore, we can see that the term 'black' is not necessarily all-inclusive: i.e. the fact we are all not white does not necessarily mean that we are all black. Non-whites do exist and will continue to exist for quite a long time. If one's aspiration is whiteness but pigmentation makes attainment of this impossible, then that person is a non-white. Any man who calls a white man 'baas', any man who serves in the police force or security branch is ipso facto a non-white. Black people – real black people – are those who manage to hold their heads high in defiance rather than willingly surrender their souls to the white man.

Biko made a distinction between the term black and non-white. Blacks were conscious of their oppression and of who oppressed them. It is unfortunate that he too was trapped by the apartheid language which sought to imprison his mind just like myself.

The word black refers to colour. Defining people by the colour of their skin is not only superficial, but reveals a racist mentality. Non-white also reflects a racist perspective.

From this definition of who is 'black' and who is 'non-white' fall gems and jewels of wisdom. A wonderful analysis of a class-system, I would conjecture, in the South African context. This is the analysis of a genius and would make more sense and impact to the educated. I think there is a lot of theory in this analysis that may be too obscured for the person in the street. A lot of workshops and seminars to disseminate this ideology were indeed necessary. I give credit to the idea of black community programmes. The 1976 school uprisings are a clear indication that the ideology – Black Consciousness was actively received among scholars. I recall that I was a school teacher then. The parents were far behind in perceiving the causes of the June 16 uprisings. There was a common saying among certain sectors of the parents: "Le nto yabantwana besikolo isixakile" – (this issue of school children is problematic to us). This reveals the big gap that existed between parents and youth during the Soweto uprisings.

Another criticism I received when I mentioned in the church that I will be on study leave and writing on 'Black Consciousness', a well-informed parishioner said: "I have hang ups about the term 'Black Consciousness' why not 'African Consciousness'". Blacks are not blacks because of the existence of whites. He prefers the term 'African Consciousness'. Africans are Africans because they are from Africa. This is a very valid argument and deserves to be examined carefully. This is a letter printed in the (Cape Times) written by Mthuthuzeli Kaye, the same person who gave me this

constructive criticism of 'Black Consciousness' as opposed to the suggested term 'African Consciousness'.

Whites invented 'blacks'

I am an African. I am a South African. I am not black. Is there a country called Black land? No.

In South Africa, the word 'black' is something used to mean Africans, Coloureds and Indians. At other times, it is used to mean Africans only. Why are we Africans of this country not called Africans but blacks? Are we supposed to be the opposites of those who call themselves whites? I reject with contempt the assumption that we are shadows of the whites in our country.

The word 'black' was invented by Europeans to describe people who were not of European origin. We Africans originate from this continent. We are Africans and nothing else. Those who do not wish to be called Africans can call themselves anything they like.

(Cape Times, 29 April 1994)

He went on to give me the following comments: "Another reason for calling us 'blacks' is that the boers have usurped the word African and call themselves 'Afrikaners'. If we really mean that we want to rid ourselves of apartheid and apartheid thinking, we will have to devise a language which describes who we are rather than telling of the colour of our skin. I am not being negative, but I think we need to develop a critical 'mind'."

The suggested term does not of course change the ideas of Biko but I totally agree that it is a very valid argument. The terms "Black Consciousness" or 'African Consciousness' encourage Africans to do a lot of reflection, and self-analysis in an effort to re-evaluate and redefine themselves. This we have to do in order to decolonise our minds which have been polluted by colonialism and apartheid. We have to do a lot of research in order to develop a language that will suit our history,

culture and African Religion. It is indeed true that getting rid of apartheid also implies getting rid of apartheid thinking. Apartheid has been ripped out of the statute books, but it is still alive and kicking in our thinking. This shows consequences of having been brought up in an apartheid state. It also indicates how monstrous the ideology of apartheid was. There are many things that have to be decolonised as we have moved on to a new South Africa. Naming of certain buildings, hospitals, schools, streets, etc. have to reflect the history, norms and values of the majority – Africans. The same applies in the naming of our churches. Even the form of our worship has to be decolonised, that is, our worship has to depict our history, art and African rhythm in music and dances. Even the sacraments we use within the life of the church, they have to be decolonised. For example, in baptism the tendency and culture we have inherited from the missionary church is to give our children English names. I suggest that this is unnecessary, I conjecture this was done to make it easy for our 'baas' to pronounce and call our names easily and comfortably.

### **2.3 Jimmy Kruger and the Death of Steve Bantu Biko**

Late on the night of 18 August 1977 banned Eastern Cape political activist Steve Biko was detained at a police road block that had been especially set up for him on the outskirts of Grahamstown. Twenty six days later he was dead from massive head injuries sustained in a room at security police headquarters in central Port Elizabeth.

Justice Minister Jimmy Kruger, who announced the death in a fumbling statement on the morning 13 September 1977, clearly believed that Biko had died as a result of a hunger strike "since 5 September . . .", he said, "Mr Biko refused his meals and threatened a hunger strike . . . The District Surgeon was called in on 7 September after Mr Biko appeared to be unwell . . . (but) he could not find anything wrong."

The rest of the statement detailed further doctors' visits, a suspicion by both police and medical men that he might have been feigning illness and finally, a 120 kilometres dash by Land Rover to get the ill man to a prison hospital in Pretoria.

Kruger, who had a reputation as a hawk, reached new heights the next day at the Transvaal Congress of the National Party: "I am not glad and I am not sorry about Mr Biko . . . He leaves me cold" (Saunders, 1992:445). He told an appreciative audience of Cabinet Ministers, MPs and other pillars of the party. Later a delegate from Springs capturing the mood of the gathering drew roars of laughter when he praised the Minister for granting Biko "his democratic right to starve himself to death."

Elsewhere in the country, mainly in the African townships, news of the death of the 'Black Consciousness' leader was greeted with shock. Shock that turned to anger when the story of Biko's final days unfolded at an inquest that opened in Pretoria on 2 November 1977.

Not formally charged with committing a crime Biko had been held under Section 6 of the Terrorism Act that allowed for the indefinite detention, for the purposes of

interrogation, of any person either thought to be a 'terrorist', or who had information regarding the activities of 'terrorists'.

It was a detention that security police justified by claiming that at the time of his arrest he was on his way to Cape Town to distribute "'inflammatory' pamphlets . . . inciting blacks to cause riots".

On 19 August, after spending the night in a police cell in Grahamstown, he was taken to the Walmer police station in Port Elizabeth where he was held, naked, "in order to prevent him from hanging himself with his clothes" (Saunders, 1992:445).

On 6 September, still naked, but now also in leg irons, he was taken to security police headquarters where a five man team headed by Major Harold Snyman began interrogating him. What happened there became the subject of series of heated exchanges between Sydney Kentridge, counsel for the Biko family, and members of the security police.

The autopsy had revealed the cause of death as a blow (or blows) to the head, struck with enough force almost certainly to have rendered Biko unconscious.

Snyman's explanation was that Biko had bumped his head against a wall during a struggle. He had jumped up with a "wild look" in his eyes after being confronted with evidence that linked him to riots, arson and boycotts – and it had taken five men to restrain him, said the major.

If this were so, countered Kentridge, why was it not mentioned in any of the 28 affidavits made by the police and doctors involved?

Kentridge was particularly scathing in his criticism of the conduct of doctors Ivor Lang, Benjamin Tucker and Colin Hersch, all of whom admitted making incorrect diagnoses. The police, he claimed, faced with allegations that they had assaulted Biko, had closed ranks and entered into a conspiracy of silence into which the doctors had allowed themselves to be drawn (Saunders, 1992:445).

They had gone along with a police theory that Biko was feigning illness when it must have been obvious that he was, in fact, gravely ill. And even when they were finally moved to suggest that he be taken to hospital, they allowed him to be placed naked in the back of a police Land Rover for a journey of more than 1 000 kilometres to Pretoria. There, said Kentridge, "Biko died a miserable and lonely death on a mat on a stone floor of a prison cell" (Saunders, 1992:445).

A telex sent by the head of the Port Elizabeth security branch, Colonel Piet Goosen, to Pretoria, cast further doubts on police evidence: describing the events leading to Biko's death, the telex mentioned an injury "inflicted on" Biko at 7:00am on 7 September. Recalled to the stand, Goosen explained "inflicted on" as a play on words.

Earlier, in another clash with Goosen, Kentridge asked the security police chief who had given him the authority to keep a man in chains for 48 hours?

"I am asking you to give the statute," insisted Kentridge.

"We don't work under statutes," said Goosen.

"Thank you very much," answered Kentridge. "That is what we have always suspected."

The chief magistrate of Pretoria, Martinus Prins, said Biko's death had probably been caused by head injuries sustained in a scuffle with security police (Saunders, 1992:445).

"The available evidence does not prove that the death was brought about by any act or omission involving or amounting to an offence on the part of any person" (Saunders, 1992:445).

The response of Kruger to the death of Biko is a clear picture of how whites in South Africa, especially the Afrikaners, treated blacks – as non-persons, without any human dignity. Blacks are human beings created in God's image, it is a gift of grace granted by God to all humanity. His response will go down in the history of blacks in South Africa as a constant reminder of white supremacy and bad attitude towards black South Africans. The response was a total denial and a refutation that South Africa is a Christian country. The Nationalists regime always claimed to be Christian and anti-communists. The Minister of Justice uttered a degrading statement. His statement,

the blatant lies given by security police, and doctors mentioned in the Biko case, sowed seeds of hatred amongst black people of South Africa.

The actions of Kruger and others connected with the death of Biko, cast a lot of questions and doubts on how Christian the apartheid government was. The reactions that came from different quarters of South Africa, and the international world, condemning the Minister of Justice's statement, and the death in detention of Biko, bore evidence of the problem of forgiveness, reconciliation, racialism and white domination in South Africa. The way Biko died in detention is history and politics, and I suggest that it should always be remembered, whenever South Africans are preparing for elections. It is history and politics that those, who find it difficult to vote for the African National Congress, Pan Africanist Congress and Azanian People's Organisation, should be given a chance to think and be reminded about. It is a case that should be re-opened as we move towards a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and new South Africa. Not for sowing seeds of resentment, but for sowing seeds of forgiveness, reconciliation and nation building. The sins of the past should be known first, be brought out, before seeds of lasting forgiveness and reconciliation can be sowed among the different racial groups in South Africa. For example, in a booklet produced by the Western Province Council of Churches: Amnesty, Dr S. Govender and Rev. Bennie Witbooi, Fr Michael Lapsley and the Black Sash respectively wrote:

No society can move into a better future without healing and justice, forgiveness and reconciliation. A prerequisite for this to happen is that the truth about the past must be publicly told . . . (Foreword)

They were reacting, with other organisations, against the Indemnity Bill going through the tri-cameral parliament.

Before healing can take place, before we can decide what to do with those who have confessed and repented of their crimes against humanity, power must change hands. For religious people our belief in the God-given dignity of all human beings, requires that we continue the struggle for freedom and justice that will sow the seeds of peace. (Amnesty:9)

Fr Michael Lapsley also believes in the confession and repentance of those who had committed crimes against humanity. He proposes that that is not the end of the story but a continuation for freedom and justice, in order to experience lasting peace.

However, we believe that an amnesty declared now, and permitting exoneration for past crimes without full investigation and revelation, would usher in years of discontent and resentment. Past would remain unhealed, and important concepts of justice and responsibility would be devalued. This price for an amnesty is too high. (The Black Sash)

Full investigation and revelation of the crimes committed is the ethos. This would ensure forgiveness, reconciliation and lasting peace.

The then President F.W. De Klerk apologised in public for the sins of apartheid perpetrated by the National Party, but that, on its own, is not enough. It is a pointer to the right direction for forgiveness, reconciliation and nation building. Perhaps, a suggestion for the establishment of a 'truth commission' should be supported.

To prove that simply encouraging forgiveness and reconciliation is not enough for building a new South Africa: recently, sixteen years after, Biko had died, an article by *Allister* Sparks appeared in the Cape Times.

^  
Dr Gluckman exposed truth on Biko's death.

The death of South Africa's foremost pathologist, Dr Gluckman, releases me from a 16 year pledge of confidentiality to reveal his role in exposing the truth about Steve Biko's death in detention at a time when the Minister of Justice was attempting to cover-up.

I had just become editor of the Rand Daily Mail, that wonderful crusading newspaper which struggled through the dark years of apartheid to expose the evils of the system.

It was my first experience of the double whammy of government pressures and unsympathetic proprietors which had driven my two predecessors from the editorial chair, and which in time was to drive me out as well and eventually shut down the paper altogether just as its moment of indication was at hand.

Gluckman was one of the backroom heroes of the struggle for justice in South Africa, a tall, rotund man whose slightly pompous air concealed a passionate humanitarianism that drove him into some of the darkest corners of this oppressive society . . .

History has vindicated us, of course. But the verdict still stands in the records of the Press Council, and the newspaper is dead because of the thousand wounds like that which suffered in its final years. Now Jon Gluckman is dead too.

(Cape Times, June 21, 1993)

This article is a 'living evidence' that Biko was a historian and a politician. Because of his ideas, people like Doctor Gluckman were prepared to reveal the truth about his death, even if that implied death for him in return, from the repressive measures of Prime Minister Vorster's regime. Even Allister Sparks was prepared to stick his neck out for the sake of truth and justice. This is a clear indication that non-racialism, non-sexism, democracy and nation building cannot be built on cover-ups in a new South Africa. Although Biko is dead his spirit is alive.

There are also many people like Doctor Gluckman, who contributed in the struggle, but they are not well known, because they operated secretively and privately. They were not keen to be known, for fear of persecution by the state and preferred to operate as backroom heroes, but their contribution was sound and worthy.

The truth played an important role in the life of Doctor Gluckman. This is shown by his revelation to the editor of the Rand Daily Mail. On mentioning the truth I am reminded of Pilate and Jesus. Pilate as the interrogator and Jesus as the interrogated person. He questioned Jesus on his Kingship, this is how the whole episode went:

Pilate said to him, "So you are a King?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a King, for this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice." Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" (John, 18:37-38)

Pilate did not know 'what is truth' because he was prepared to sentence Jesus on false accusations and fabrications. Jesus is the truth and he came into the world solely to bear witness to the truth. The truth, which is Jesus was in front of Pilate, in the person and divinity of Jesus. He could not perceive the truth. He was already engulfed in falsehood, prepared to sell the innocent blood of Jesus in order to please the world. Those who are prepared to die for truth and not sell it, bear witness to the person, divinity and teachings of Jesus. Biko many other people are examples of this.

Through Gluckman, it became clear that Kruger was telling blatant lies. The truth was that Biko had died of brain damage. This was evident in a lumbar puncture conducted on Biko which showed an excessive number of red cells. This gave evidence that he was beaten up until he died. The alarm, showed by the three doctors who conducted a post-mortem on Biko, at being confronted with the facts convinced them that the police and doctors had indeed known what was wrong with the prisoner. What is important, and what will go down in the history and politics of our country, is that, although Gluckman and Biko are dead, only the truth survives. A clear indication that people, governments, history and politics cannot continue forever, when built on lies.

## CHAPTER 3

### 3. 'Historian'<sup>1</sup>

According to Siphso Buthelezi the Black People's Convention was formed as a national political movement of the black oppressed in Azania, at a time when the black political struggle had suffered a stalemate for a whole decade.

When the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) were banned and outlawed by the racist and oppressive regime of South Africa in 1960, a conspicuous political vacuum was created in the black community. The Black People's Convention (BPC) was therefore born out of this particular experience which the masses of our people shared collectively as the viciously oppressed nation class; a people who are denied in the South African apartheid system any relevant and effective political machinery through which their aims, aspirations, ideals can be channelled and realised.

The birth of the BPC was preceded by a number of conferences and meetings by several black organisations. The first conference was held in Bloemfontein on 24th April 1971. The theme was "Co-operation between, and co-ordination of the work of all progressive black organisations". The main organisations present were:

- (a) The Association for the Educational and Cultural Advancement of African People of South Africa (ASSECA),
- (b) The South African Student's Organisation (SASO),
- (c) African Independent Churches Association (AICA),
- (d) Interdenominational African Ministers Association (IDAMASA), and
- (e) The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA).

And ad-hoc committee was to be elected (Buthelezi, 1988:2).

A two day conference of people's organisations met in Pietermaritzburg in mid-August 1971. The Maritzburg Conference was attended by over 100 representatives of people's organisations, mainly welfare, educational, cultural, religious and student organisations. The main decisions of the conference were:

- (1) That all African people's organisations be asked to join in the formation of a national confederate organisation.
- (2) That the attendant people's organisations work in close collaboration with other black groups towards the realisation of the aspirations and goals of the black oppressed in South Africa.
- (3) That the proposed national confederate organisation operates outside the South African government created platforms (i.e Bantustans).
- (4) That the proposed organisation devotes itself to representing African political opinion and to promoting community development programmes on education, socio-economic and cultural aspects. (Buthelezi, 1988:2-3)

The newly elected Ad-hoc Committee came to be known as the National Organisations Conference. The proposed conference met in Orlando Communal Hall in Soweto, near Johannesburg from the 17th – 19th December 1971. Over 40 representatives attended the conference. It was at this conference that the proposed confederate organisation was founded and came to be known as the Black People's Convention (BPC). It was agreed at this conference that the Black People's Convention would be a confederate black political organisation embracing all people's mass organisations in the country.

On the 14th January 1972, the BPC Ad-hoc Committee issued a press statement announcing the formation of a national black political movement under the banner of Black Consciousness. The primary aim was to unite and solidify black people working towards their liberation and emancipate them from psychological and physical oppression.

Our interests therefore lie within the black community and our sole aim will be directed towards its needs, which needs will coincide with those of all oppressed peoples throughout the world. It is therefore essential and imperative that all black people, individuals and organisations should pull their resources together in order to achieve their aspirations. Their future destiny is in their hands (Buthelezi, 1988:3-4).

From the brief history mentioned above from Siphso Buthelezi, it is clear indirectly, that Biko's ideas were influenced by the political situation in South Africa. A situation which deprived blacks of their birthright and say in the governing of their own country. Again Biko was interested in uniting all blacks into one national political movement. This is

what is needed in South Africa to contend with the divide and rule policy of the National Party. A policy which the Afrikaners inherited from the British government during its rule of the Cape Colony. Biko emerged after a period of long silence, repression and suppression and banning of liberation movements. Blacks were divided and dehumanised politically, economically, culturally, historically and religiously. The emergence of the BPC and Black Consciousness movement was a blessing and upliftment for black aspirations, which had been bottled up for a long period by the regime. The appeal for co-ordination of the work of all progressive black organisations was a challenge and confrontation to the homeland system, accepted by those who collaborated with the system. The Black People's Convention, the Black Consciousness movement and the South African Student's organisation shaped Biko's ideas.

In South Africa, the Africans, coloureds and Indians comprise the black community which has been deprived of this inalienable right to be free; and for long there has been a political vacuum in the black community. From the 8th – 10th July 1972, the BPC held its inaugural conference at the Edendale lay Ecumenical Centre, Pietermaritzburg. The inaugural conference formally adopted the new BPC constitution and launched the organisation. The first BPC annual congress was held from the 16th – 17th December 1972 in Hammanskraal, near Pretoria. All these historical events were nurturing Biko as a historian. For example, the preamble of the BPC constitution states the following:

We, the black people of South Africa, declare that having examined, analysed, assessed and defined our needs, aspirations, ideals and goals of this country; and noting that there is a dearth of a political movement to articulate and aggregate these needs, aspirations, ideals and goals, and having further unconditionally declared of our faith in the

effectiveness, relevance and capability of black political movements as the only media through which our liberation and emancipation could be effected and realised, and believing that:

- I. Black people in South Africa have unique needs, aspirations, ideals, difficulties and problems pertaining to them,
- II. It is an inalienable birthright of any community to organise itself into a political movement for effective translation of its needs, aspirations, ideals and goals into reality.
- III. It is necessary and essential for blacks and South Africa to unite and consolidate themselves into a political movement if their needs, aspirations, ideals and goals are to be realised and actualised.
- IV. There is a crying need in South Africa for blacks to re-assert their pride, human dignity, group identity and solidarity through a political movement, and

We, therefore, resolve to find a political movement which would:

- I. Articulate and aggregate the needs of black people in South Africa.
- II. Represent black people nationally and internationally. (Buthelezi, 1988:21)

Biko was the Honourary President of the BPC. The history of the BPC and the adoption of the constitutions of the South African Student's Organisation and the Black People's Convention definitely point to him as a historian. It is evident from the preamble quoted above that he was concerned with the plight of the blacks in South Africa. And was also very concerned with the unity of the blacks and making them aware and analytical of their situation. The liberation of the blacks could only be realised when they came together into a solid political front and expressed their grievances with one voice. The emphasis in the preamble for blacks to reassert their pride, human dignity, group identity and solidarity through a political movement, is full of historical connotations. This implies that blacks should adopt a recovery of who

they are. Recovery of culture and their being, is what was also demonstrated by 'Black Consciousness'.

Biko, responding to a question posed by Bernard Zylstra to explain precisely the meaning of 'Black Consciousness' state that, "Black Consciousness means the cultural and political revival of an oppressed people. This must be related to the emancipation of the entire continent of Africa since the Second World War. Africa has experienced the death of white invincibility. Before that we were conscious mainly of two classes of people, the white conquerors and the black conquered" (Woods, 1978:95).

The blacks in Africa now know that the whites will not be conquerors forever. He emphasises the cultural depth of 'Black Consciousness'. The recognition of the death of white invincibility forces blacks to ask the question: "Who am I? Who are we?" And the fundamental answer we give is this: "People are people!" So 'Black Consciousness' says, "forget about the colour!" But the reality we faced ten to fifteen years ago did not allow us to articulate this. After all, the continent was in a period of rapid decolonisation, which implied a challenge to black inferiority all over Africa. This challenge was shared by white liberals, so for quite some time the white liberals acted as the spokespeople for the blacks. But then some of us began to ask ourselves: "Can our liberal trustees put themselves in our place?" Our answer was two-fold: "No! They cannot". And: "As long as the white liberals are our spokesmen, there will be no black spokesmen" (ibid, 1978:95-96).

The phrase: "Cultural and political revival" is a pointer to the origins, the being and the norms and values of the black people in South Africa. This is a call for a revival and re-awakening of the history of blacks in South Africa. Yes, Biko was not a historian in a conventional manner of western thinking. That is, he did not study history, he never wrote historical books. He never analysed historical events in a conventional manner. But, his call for revising culture is an indication that he was a historian in the context, plight and experience of black people in the then oppressive circumstances. One has to remember that the blacks, young and old were forced to read a distorted history of South Africa, written to promote the system of apartheid and homelands.

The phrase: "emancipation of the entire continent of Africa" (Woods, 95) is an indication that Biko was also interested in Pan-Africanism. By Pan-Africanism is meant the freedom of South Africa and also all other African states in the entire continent of Africa. As a historian, Biko had a very wide view and understanding of history of South Africa and the African continent.

The phrase: "Cultural depth of 'Black Consciousness'" (Woods, 96) indicates that one of the emphases of 'Black Consciousness' ideology was culture. In other words, keenness to trace and affirm the true humanity and being of black people. This is an attempt to revitalise the history, customs, norms and values of black people. Biko encouraged black people to define their being, by answering the question: "Who am I?" (Woods, 96). That is, giving a definitive definition of the origin of black people. I therefore appeal to anyone who would be in a position to read this work to avoid preconceived ideas and suspend his presuppositions as much as possible. I am

appealing for bracketing and suspension of preconceived ideas. If one does that, one would be in a position to perceive ideas of a historian in 'Black Consciousness'.

The sentence: "The continent was in a period of rapid decolonisation, which implied a challenge to black inferiority all over Africa" (Woods, 96) is a challenge to all Africans to <sup>im</sup>prove their western thinking and affirm Africanism, that is, African culture, history, being, origins, norms and values. It is an encouragement to Africans to walk tall, with dignity and to embrace their Africanness. The fact that there are black people is a matter of history and experience. It is not an error.

This is a reference to the restoration of the human dignity and the "Imago Dei" referred to in the book of Genesis when God said:

Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. (Genesis 1:26)

This is a right of human beings, a God-given human dignity. A gift from God, to bear his or her image. A gift which is not supposed to be denied any person, regardless of race, creed and colour. This is a human dignity which has to be restored to the blacks in South Africa before they can freely be regarded as full citizens in South Africa. Addressing this restoration is empowering, affirming and giving back that human dignity which has been denied the blacks. A right to be stewards of God's creation. A right freely given by God to all his or her peoples. A right which has to be enjoyed by all peoples. A universal right, which is solely from God and for all human beings to enjoy. A right which endorses freedom of speech, movement and

political rights to all human beings. A right which is supposed to be enjoyed in its fullest both nationally and internationally. A right which is enshrined in the universal declaration of human rights.

Biko gives a very critical analysis of the history of South Africa. It is an analysis which reflects the social and political conditions prevailing in South Africa at the time. In his analysis of white liberals and integration in South Africa, he states the following facts that liberals, leftists etc. are the people who argue that they are not responsible for white racism and the country's inhumanity to the black man. These are people who claim that they too feel the oppression just as acutely as the blacks and therefore should be jointly involved in the black persons struggle for a place under the sun. In short, these are the people who say that they have 'black souls' wrapped up in white skins (Biko, "I write what I like", 20).

He goes on to state that the role of the white liberal in the black man's history in South Africa is a curious one. The white liberals thought that they always knew what was right for black people. The wonder of it all is that the black people have believed in them for so long. It was only at the end of the fifties that the blacks started to be their own guardians.

The integration they talk about is, first of all, artificial in that it is a response to conscious manoeuvre rather than to the dictates of the inner soul. As a result the integration so achieved is a one-way course, with the whites doing all the talking and the blacks the listening. He continues to affirm that, given the facts of the situation,

If 'Black Consciousness' is "a way of life" and not merely "political rhetoric" (ibid), this is an indication that its leader was indeed a historian worthy to be recognised. History refers to the present, the past and predicts the future, so is and was the ideology of 'Black Consciousness' and Biko himself. There was a need for 'Black Consciousness' to enhance being, true humanity and dignity. "Liberation and central to consciousness of self" (ibid) in order to express true and full humanity. Liberation cannot be fully realised without consciousness of self. Consciousness of self implies to be able to "walk tall" (ibid). It is a realisation that it is not a mistake to be black. Blacks are not the negatives of whites. Blacks breathe the same air that is breathed by whites. They have the same blood and have a reason to walk tall and be proud of their being. They have to feel superior and walk tall just as whites do. 'Black Consciousness' is history, was history and will continue to be history even in the future. The emphasis is on the history of the blacks but I do not mean that 'Black Consciousness' had no impact on the history of the whites. Why the emphasis on blacks? Because of trying to inculcate the impression on blacks that their history, being, culture, norms and values have a standing in the shaping of events, way of life, politics, theology and history of their country.

Zylstra posed this question to Steve Biko:

Do South African blacks display the differences that have divided the blacks in other African nations, like Angola and Rhodesia (Zimbabwe)?

Biko answered in a wonderful way displaying his interest in the history of South Africa:

Let me at least say this: we are not divided because of personal ambitions among the leaders. What are my own ambitions? I have no personal ambitions. I have hopes. I know my limits. I am not an administrator. My hope is to engage in doing justice in the South Africa of the future. (Woods, 1978:99)

As a leader, who was also a historian, he was hopeful that the then history of South Africa would change. He saw himself taking also a significant role in shaping a future of a new South Africa, where he envisaged himself as an instrument and agent of justice. Indeed, 'Black Consciousness' had a tremendous impact on the history of our country, in moulding future leaders and in giving confidence to and affirming the deprived South Africans. Biko's understanding of history was more than that of a lay person's knowledge of black history. He founded the ideology of 'Black Consciousness'. He participated through contribution and even sacrificing his life in moulding history. He participated by improving the living standards of black people. It can be proved that he was a historian in ideas and stature because sixteen years after his death his ideas still have an impact.

Biko contributed to South African history by uniting blacks into one national political movement. As a 'historian' in the formative stages: he was moulded by the University Christian Movement, the South African Students' Organisation, the Black Consciousness movement and by his contemporaries and the South African political situation. He inculcated in himself a consciousness of South African history by participating in it and allowing it to be formulated.

Biko raised questions pertaining to land, cattle and the Bible which came from Europe to Africa through the missionary movements. He was always worried about the loss of land experienced by Africans after accepting the Bible and Christianity. He was fully aware that Africans were also makers of history. This clearly comes out in the interviews conducted amongst his contemporaries and known activists. He embraced

African culture, value system and religion. He was totally aware of African economic values, and fought all out against colonisation. He used his understanding of history to challenge the then regime. As a 'historian', he never taught, wrote or analysed historical documents in an acceptable conventional sense as understood by westerners. He encouraged his followers to equip themselves by tracing their history. He was consistently in secret contact with leaders of the calibre of Robert Sobukwe and Doctor Kaunda the makers of, and contributors to, the history of their countries. History was of prime importance to him because it contributed to the consciousness of the black community. He was fully aware that the history written by white historians was a distortion of the history of the black people. This was deliberately done to cast shame upon black people. He encouraged history to be written from a black perspective in South Africa. He was fully aware that history taught at schools and universities was a distortion and in need of reconstruction. In his speeches, he constantly quoted from black history pointing out failures and successes of African leaders.

He went all out to encourage the black man to reject the value systems that sought to make him a foreigner in the country of his birth and reduce his basic human dignity.

Biko wrote,

. . . merely by describing yourself as black you have started on a road towards emancipation, you have committed yourself to fight against all forces that seek to use your blackness as a stamp that marks you out as a subservient being. (Biko, 1978:48)

South African blacks were no longer interested in becoming part of the system but in changing it, to make it more in keeping with traditional African values of communalism,

compassion and sharing. Biko envisaged that the white society's elevation of individualism, greed, and materialism in which the poor will grow poorer and the rich richer would be a thing of the past. The goal was a just, egalitarian society based on equal sharing of the country's wealth. Once when Biko asked for proof that 'Black Consciousness' was a force to be reckoned with he responded with one word: Soweto! The philosophy of the 'Black Consciousness Movement' instilled in the Soweto youth a pride and self-confidence. The contribution of the 'Black Consciousness Movement' then, is in its re-galvanising the black militancy of an earlier era after a decade-long lull in resistance politics after the bannings of the ANC and PAC. Biko is history, was history and will always be remembered as a 'historian', politician and a 'proponent' of African Traditional Religion. He never studied history, he never wrote history books, he never analysed historical documents to qualify him as a historian in a widely accepted manner. But, he talked history, encouraged people to read history, he encouraged reconstruction of our history. He has made history through his uncompromising and fearless attitude, he contributed to the history of South Africa this qualified him to be a 'historian'. He contributed dearly and costly through his sacrificial life. He laid down his life for his fellow people by dying brutally in detention, in the prison of his own beloved country.

### **3.1 His Views on African Culture/Identity and Past**

According to Biko since the unfortunate date 1652 we have been experiencing a process of acculturation. 'Acculturation' is a fusion of different cultures. He argues that in taking a look at cultural aspects of the African people one inevitably finds himself having to compare. This is primarily because of the contempt the so-called 'superior' or dominant culture shows towards the indigenous culture (Stubbs, 1978:40-45).

Biko viewed the arrival of Jan Van Riebeeck in 1652 as a period that ushered in a disregard for, and the fall of, African culture, identity and past. This was a period which introduced a process of acculturation, a fusion of different cultures. The period of separate development, apartheid, exploitation, dehumanisation, a looking down on African norms and values began in the history of Africans in South Africa. Jan Van Riebeeck's arrival in Africa meant a clash between African culture and western culture. From then until now, Africans found themselves continuously living in two worlds: the African world, aspiring for African norms and values under very difficult conditions, and western world which assumed to usher the culture, the norms and values and the civilisation. As a result, in all spheres of life Africans are caught up in this situation. This is noticeable in religion, politics, science, history, medicine and law. The two trends, African and western, always emerge in the approach of people of religion. In religion there is African interpretation and western interpretation. All the abovementioned spheres of life reveal this tendency especially Christianity.

This problem of acculturation is highlighted by Sibusiso Bengu in his address to amaZulu, warning them of the danger of ethnocentrism, under the topic: "The Disease of Mental Whiteness":

My remarks to you, young sons and daughters of Africa, are based on one of the oldest yet contemporary enemies of mankind, as revealed in human behaviour . . . and that is, ethnocentrism . . . Ethnocentrism is a belief in the superiority of one's own cultural groups or society and a corresponding dislike or misunderstanding of other such groups . . . An ethnocentric person places his or her group at the centre of the world and views or judges the other groups according to his or her group's standards. One's own group is placed at the centre of the world as an in-group and the out-group are seen as conforming or failing to conform to the norms and standards set by the in-group. (Bengu in Van der Merwe, 1978:94)

Why do I raise this issue? It is because history has to do with one's culture, past as well as one's identity . According to Bengu people have to avoid ethnocentrism, a feeling that one's culture is superior to other groups' cultures. Biko as a historian, was keen in affirming African culture, past and identity. He viewed African culture, history, past and identity as worthwhile. It is worth noting that history, culture, past and identity are inseparable. This is why I touch on these when I refer to Biko as a historian.

According to Biko the African social structure has always been a man-centred society. Conversation groups were more or less naturally determined by age or division of labour. Love for song and rhythm are important aspects of the African way of life and culture. With Africans music and rhythm were not luxuries but part and parcel of our way of communication. There is no doubt that the so-called "Negro spirituals" sung by black slaves in the States as they toiled under the oppression were indicative of their African heritage. All African songs are group songs. In war the songs reassured those who were afraid. Black slaves derived strength and sustenance in the songs

they sung together. At work the binding rhythm makes everybody brush off the burden and hence Africans can continue for hours on end because of this added energy (Stubbs, 1978:40-45).

White domination continued for several decades till the unbanning of people's organisations on the 2nd February 1990 which gave a spark of hope and freedom. It is still continuing in this transitional stage in the history of South Africa. Biko yearns for a recovery of an African way of life, culture, history, identity and the past. All pillars that formed African social structure have been tossed around and found wanting. Hence <sup>M</sup>tsikana's utterance that Africans will be spilt like water. This utterance echoes exactly what Biko was attempting to build and to restore in the history, culture, identity and past of Africans. "Ngamanye amazwi ufuna okokuba abantu abamnyama baphuthume ubuntu babo" – He encouraged blacks to reconstruct their social structure.

Biko's emphasis on history, African culture, identity and past echoes Mangaliso Sobukwe's quest for African nationalism in order that civilisation should be complete:

. . . we have made our choice. And we have chosen African Nationalism because of its deep human significance; because of its inevitability and necessity to world progress. World civilisation will not be complete until the African has made his full contribution. And even as the dying so-called Roman civilisation received new life from the barbarians, so also will the decaying so-called western civilisation find a new and pure life from Africa . . . I wish to make it clear again that we are anti-nobody. We are pro-Africa. We breathe, we dream, we live Africa; because Africa and humanity are inseparable. (Speeches of Mangaliso Sobukwe, 1949-1959:10)

‘Black Consciousness’ has overtones of African nationalism. By African nationalism I mean a regard for African norms, values, culture, history, African consciousness or

what Biko called 'Black Consciousness'. Like Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe who emphasised that "we are pro-Africa, we breathe, we dream, we live Africa; because Africa and humanity are inseparable" (ibid); Biko encouraged blacks to be pro-Africa, to breathe, dream and live 'Black Consciousness'. 'Black Consciousness' and true humanity are indeed inseparable.

The missionaries confused our people with their new religion. By some strange logic they argued that theirs was a scientific religion and ours was mere superstition, in spite of the biological discrepancies so obvious in the basis of their religion. They further went on to preach a theology of the existence of hell, scaring our fathers and mothers with stories about burning in eternal flames and gnashing of teeth and grinding of bone. This cold, cruel religion was strange to us. But our forefathers were sufficiently afraid of the unknown anger to believe that it was worth a try. Down went our cultural values (Stubbs, 1978:40-45).

Biko argues that religion and culture are intertwined. Christianity is criticised and regarded as a new religion which was perpetrated by missionaries to confuse Africans. This is a critical suggestion and casts a lot of doubt on the authority and validity of the Christian faith. The methodology of evangelism in preaching the Christian gospel is totally questionable. The very missionaries who brought Christianity to Africans, their commitment and honesty, are open to criticism. Christianity is regarded by Biko as a "strange, cold and cruel religion" (ibid) and a religion responsible for the throwing away of African cultural norms and values. The methodology used by missionaries to spread the Word of God in Africa is indeed questionable and raises questions, hurt

and anger. Having said that, I do not disregard the positive things brought by Christianity to Africa, like encouraging education, building schools and hospitals. The pain, frustration and misery caused by this "cold, cruel and strange religion" leave a lot of unanswered questions. The question that comes to me is, do we have to throw away the baby and the bath water? Some scholars in the Department of Religious Studies question Africanisation of Christianity. They encourage a study of African Traditional Religion per se, that is, without mixing African concepts with Christian concepts. My concern about this methodology is a disregard of the already visible impact, influence, the power of the gospel that has been introduced to Africans by missionaries. And a large number of Africans presently attend established churches and even independent churches. What do we say to them, because some of them accept Christianity at face value and do not want to mix politics and Christianity. I know that this is difficult for scholars and students to contemplate, but it is a reality.

### **3.2 Colonialism**

Concerning colonialism in South Africa, Biko highlights 1948 – the year in which the Nationalist Party came to power. His life he lived in the framework of institutionalised separate development. His friendships, his love, education, thinking and every facet of his life, have been carved and shaped within the context of separate development. He blames separate development for having restricted free movement and contact among the peoples of South Africa. This policy has encouraged a lot of racial hatred

and suspicion within South Africans. It has dehumanised, degraded and inculcated a feeling of inferiority among blacks. The following quotation bears witness to this:

The colonialists were not satisfied with holding a people in their grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. They turned to the past of the oppressed people, distorted, disfigured and destroyed it. No longer was reference made to African culture, it became barbarism. Africa was the dark continent. Religious practices and customs were referred to as superstition . . .

No wonder the African child learns to hate his heritage in his days at school. So negative is the image presented to him that he tends to find solace in close identification with the white society. (ibid, pp. 27-29)

Institutionalised separate development has caused a lot of harm, demotivation, pessimism in life, loss of identity, culture, history and human dignity among blacks in South Africa. Nationalist government legislated what education is fit, which schools to attend, in which residential areas to live, influx control, job reservation, all this was done against blacks. In the process, blacks lost a sense of human dignity, pride and a sense of belonging to their own country. African norms and values were lost in the process, and blacks found themselves constantly having to be evaluated on western standards. They even lost their African traditional religious-thought-forms, as these were regarded as superstitions. Hence Callaway could state the following statement concerning the religious beliefs of amaZulu:

. . . a necessarily confused and apparently heterogenous heap of rubbish. To the general mind it will be pronounced curious, perhaps remarkable. It may be that comparatively few scholars even will care to wade through the oral traditions of a savage and uncultivated people, . . . (Callaway, 1874:4)

To refer to the religious-thought-forms of human beings as a "heap of rubbish" is to declare those people as non-persons, unfit to be treated as human beings, and to declare them in the same class as animals. This is how everything concerning Africans

has been treated in the period of colonialism. To refer to human beings as "a savage and uncultivated people" is again to class them as subhuman, falling in the same class as animals. It is to undermine their norms and values. It is to regard them as irreligious, uncivilised and not fit to live with other people. Colonialism, according to Biko, is one of the most evil and degrading systems ever employed by whites in South Africa.

Because of the impact of colonialism Africans have a tendency of undermining their norms, values, history, culture and their whole being. This is clearly expressed by Bengu when he states:

After years of denigration and self-abasement *Africans* now suffer from a very queer disease, and that is *negative ethnocentrism*. The concept of negative ethnocentrism involves the act of a person or group having its own values and going full out to adopt values and habits of other groups. Whilst it is necessary for us to tell Westerners to develop a less self-centred view of the world which inevitably places them in a position of superiority, we struggle to come out of our own negative ethnocentrism. (Bengu in van der Merwe, 1978:95)

Africans have a task and that is that they should refuse to make themselves carbon copies of various aspects of European culture. A carryover from colonialism should be avoided. Africans cannot simply adopt values and habits of Europe without first aspiring for recognition of their own norms, values, and history. This is clearly indicated in Biko's testimony when he was asked by advocate Soggot in the 'Black Consciousness' trial:

Soggot: when you have phrases such as '*Black is beautiful*' how would that sort of phrase fit in with the 'Black Consciousness' approach?

Biko: yes it does.

Soggot: what is the idea of such a slogan?

Biko: I think that slogan has been meant to serve and I think is serving a very important *aspect of our attempt to get at humanity*. You are challenging the very deep roots of the black men's belief about himself. When you say 'Black is beautiful' what in fact you are saying to him is: *man, you are okay, as you are; begin to look upon yourself as a human being*. Now in African life especially it also has certain connotations, it is the connotation of the way women prepare themselves for viewing by society. In other words the way they dress, *the way they make up* and so on, which *tends to be a negation of their true state and in a sense of a running away from their colour*. They use lightening creams, they use straightening devices for their hair and so on. They sort of believed, I think, that their natural state, is not synonymous with beauty. And beauty can only be approximated by them if the skin is made as light as possible and the lips are made as red as possible and their nails are made as pink as possible and so on. So in a sense the term 'Black is beautiful' challenges exactly that belief which makes someone *negate himself*. ('The Testimony of Steve Biko', Millard Arnold (editor), 1978:21-22)

Biko, like Bengu, is against the idea of blacks negating their being. He attempted to inculcate in blacks an attempt to get at humanity. He was challenging the very roots, history, norms, values, culture, religious beliefs, the whole being of a black person to be proud of his or her whole being. The compliment 'Black is beautiful' is an affirmation, a call for one to pause and be proud of his or her blackness. It is a call to regard with high esteem the history of the black people. It is a call aiming at discouraging making up, using lightening creams. It is a call to remind blacks that to be black is not an error but a God-given right. A call to be proud to be black. It is a special gift from God and blacks ought to walk tall. It is a call to regard our natural state – blackness – as synonymous with beauty, politics, history and religious-thought-forms. The phrase "Black is beautiful" implies that black culture, identify, past, politics, history, African Traditional Religion are all beautiful and deserve recognition and are a way of life. This is an appeal for a culture that accepts the humanity of the Black man, a culture that is basically sufficiently accommodative of African concepts to pass

as an African culture. What is implied is that at the present moment there is a culture in our country which is a European culture.

Biko has highlighted this overtone of European culture in an African context when he was asked:

Advocate Soggot, what sort of modifications were envisaged? Steve Bantu Biko went on stating that: *this country* looks, my Lord, like a *province of Europe* you know, to anybody who perceives the behaviour pattern it looks like a province of Europe. It has got no relationship rootwise to the fact that it happens to exist in Africa. *We don't behave like Africans, we behave like Europeans who are staying in Africa.* So we don't want to be just mere political Africans, we want to be people living in Africa. We want to be called complete Africans, and we don't have to go far. We just have to live with the man here, the Black man here, whose proportionate contribution in the *joint culture* is going to sufficiently change our joint culture to accommodate the *African experience*. Sure, it will have European experience, because we have Whites here who are descended from Europe. We don't dispute that. But for God's sake it must have African experience as well. (ibid)

The implication is that European civilization will not be complete until the African has made his full contribution. African nationalism is the only liberating creed that can weld these masses. African nationalism means having an inspiration, and a pride to be African. It means a feeling of pride in African norms, values, culture, history, land of Africa and behaviour patterns of Africans.

Africanism is Pan Africanistic in scope, purpose and direction. It is a social force that constitutes the third social force in the world. It serves the material, intellectual and spiritual interests of Africa, and does not in any way serve the spiritual interests of either the eastern or the western powers. It is continental in scope, covering the entire continent, from Cape to Cairo and from Madagascar to Morocco. It is a social force functioning through the media of African social conditions, and operating to liberate Africa and to create a social order original in conception, Africanistic in orientation, socialistic in content, democratic in form and creative in purpose. Pan Africanism became a concrete reality when African nationalists from all parts of the continent met at Accra. The All Africa People's Conference held in Accra in December 1958, laid a promising organisational foundation for African nationalism on a Pan African basis. (Speeches of Mangaliso Sobukwe, 1949-1959:46-47)

## CHAPTER 4

### 4. 'Proponent<sup>2</sup>' of African Traditional Religion<sup>3</sup>

A lady, who is a parishioner at our church posed an interesting question when she heard that I am writing on Biko. "What has Steve Bantu Biko to do with theology or the church?" she said. This is a fascinating question and demands a lot of argument to support and convince the questioner. I strongly believe that his ideas are also pregnant with religious implications. Not only for black theology but I strongly believe that for African Traditional Religion as well. This is the fact I intend to develop. At one stage I was also in the same position indicated by the parishioner I have just referred to. One of my concerns was the fact that in the comparative study of religion, scholars also study speeches and ideas of politicians. At one stage too, I was of the idea that politicians have nothing to offer to religion. Strongly believing that religion is solely for theologians. But of course, in religion scholars are concerned and study symbols, myths, rituals and traditions. After having done that, they deduce in some instances, religious implications. After having examined Biko's ideas, I have been touched by his references to African Religion and his perception of God in the African Traditional context. For example, his constant reference to the richness of African culture, that God is always respected by Africans in the drinking of African beer, in the dancing and the way of life of the Africans. All these points and many which will be mentioned and quoted in this paper prove that, he was also a campaigner and 'proponent' of African

Traditional Religion. For example, to use the term "Black Consciousness" is an indication that African ways of life, their whole being, in history, dance, art, culture have a bearing on African Traditional Religion too. To be conscious of being black means to be proud of the whole being of Africanness including African Religion. I strongly believe that history, culture and religion of any nation are inseparable. By emphasising the ideology of "Black Consciousness", Biko was calling Africans to reflect and embrace African Traditional Religion. He had hang ups about denominationalism and Christ. He has this to say about religion and the church in South Africa:

Most of the time one is born into or within a particular religion and denomination and very little individual thinking is done to consider the fundamental relationship between man and God . . . . Beyond this I've also grown to question in fact that very need for worship in an organised way . . . . My problem is that the most unbelievable aspects of organised religion are to do with the advent and subsequent role of Christ on earth. As a historical fact I find it easily acceptable that Christ did come to earth. What I find difficult to accept, however, are the many dogmatic pronouncements that accompany explanations about Christ's advent and subsequent role on earth. (Stubbs, 1978:210-211)

Indeed he did not embrace the idea of a particular religion and denomination, he had indeed, a longing for African Traditional religious-forms. Historically and traditionally, Africans did not have an organised way of worship as is the case today through the influence of missionary work. Biko was indeed very aware of this. Perhaps, with the words of Eric Sharpe, "He who knows one, knows none", (p.26) he expressed the same views, ideas, teachings and sentiments. He was definitely and clearly not at home with Christianity. He was restless, searching and urging Africans to rediscover African Traditional Religion. Expressing the same sentiments I endorse, that South Africa was never solely a Christian country but a religious country. This sentiment was clearly epitomised when the process of negotiations was started in our country.

Indeed, Black Theology came into being through the experience of Black Theologians. Black Theologians attempted to apply Christianity within their experience. My argument is this: Black people did not simply accept Christianity empty, without any faith. They accepted Christianity, but they have their prior experience of African-Religious-Thought-Forms: 'African Traditional Religion'. Black Theology arises from a context of racism, suffering and exploitation of the black people in South Africa. It raises the question: "what it means to be both black and Christian in South African Situation?" According to Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in our pursuit of Christianity as Africans, sometimes at the expense of our true self-image, we have been forced to live in two worlds, "we have suffered from what can only be called religious or spiritual schizophrenia" (Tutu, 1987:46-47).

Archbishop Tutu, contends that there are very close similarities between African Theology and Black Theology. Both have arisen as action against an unacceptable state of affairs. African Theology and Black Theology are an assertion that we should take the incarnation seriously. Christianity to be truly African, must be incarnated in Africa. African Theology and Black Theology both provide a sharp critique of the way in which theology has been done mostly in the northern hemisphere. African Theology has done a wonderful service in rehabilitating the African Religious Consciousness. Both African and Black Theology have firmly repudiated the claim that white is right, white is best.

Biko suggests that Black Theology seeks to relate God and Christ once more to the Black man and his daily problems. It wants to describe Christ as a fighting God, not

a passive God who allows a lie to rest unchallenged. It grapples with existential problems and does not claim to be a theology of absolutes. It seeks to bring God to the Black man and to be truth and reality of his situation (Biko, 1978:94).

According to Gabriel Setiloane, the term 'Black Theology' is used in reference to the whole area of theological thinking by the Black man in the world. It is negatively inspired by the fact that in the past, it is felt, theologians have been insensitive to, and neglectful of, certain experiences of mankind in our life together on this planet. These experiences are those of the poor man and the down-trodden and, the Black man usually falling into these two categories, therefore the experience of the Black man. It seeks to redress this and thus is addressed to blacks as an identifiable group. It recognises that all theology is reflected and given birth to from within a social and cultural experience and is, therefore apologetical. It claims the right of the social and cultural setting of the Black man and his experiences, alone and within the general family of mankind, as an equally legitimate basis as any for reflection about God, man and society (Gabriel Setiloane, South African Outlook, February, 1971:28).

From what Archbishop Tutu has said "African Theology and Black Theology . . . Both have arisen as reaction against an unacceptable state of affairs" (Tutu, 1987:46); Biko: "Black Theology seeks to relate God and Christ once more to the Black man and his daily problems" (Biko, 1978:94); Gabriel Setiloane: "Black Theology is used in reference to the whole area of theological thinking by the Black man in the world" (Setiloane, 1971:28); all these utterances imply that in a pre-Christian period a black man had his or her religious thought-forms. He or she had his or her own theological thinking

which I contend is African Traditional Religion. Hence my argument that Black Theology and African Theology are two components of African Traditional Religion. I am appealing for bracketing and suspension of one's Christian position for a while in order to accept the fact that before Christianity Blacks had their African Traditional-Religious-Thought-Forms. A contention that Black Theology and African Traditional Religion raises very serious and important theological tasks: the method of approach to Christian theology in Africa, the place and interpretation of the Bible, the contribution of culture and of African religions, an evaluation of the Independent churches and the socio-political context of theology. Most African Theologians assume that Christian theology is the universal theology. The implication of the universal theology is the assumption and thinking that all theologies should be Christ-centred. There is always a tendency to raise the question: where does one fit Jesus in his or her theology or religion. Black Theology and African Theology appear to have no problems about the authority of the Bible. African Traditional Religion is still battling to define its position, sources and methodology.

The first forum known as CODESA (Congress for a Democratic South Africa) was opened with prayers by religious leaders of different faiths – Jewish, Islamic and Christians. Professor David Chidester in his book, Religions of South Africa, expresses the same sentiments that South Africa has many religions. In his preface he says:

Religion has allowed people to experiment in different ways of being human. Not only humanising, however, religion has also been implicated in forces of dehumanisation in South Africa. Religion has been entangled with economic, social and political relations of power that have privileged some, but have excluded many from a fully human empowerment. The religions of South Africa, therefore, must be considered within a general history of South Africa. Religion must be allowed to appear within a history of the

relations of domination, resistance, and recovery that have made being human in this particular place meaningful. (David Chidester, 1992:Preface 1)

David Chidester goes beyond just stating that South Africa has religious pluralism but implies that in the history of South Africa religion has been used to exploit, dehumanise and to treat Africans as non-persons. This becomes evident in the travels of the missionaries. The whole Christian church has been implicated in the process of dehumanisation. As a result of domination of the majority – Africans, by the minority – whites. Biko was forced by a South African situation to question Christianity and to encourage and inculcate norms and values of African culture, history and African Traditional Religion. Hence, his quest for a true humanity and relevance of Black Theology to put into practice and context norms and values of Christianity. I strongly believe that although Black Theology was an attempt by black theologians, to make meaningful the teachings of Christianity: they came into Christianity having African Traditional Religion as their first faith and religion prior to embracing Christianity. Having said that, I reiterate my strong conviction that Black Theology is a component of African Traditional Religion.

## 4.1 African Traditional Religion

Biko as a 'historian', a politician and a 'proponent' of African Traditional Religion has expressed views concerning his concept of God. These views are implying that he had a traditional concept of Africa, for God. In attempting to respond to the question: Does God exist? he has uttered the following:

I have never had problems with this question. I am sufficiently convinced of the inadequacy of man and the rest of creation to believe that a greater force than mortals is responsible for the creation, maintenance and continuation of life. I am also sufficiently religious to believe that man's internal insecurity can only be alleviated by an almost enigmatic and supernatural force to which we ascribe all power, all wisdom and love. This is ultimately what makes us tick . . . (Stubbs, 1978:209)

According to the above quotation, it is clearly impossible for human beings to exist without their existence being responsible to another 'greater force'. This 'greater force' is God. God is totally responsible for creation. He or she cares, considers, maintains and sustains every living being. Human beings behave and are provided by God and act within certain laws of God. God has granted human beings knowledge of what is good and what is evil.

Gwinyai Muzorewa also emphasises the idea of one God as expressed by all African theologians:

All African theologians understand that all African people believe in one God. This God is both immanent and transcendent. The daily life of Africans is maintained, directed by God who is involved in their way of life. He provides and yet he is above all creation. The commonest African concept of God is that God is regarded as the Creator (umDali in Xhosa). A creator of everything that is in existence. Referring to the works and activities of God. (Muzorewa, 1985:10-11)

John Mbiti states that African knowledge of God is expressed in proverbs, short statements, songs, prayers, names, myths, stories and religious ceremonies. All these are easy to remember and pass on to other people, since there are no sacred writings in traditional societies. One should not, therefore, expect long dissertations about God. But God is no stranger to African people and in traditional life there are no atheists. This is summarised in an Ashanti proverb that "no one shows a child the Supreme Being." That means that everybody knows of God's existence almost by instinct and even children know Him:

African concepts of God are strongly coloured and influenced by the historical, geographical, social and cultural background or environment of each people. This explains the similarities and differences which we find when we consider the beliefs about God from all over the continent. (Mbiti, 1969:29-30)

Biko's concept of God bears common ground and similarities to the concepts expressed by other scholars I have quoted. Indeed, all Africans have the same understanding of God. Their understanding is unique and cannot be gauged by Christian standards to determine its validity and authenticity. Africans, like any other nations, are naturally and ontologically religious beings. By their very nature and approach to life, they have a strong concept of God. Biko did not write a theological treatise in order to give his concept of God. The concept of God he gave refers to pre-Christian period. It is implied in his utterances. He was wholly aware that Africans/Blacks have their traditional concept of God. Yes, he was a Christian but in his speeches, he indicates that he was caught up in circumstances beyond his control. I again appeal to anyone who would be reading this work to bracket and suspend Biko's Christian faith for a while in order to discern the fact that he was indeed a 'proponent' of African Traditional Religion. His constant inference to pre-Christian

period implies his consciousness that Africans have a duty to unpack Christianization in order to be conscious as well of their African-Traditional-Religious-Thought-Forms. To do this one has to employ a phenomenological method. I am aware that it is indeed very difficult to do this because many scholars have been continuously brought up in believing that Christianity is 'the religion' and 'the theology'. Under very trying and difficult conditions Biko attempted to influence scholars to be above the latter view.

According to Biko: quoting Doctor Kaunda and referring to the traditional-religious-thought-forms stated:

*Africans being a pre-scientific people do not recognise any conceptual cleavage between the natural and supernatural. They experience a situation rather than face a problem. By this I mean they allow both the rational and non-rational elements to make an impact upon them the action they can take could be described more as a response of the total personality to the situation than the result of some mental exercise. [Steve Biko quoting Doctor Kaunda] – (Steve Bantu Biko, I write what I like; 1978:44)*

Steve Biko went on expressing these African-Traditional-Religious-Forms:

*. . . we all accepted without any doubt the existence of a God. We had our own community of saints. We believed and this was consistent without views of life – that all people who died had a special place next to God, we felt that a communication with God, could only be through these people. We never knew anything about hell – we do not believe that God can create people only to punish them eternally after a short period on earth. (Biko, I write what I like; Stubbs, 1978:44-45)*

The implication of "we all accepted without any doubt the existence of a God" is an affirmation of a pre-Christian concept of God by Africans. This is an indication of African Traditional Religion Concept of God. This proves my thesis that Biko was a 'proponent' of African Traditional Religion.

The emphasis "our own community of saints" indicates Biko's embrace and indication of religious concepts of African Traditional Religion. In other words yes, as there is a community of saints in Christianity there is also in African Traditional Religion. It is not something new brought to Africa by missionaries. The sentence "all people who died had a special place next to God . . . a communication with God, could only be through these people" expresses an African Traditional Religion's understanding of the relation of the living and the ancestors. Ancestors play a very significant role in the religious-beliefs of the Africans. Steve Bantu Biko was indeed insinuating this understanding, for example, according to Hammond-Tooke, the ancestors are omnipresent and all-knowing and are the ultimate source of dependence (Hammond-Tooke, 1981:23). Heinz Kuckertz, quoting Fashole-Luke states that the ancestors are the "custodians" of morality, they represent the moral code for the living, while they actively punish morally bad behaviour. Ancestor religion relates to ethics (Kuckertz, 1981:86). It is a general understanding among Africans that the dead still belong to the community but are spiritualised. They are present among the living through their spirit. Social relations between the living and the ancestors often occur during important crises of life. Giving respect to African-Traditional-Religious-Thought-Forms is part and parcel of "Black Consciousness" and being inward-looking.

Biko's attitude to Christianity and his encouragement for the development of Black Theology demonstrated the fact that he was a 'proponent' of African Traditional Religion. He encouraged consciousness of African culture, decolonization of Africa and the de-Christianization of Africa. Indirectly, this is a call for the value of African Traditional Religion, the whole being of an African. This is also an indication of a being

of African-Traditional-Religious-Thought-Forms. All that has been indicated is vocalised and demonstrated by Bernard Zylstra's question to Steve Bantu Biko and his amazing response.

**Zylstra:** How does Christianity fit in with 'Black Consciousness'?

**Biko:** I grew up in the Anglican church, so this matter is an important one for me. But it is a troublesome question, for *in South Africa*, Christianity for most people is purely a formal matter. We, as blacks cannot forget the fact that *Christianity in Africa is tied up with the entire colonial process*. This meant that Christians came here with a form of culture which they called Christian but which in effect was western, and which expressed itself as an *empirical culture* as far as Africa is concerned. Here the *missionaries* did not make the proper distinctions. This important matter can easily be illustrated by relatively small things. *Take the question of dress, for example. When an African became Christian, as a rule he or she was expected to drop traditional garb and dress like a westerner.* The same with many customs clear to blacks, which they expected to drop for supposed 'Christian' reasons while in effect they were only in conflict with certain western moves. Moreover, although the social hierarchy within the church was a white/black hierarchy, the sharing of responsibility for church affairs was exclusively white. This meant that the nature especially of the mainline churches was hardly influenced by black fact. It cannot be denied that *in this situation* many blacks, especially the *young blacks*, have begun to question Christianity. The question they ask is whether the necessary *decolonization of Africa* also requires the de-Christianization of Africa? The most positive facet of this questioning is the development of 'black' theology in the context of 'Black Consciousness'. For Black Theology does not challenge Christianity itself but its *western package*, in order to discover what the Christian faith means for our continent. (Woods, 1978:96-97)

Biko raised issues pertaining to Christianity. The issue of Christianity entangled with colonial tendencies. Christian faith and colonialism were inseparable. This implies that Christianity was entangled with oppression and exploitation of blacks by whites. Unfortunately, this was disguised in the methodology used to convert blacks. Blacks copied and imitated their masters. This is implied in the way blacks dressed in order to imitate the westerners. It is implied that even the way African Christians worshipped, they were not themselves, they imitated the way whites worshipped. All these issues

raised indicate a strong position that Biko was a 'proponent' of African Traditional Religion. Biko was asked by advocate Soggot to tell of the role which Black Theology played in the South African Students Organisation (SASO).

**Biko responded:** Yes, I think this is well, as far as my understanding of why it features so much, this would stem from an understanding again of the *black experience*. Essentially the black community is a very *religious community*, which often reflects on beings, in other words, what is my purpose in life, why I am here, who am I? But I mean in this particular context in which we as oppressed people find ourselves in this country, inevitably you come to a block in your thinking, when you think about God, a God who is all loving, all knowing, but a God who allows me at the same time to be at the receiving end of suffering. So that it was beginning to create problems amongst youth especially. This whole religious question, what is God's intention with us? What does he want?

**Advocate Soggot:** Are you yourself a believer?

**Biko:** I am myself an Anglican.

(The Testimony of Steve Biko; Arnold (editor), 1978:98)

In this interrogation Biko admitted that he was a Christian, by admitting that he belonged to the Anglican church denomination. He was keen on a type of Christianity that was relevant in addressing black experience. By black experience is meant the context of oppression. In other words what was God saying in the context of the oppressed blacks. In other words the proponents of "Black Consciousness" contextualised Christianity by encouraging the development of Black Theology. The appeal for a relevant theology is an indication of a need for a theology that encouraged consciousness of African norms, values, customs, culture and African-Religious-Thought-Forms. Indirectly, this is an appeal to go back to pre-Christian times, to re-discover African Traditional Religion. The argument I have already earlier indicated is that: Black Theology and African Theology are two components of African

Traditional Religion. Before embracing Christianity blacks did and do have their traditional-religious-beliefs. This may not be a current theological debate but it does require consideration to enhance the dignity and true humanity of Africans.

This is the perspective of Biko in defining the Bible, Christianity and Black Theology. Biko began to radically re-interpret old Christian concepts from the perspective of Black Consciousness. This perspective also bears African Traditional Religious overtones:

The Bible must not be seen to preach that *all authority is divinely instituted*. It must rather preach that it is a sin to allow oneself to be oppressed. . . . *Black Theology* seeks to do away with spiritual poverty of the black people. It seeks to demonstrate the absurdity of the assumption by whites that '*ancestor worship*' was necessarily a superstition and that Christianity is a scientific religion. While basing itself on the Christian message, Black Theology seeks to show that *Christianity is an adaptable religion* that fits in with the cultural situation of the people to whom it is imparted. Black Theology seeks to depict *Jesus as a fighting God* and saw the exchange of Roman money – the oppressors' coinage – in His father's temple as so sacrilegious that it merited a violent reaction from Him – the son of Man. (I write what I like; Stubbs, 1978:31)

Biko used the politics and culture of 'Black Consciousness' to analyze the connection between apartheid and Christianity. He was questioning the attitude of the black churches towards Christianity. The black churches had uncritically swallowed the racist doctrines of white Christian missionaries.

In particular, black churches embraced a false notion of sin as primarily drinking, smoking and stealing, hence Biko's saying that the Bible "must rather preach that it is a sin to allow oneself to be oppressed". White Theology prevented them from comprehending a large perspective on sin. In the South African reality sin comprised a system of evil, a structural matrix in which whites lorded themselves over the black

majority. In the process all African norms, values, culture and religious-forms of African Traditional Religion were ignored and seen as heathenism and superstition. 'Black Consciousness', in Biko's theology, sought to provide a positive expression for the pains, suffering and anger of the black majority in order to realise God's will for liberation. 'Black Consciousness' – God's positive will to end apartheid and forge a new humanity – needed to replace White Theology and a white God with a Black God in the South African churches.

Biko specifies the literal nature of God as black. In this manner he criticises the cultural inferiority of blacks who fail to perceive an ebony divinity that looks like them. If the Christian God is black, then black people should be proud of their physical features, values and traditions.

According to Graybill, Christianity for Luthuli, Sobukwe and Biko provided the ethical critique of apartheid and with it the source of moral anger and hope that is vital to energise an oppressed people to take their salvation into their own hands (Graybill, 1995:80). What being a Christian meant for Biko was in the context of challenging and condemning apartheid South Africa. Biko was a religious and political pragmatist. He embraced Christianity more for pragmatic than theological<sup>al</sup> reasons. He realised that theology was a language of the elite, but which was accessible to the rank and file. He was addressing a class across the colour line. His preoccupation with the church stemmed from his study of its role in giving religious justification for apartheid. He could not fail to see how the Dutch Reformed Church's Calvinist theology had degenerated into ideology. The only path open for proponents of Black

Consciousness Movement was to redefine the message in the Bible and to make it relevant to the struggling masses. He asserted that it was the task of Black Consciousness to unwrap the western package from Christianity, to let it speak to the black man's situation in Africa, hence the development of Black Theology.

The efforts to redefine the message in the Bible involved the Africanisation of Christianity and this implies the significance of pre-Christian African-Traditional-Religious-Thought-Forms, hence the contention that Biko was a 'proponent' of African Traditional Religion. Before Africans embraced Christianity they had and they came into Christianity with their traditional-religious-thought-forms. Even if Biko was aware or not aware when he challenged the relevance of Christianity to the oppressed, he was also indirectly embracing African Traditional Religion. It was the goal of Black Consciousness then, to rebuild self-confidence through a reassertion of pride in African culture and religion. For example, Graybill analysing Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement stated that two aspects of traditional society were emphasised: a belief in God's immanence and the communalism of pre-colonial Africa. God's deep involvement in the world is a truth that was emphasised in the Black Consciousness Movement and especially by the theologians in the movements, who came to stress God's concern in the here-and-now for the whole man – body, soul and spirit – in his situation of oppression. The second aspect of traditional religion incorporated in the movement was the corporate dimension. In African religions, the whole community or group partakes of its ceremonies and festivals (Graybill, 1995:85).

Biko and the Black Consciousness ideology sought to reawaken the corporate ideal, the oneness of the people, that had existed in African traditional life. The individual's responsibility toward the whole community was stressed, it was argued that one's highest loyalty had to be to the black community. Black Consciousness sought to reawaken this past spirit of sharing, self-help, oneness of community, and unity of humanity and God that was at the heart of traditional society. A sense of solidarity, it was believed, would create a united front of all blacks – rich and poor, educated and uneducated – which would be necessary in the political struggles ahead (Graybill, 1995:83).

It is important to note that despite the interest in traditional religion within the Black Consciousness Movement, there was no wholesale rejection of Christianity but, rather an attempt to incorporate insights from African traditional religion into a new awareness of Christian responsibility for community well being.

There was an outright rejection of orthodox Christianity's inward orientation and concern with the soul to the exclusion of the outward life under conditions of oppression. The constant reference by proponents of Black Consciousness to insights from African traditional religion is an indication that, indirectly, Biko was a 'proponent' of the significance of African traditional religion. Like many Africans, Biko was caught up on two worlds – the African and the western worlds. Within himself, he was totally aware of the impact of African traditional religion and how to be a true African within the context of Christianity inherited during colonisation. He was aware that Africans were oppressed historically, politically and even religiously. Historically, because

African teachers had to teach a history decided by the regime. Politically, because Africans had no political rights and power. Religiously, because African-traditional-religious-thought-forms were looked down upon by the missionaries, as I have mentioned before. He was a 'proponent' of African traditional religion under very oppressive and trying conditions, where anything termed black and African was regarded as a threat and a cause for suspicion.

His appeal for Black Consciousness, is an appeal for religious consciousness as well. A religious consciousness that existed prior to contact with Christianity. An indication that Africans had their traditional concept of God. Comparatively speaking, Africans have a wider concept of God, than the traditional and the Christian concepts. Biko's utterances indicated insights of a concept of God. His insights, concerning ancestors indicate issues of African traditional religion. When he questioned Christianity, he also implied questions about the methodology used by missionaries in spreading the gospel. He was politically aware and also religiously aware. He embraced African-traditional-religious-thought-forms. He raised issues concerning African ceremonies and festivals. He was aware of the importance of these ceremonies and festivals within the African life. For example, the circumcision ceremony, has ancestral and religious connotations. When a boy is circumcised his ancestors are also believed to be involved in the wellbeing of the boy in the circumcision *School* and after.

Black Consciousness is also a consciousness of the religious makeup of a black person. If black is beautiful, African-religious-thought-forms are also beautiful and worthy. They also demand this consciousness and regard. As a person, a politician,

a historian and a religious being, Biko lived and laboured for consciousness of African value system.

## **4.2 Missionary Movements**

The missionary movements conducted in the nineteenth century in South Africa among Africans caused a lot of confusion amongst our people. This is evident in the division African people experienced among themselves. This was noticeable during the period of the kings like Ndlambe and Ngqika during the period of colonialism exercised by the British government, during the occupation of the Cape Colony by foreigners. I use the term king, because the tendency was to refer to our kings as 'chiefs' as if they were not in the same standard as the kings in Britain. The negative attitude shown by Biko towards the missionaries is a clear example of the damage and confusion caused by missionaries in South Africa. They created an impression that "Africans had no religion and theirs was a scientific religion and ours was mere superstition" (Stubbs, 1978:31).

The methodology used by missionaries in spreading Christianity in South Africa was that of a relationship between a master and a slave. The missionaries failed to discern meaning, power and richness in African religion. The consequence was serious, Africans themselves in modern days looked down upon their religious-thought-forms. Many of them, have embraced Christianity, including myself. Others have questions and suspicion about Christianity and term it a "white person's religion", and it is even

regarded by some scholars as "armed religion." A clear indication and retaliation to the wrong methodology used by missionaries in preaching Christianity in South Africa. An allusion too, to the ambiguity shown by the church to the plight of the poor, the exploited and oppressed. The missionaries used Christianity to dispossess Africans of their land. The same missionaries preached and claimed to be the ambassadors of Christ, representing Christian norms, values and Christian quality of life.

In the process, Africans lost their human dignity, were afraid to go to hell, lost their norms, values, customs which were pillars of life. The consequence, down went our cultural values. Africans, who embrace Christianity live in two worlds. They adhere to Christianity and also adhere to an African way of life. The extremists, have totally rejected their African heritage. Biko, through his historical views, political and religious tones is referring us back to the value of our being.

### **4.3 'Collapse of Africanism'<sup>4</sup>**

Colonialism, together with missionary work contributed to the fall and collapse of Africanism. Through colonialism black people in South Africa were dehumanised, dispossessed of their land, norms and values. Their religion, customs, history and their human dignity were destroyed. Perhaps, it is good to explain what I mean by "Africanism." Africanism means the norms, values, way of life, history customs and language of Africans. To value, respect and consider Africanism is a mark of recognition and affirmation of the human dignity of Africans as a people and a nation:

In 1800 the first representative of the London Missionary Society in Southern Africa, the former soldier, farmer and biblical scholar, J.V. Van Der Kemp, reported to headquarters about the situation in his mission field in the Eastern Cape. In the context of a general survey of customs, population, government, language, history and natural productions, Van Der Kemp provided a preliminary assessment of the indigenous religion of the Xhosa people in the region. Van Der Kemp had made a surprising discovery. He had found "no religion", an absence, an empty space in the intellectual register of Xhosa-speaking people. "If by religion we understand reverence of God, or the external action by which there reference is expressed," Van Der Kemp reported, "I never could perceive that they had any religion, nor any idea of the existence of God" (Chidester, 1993:4).

This is a strange, confusing and erroneous discovery by Van Der Kemp that amaXhosa did not have a religion. In other words, they had no concept of God, this is an indication of the assumption under which some missionaries operated wrongly in dealing with blacks in our beloved country South Africa. This is an insult to us and has ushered in a period of missionary work on false methodologies and assumptions. The missionaries communicated with Africans through an interpreter. Few eventually learnt to speak Xhosa. Consequently they had preconceived ideas about people they did not know, whose language, customs and traditions they did not even attempt to understand. They came from Europe with grand ideas about civilising the 'barbarians' of the 'Dark continent of Africa'. They did not even consider the fact that they were dealing with different people, with a different culture living geographically on a different continent. This was the start of the 'collapse of Africanism'. And from there on Africans had been treated as animals as if they are subhuman. This is one of the assumptions which encouraged me to highlight the fact that Biko was a historian, a politician and a 'proponent' of African Traditional Religion. The missionaries failed to admit that they could not comprehend the religious-thought-forms of blacks. They simply assumed that we had no religion. Our religion is hidden in our way of life, customs, our daily routine and in our respect of Qamata – the Xhosa version of God

who is one and highly respected. Traditional Africans feared even pointing a finger at the sky because they thought that Qamata cannot be pointed at. This is an expression of respect for God and a realisation of the existence of a Supreme Being – Qamata.

It is clear, that the findings reached by missionaries were based on false assumptions and misunderstandings. Africans were bombarded with Christianity at the expense of their norms, values and African traditional-religious-thought-forms. This sowed the seeds of the collapse of Africanism. As a result of this collapse, any African today, including myself, lives in two worlds. The western world adheres to the norms, values and lifestyle of the west. The African world adheres secretly and shyly to the African-traditional-norms. This attitude and way of life has created an impression that civilisation was brought by Europeans in Africa as if Africans were not civilised. Many African children have been taught at schools, especially during the apartheid period, to disregard their authentic history, history which has been created by our liberation movements: such as the African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress. As we move slowly and violently into a new non-racial, democratic and non-sexist South Africa there is a strong demand and a need to resuscitate Africanism. This will help us build our nation.

## 4.4 Emergence of Black Consciousness<sup>5</sup>

According to Biko:

He has lived his conscious life in the framework of institutionalised separate development. His friendships, his love, his education, his thinking and every other facet of his life have been carved and shaped within the context of separate development.

He goes on to suggest that the type of black man we have today has lost his manhood. And he has been reduced to an obliging shell, he looks with awe at the white power structure. Deep inside his anger mounts at the accumulating insult, but he vents it in the wrong direction – on his fellow<sup>o</sup>man in the township on the property of the black people.

All in all the black man has become a shell, a shadow of man, completely defeated, drowning in his misery, a slave, an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity. (Stubbs, 1978:27-29)

This is an analysis of a hopeless situation of the life of a black person in the context of discrimination. A life of despair, no value, no vision and a life that forces black people to lose human dignity and that image of God which exists in the life and nature of every human being. The question is how to restore value, meaning, human dignity and hope in the experience of black people in South Africa? The emergence of “Black Consciousness” in the late sixties and its application in the seventies, was a symbol of hope and a search for identity in the life of black people in our country. A desperate effort to revolt against apartheid and to revolt against the Nationalist Party government emerged and was realised again by the emergence of “Black Consciousness”! This reawakening took place after a long lull when the people’s liberation movements were banned and people’s leaders were languishing in jails. The question arises how were the ideas of ‘Black Consciousness’ to be inculcated in the minds and life of the

people? Again, I see a rise of Africanism with the introduction of 'Black Consciousness' in South Africa.

## 4.5 Language and Symbolism

Steve Bantu Biko used a particular language in expressing his feelings. The language he used had implications for religion. And that religion, according to my analysis, is African Traditional Religion. He might not have stated this clearly but the symbolism indicated has tendencies towards African Traditional Religion. This is noted in the following phrases and slogans:

. . . indigenous peoples; make the black man come to himself; to pump back life into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity; to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing himself to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the country of his birth; 'Black Consciousness' as an inward-looking process, colonialists turned to the past of the oppressed people and distorted; disfigured and destroyed it. Religious practices and customs were referred to as superstition. 'Black Consciousness' has to be directed to the past; to seek to rewrite the history of the black people and highlight the heroes who form that history; there are a lot of positive aspects in our culture to teach the Westerner a lesson or two. (I write what I like, Stubbs, 1978:27-31)

The oneness of community life is at the heart of our culture; the easiness with which Africans communicate with each other is inherent in our lifestyle; 'Black Consciousness' seeks to teach black people a positive and constructive way of solving their problems; 'Black Consciousness' therefore seeks to give positivity to the outlook of the black people to their problems; it seeks to talk to the black man in a language that he understands; seeks to infuse the black community with a newfound pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems; their culture, their religion and their way of life; liberation is of paramount importance in the concept of 'Black Consciousness'; self-examination; group pride and determination of the blacks to rise and attain the envisaged self "Black is beautiful". (I write what I like, Stubbs, 1978:30-49)

Some of the terms used were expressed by Biko, others by scholars defining 'Black Consciousness'. The expression: 'indigenous people' indicates the history, politics and indigenous religion, value system and norms and values of African Traditional Religion. All these are implied and embedded. Giving an indication that their norms and values are significant and call for attention and consideration.

The term: "Black is beautiful" (ibid, p. 104) summarises all the language and symbolism referred to. The basic teaching is to inculcate in all Africans a sense of value of their physical make up, history, politics and African Traditional Religion. But the point is that these terms and some of Biko's views have African Traditional Religious connotations. If "black is beautiful" even our African Traditional Religion is beautiful. In other words, it has to be respected by being taught at schools, colleges and universities. The present Christian ministers have a task of giving respect to African-religious-thought-forms. African-traditional-religious-thought-forms are okay as they are. Blacks ought to look upon them as of value and bear authenticity of our religion. All that is black is beautiful. Black, does not in any way mean inferior. Blacks ought to feel proud and walk tall because they are important too in the eyes of God and nations. The whole being of a black person is beautiful. His or her politics, history, religion, cultural background are all important and full of dignity and true humanity.

## CHAPTER 5

### 5. Empowerment

Having indicated that Biko was a politician, a historian and a 'proponent' of African Traditional Religion, I arrive at this analysis: through his teaching he was involved in a process of empowerment. My understanding of empowerment is giving power to the powerless. Dignity to those who have been dehumanised and despised. Through the black community programmes, he was developing and improving the quality of his people. He was giving value, recognition to politics, history and African Traditional Religion.

He was not a theologian, but his utterances referred to the acknowledgement of the religious field of the Africans. Although he encouraged a situational theology – Black Theology, he was totally aware of pre-Christian-religious-beliefs of Africans.

Because of an emphasis on 'blacks' some people could postulate that he was a racist. Why the focus on blacks? The response would be the need, poverty, powerlessness, loss of human dignity, loss of history, culture, religion and being, were clearly noticeable amongst blacks. They were desperately in need of a restored identity. This could, wholly, be done through empowerment. He was not a racist but was involved in a programme of empowering the dispossessed and dehumanised. This is clearly

implied in Baruch Hirson's saying that the students of 1976 looked inwards to their own problems. They sought 'awareness', 'self-identity', 'liberation from psychological oppression' and some mythical 'black value-system' (Hirson, 1979:284). To look inwards to one's problems is to seek a solution so as to overcome one's problems.

'Awareness' is also being conscious of one's circumstances. And to seek self-identity is to search for history, politics and religion. And to seek for liberation from psychological oppression and some mythical 'black value-system', is to seek for change from an oppressive situation, so that one's freedom, norms and values can be realised. A value-system that takes account of history, politics, being and religion. All these factors, point to the process of empowerment. A value system that enhances Africanism or in the words of Biko – 'Black Consciousness' (Biko, 1978:48). Through the development and preaching of 'Black Consciousness', African-Traditional-Religious-Forms were also highlighted as having importance, dignity and a worthy consciousness.

## **5.1 Reconstruction and Development Programme**

The process of empowerment advocated by Biko is also clearly embedded in the development of a new South Africa. His ideology of 'Black Consciousness' advocated in the sixties and fully realised in the seventies is related to the African National Congress' Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). The basic idea is about empowerment and improving the quality of life amongst all the South Africans

who live in squalid conditions and who have been underprivileged politically, socially, economically and otherwise. This is what is implied in the Reconstruction and Development Programme:

The RDP links reconstruction and development in a process that will lead to growth in all parts of the economy, greater equity through redistribution, and sustainability. The RDP is committed to a programme of sustainable development which addresses the needs of our people without compromising the interests of future generations. Without meeting basic needs, no political democracy can survive in South Africa. We cannot undo the effects of apartheid overnight, but an extreme sense of urgency is required because reconstruction and development are major thrusts of the National Peace Initiative . . .

The central objective of our RDP is to improve the quality of life of all South Africans, and in particular the most poor and marginalised sections of our communities . . .

(RDP, 1994:15)

It is observable in the vision and objectives of the RDP that the aim is to meet the basic needs of all South Africans. The terminology of "Black Consciousness" (Biko, 1978:44) may be different to the reconstruction and development programme, but the vision and objectives are the same. There is a lot of reconstruction and development that has to be exercised by all proponents of Christianity towards acceptance of African Traditional Religion – as a religion that is independent, meaningful and substantial. Reconstruction and development of attitude towards African Traditional Religion is needed.

When the African National Congress was involved in campaigning for the 1994 elections, it published A better Life for all with a section on affirmative action:

The aim of affirmative action is to eliminate discrimination. It is not enough to talk of equality. Especially when the vast majority of our people have been left behind by a system that excluded them by law and deprived the country of the contribution they could have made. . . . opportunities must be opened to all who were discriminated against as Africans, coloureds and Indians, as women, as disabled people and as people staying in rural areas.

This will not be done at the expense of others, nor lead to a lowering of standards. Special emphasis will be placed on their training and upgrading so they can rise to higher levels in business, civil service, skilled jobs and other areas.

South Africa as a whole will benefit if all levels of society represent the broad spectrum of its people. It is essential to the growth of our economy and the flourishing of our culture that more people feel part of the national effort. (ANC Department of Information and Publicity)

The idea of affirmative action is just like 'Black Consciousness' and the reconstruction and development programme is about improving the quality of life, boosting our culture, the idea of empowerment is implied in all three ideas. These programmes have religious connotations. They are all about a quest for a true humanity. A true humanity that is also implicated in affirming our culture and African Traditional Religion. They are about equality and an empowering value system of all South Africans, regardless of colour, creed and race.

Honouring equality for life of all the inhabitants, is a theme that runs through the Bible. But, because of selfishness, greed and lack of respect many nations tend to ignore this theme. This has been the case in the South African context, through the ideology of apartheid.

I have compared the RDP and Affirmative Action to the 'Black Consciousness' ideology. I am aware that the ANC's version is not acceptable to a certain section of South Africans. Furthermore, the ANC's RDP is mostly about material things, creating jobs, building houses. I wish to suggest that 'Black Consciousness' was concerned with material things as well as with spiritual upliftment – the whole being of a person. The RDP is still to be delivered in our daily lives.

Biko attempted to develop the African spiritually. He tells of self-awareness, identity, dignity and pride. He teaches the African to learn to stand on his own and rely on himself. There is a feeling of wishing to revive the African spiritually in Biko's work. It is not just political rhetoric. He dares to criticise the African. He dares to point out our mistakes and our apathy. 'Black Consciousness' references to African culture and African Traditional Religion is indeed very important. It poses a challenge to be proud to be an African. God did not make a mistake by creating Africans. 'Black Consciousness' forces all Africans to look critically at multi-racialism.

It encourages the indigenous people of South Africa not to talk loosely about multi-racialism, whatever that is. Biko expressed a wish to revive The African Spirit as well as The Body. He wanted to start a renaissance of African customs, traditions and religion. One could compare this to the renaissance of art and literature in Europe in the 14th to 16th centuries. There is an urgent need to revive our own culture.

During a commemoration of Biko, always the following words are uttered: "Long live the spirit of Steve Biko, long live." The same words are always repeated in a commemoration of Chris Hani, Oliver Tambo and many comrades who have died in the struggle for freedom in South Africa before the 27th April 1994, a historic day for democratic elections. In other words, although he is not among us physically, his ideas still help in the reconstruction of a new democratic non-racial and non-sexist South Africa. His spirit is still visible and alive among those who are prepared to die for freedom. This has religious connotations and reminds us of what we have always known, that a person does not die, he/she continues to live in another world.

In African Traditional Religion the spirit of the ancestors is always regarded as living amongst those who are still alive. It is believed that, that spirit still directs and protects the living. I could argue that the spirit of Biko has the same meaning and impact to his followers even to this day. It is the flesh that dies, but the spirit lives into eternity. This has a bearing on the nature of a human being, consisting of the body, which is temporal, soul, which is eternal, and in our culture is symbolised by the respect given to ancestors.

## **5.2 Interviews**

I have decided to include a section of interviews in the appendix because I strongly feel that it would help to deepen the thinking about the issues written about in this dissertation. These interviews have been conducted with persons of different political persuasions namely: The African National Congress, Pan Africanist Congress, Azanian Peoples' Organisation and with Biko's contemporaries. I am deeply gratified to mention people like: Barney Pityana and Sabelo Ntwasa. The cooperation I got from Tony Yengeni, Michael Siyolo and Mpazamo Yonana was indeed wonderful, fruitful, edifying, illuminating, constructive and reveals a lot of information and the wonderful talent and the calibre of our beloved leaders. These leaders will go down in the annals of the struggle for liberation in South Africa. A lady is included in these interviews to avoid an assumption that only male folks have been interviewed. The inclusion of Kuku Mamputa is to get the other side of Biko from our beloved ladies who have also contributed in the quest for freedom in our beloved country – South Africa. Our

ladies, who have also a wonderful talent and contribution as we work to rebuild our country which has been torn apart by the apartheid system of government. South Africa has been purported for a long time to be a Christian country, alienating other religions that exist. As we attempt to decolonise our country, I strongly suggest a decolonisation of Christianity. Part of that decolonisation will be the acknowledgement that we have different religions in our country.

Christian norms and values have been used to determine standards of people, ignoring the heritage of African culture, African Traditional Religion and African norms and values. In the process many people have been isolated and depicted as sinners, backward, superstitious, heathens, aliens. African norms and values have been suppressed.

One of Biko's important contributions was to consciously demythologise the concept of white supremacy. He was aware that the African must see himself/herself as an equal to the white person if he is to free himself. This was a prophetic vision when we know how this is instilled into our people even today. Biko was indeed a prophet, a messiah, a leader who believed in his people and African Traditional Religion. He was aware that our religion encompasses our whole way of life.

### 5.3 Analysis

I have interviewed six persons the other one was joint, two people helping each other in responding to the questions. The one belonging to political parties and the other one belonging to a liberation movement, have expressed their personal opinions. They have not expressed a view of their respective parties. What is fascinating is the fact that they belong to different political parties. I was also highly impressed to find out how they value religion in their way of life and their involvement in improving quality of life of the oppressed in our country.

Religion is indeed very important in the way of life. Life is incomplete without a religious conviction. It has to be situational and it is still relevant in the New South Africa. All those interviewed have indicated the value of our history, politics, African culture and religion. They have expressed overtones of colonialism in Christianity and a need to value African Traditional Religion. The way I structured the questions was to gain solely confirmation of the thesis. It was a struggle to get the direct words of Biko to prove that he was also a 'proponent' of African Traditional Religion.

I asked them the same questions and had responded differently and similarly responses in some instances. All those, whom I have identified their political affiliations claim, Biko would have joined their political parties. In other words: PAC claims him, ANC claims him, AZAPO also claims him. This reveals the greatness and calibre of Steve Bantu Biko. This again gives witness to his quest to unify all black liberation movements. He was indeed a symbol of unity. One claiming that he would perhaps

feel at home with the ANC. The other postulating that he would call together all black liberation movements. South Africans have lost a leader of good quality and great stature.

All agree that he was a politician. His main emphasis and broader perspective was liberation of the oppressed. He was a politician who had been denied a chance to demonstrate freely his political capabilities. Others are a bit reluctant to use the term politician. They rather feel more at home to describe Steve Bantu Biko as a liberationist and a freedom fighter. He was committed to the struggle and prepared to die and make sacrifices, living out the ideology of 'Black Consciousness'.

He was a politician not in a conventional sense. In the African situation, he was a politician who struggled to live out his ideas and prove the clarity of blacks in politics. Black aspirations were bottled up by the then regime. Anybody, amongst blacks, who stood up for his ideals, was deemed an agitator and a terrorist. And, he was constantly monitored by the agents of the state.

On the question of being a historian, those interviewed agree that he was very keen on history. This he had shown through his constant reference and quotations to important African leaders like Dr Kaunda, Samora Machel etc. He wanted blacks to be proud and conscious of their history. It came out that he had expressed views that our history has to be rewritten. He aimed at bringing out the value of our norms, values, customs, traditions and the whole spectrum of African way of life. He raised questions that touch on the contact between blacks and whites in occupied Azania.

Landlessness of Africans in their own land was really a question to be addressed and solved.

He constantly referred to leaders like Ngqika, Ndlambe and Hintsa. These are people who had also contributed to the shaping of history of South Africa. He was not a historian in the western sense. He did not write history. He neither studied nor analyzed history in the conventional sense. But his clarity on South African history has been demonstrated in his teaching on "Black Consciousness". His writings and speeches demonstrate his enthusiasm for history. Even <sup>if</sup> he had written history books, I doubt if these would be studied by African students, because of a clampdown on liberation movements and their leaders and documents in those days.

He addressed the African way of life before whites came and was totally against colonisation and encouraged blacks to embrace their culture and being, which includes religiousness. He was very critical of the history of our country and the way it had been distorted. History for him was the coming into consciousness of the black community. He encouraged blacks not to be ashamed of their past. He hated the way blacks imitated whites and was definitely against the notion that whites brought civilisation to South Africa. He was for encouraging the communalism of black society and the ability to share which is deep-rooted in our way of life – a way of sharing which was discouraged by the whites when they came into our country. This indeed is one of the cornerstones of the African way of life. He expressed a very deep concern for the kind of history taught at our various schools under the apartheid government.

Those interviewed also expressed a positive response to Biko as a 'proponent' of African Traditional Religion. This point has not been carefully and widely expressed in many writings on Biko. Culture and religion are interrelated, Biko, though not a theologian, his views on ancestors and sacrifice reveal that he was keen on African Traditional Religion. Sacrifices to ancestors brought about harmony between the dead and the living, thus fostering peace and harmony between the seen world and the unseen world. He never wrote a theological book or paper but through 'Black Consciousness' he proposed a restoration of true humanity in a country riddled with dehumanisation. Although he never attended any theological college for training, his views pointed to his spirituality and his valuing of African Traditional Religion. He strongly cherished the idea that Africans had their own concept of God. Through his views on religion he expressed the depth of African Traditional Religion. He had doubts about Christianity and questioned its apparent appeal to the black community. Africans had their own religious ethics and he saw religiousness in the African way of life. African religiousness is embedded in the customs, traditions and the whole way of life of Africans. His encouragement of blacks to be proud of their humanness and blackness reveals his appreciation of his being. He was indeed of the opinion that God did not make a mistake by creating blacks, black.

I have assessed from the people interviewed that my comparison of the RDP with 'Black Consciousness' created a lot of controversy. Some could detect similarities, others felt the two are far apart. The context of the two is also of prime importance. The RDP is envisaged to address inequalities. Political differences of the persons interviewed could also have influenced their views on the RDP and programmes of

'Black Consciousness'. Black community programmes initiated by 'Black Consciousness' people took place in an apartheid period when the oppression was at its most severe. The basic idea of the two programmes is to improve the quality of life of the oppressed and to infuse dignity and true humanity in all South Africans who did not benefit under an apartheid government. I contend that the two are related although not exactly the same. Even Biko's Black Community Programmes were about reconstruction, he is indeed one of the early proponents of reconstruction, very keen to effect fundamental change. The context could be different, but the philosophy is the same – to empower and affirm the exploited and downtrodden and enable them to initiate projects on their own without help from whites. Biko was wholly interested in black people affirming themselves, not to fold arms waiting for outside help. He did not want any person to catch fish for black people, he wanted them to learn how to fish so that they would not starve.

The detriment of waiting for others to do things for us is visible in our new South Africa. Blacks have been oppressed for a long period. They have been receiving 'starving' wages, they have not had proper housing or education. There was no health care worth the name. To redress these problems, affirmative action has to be entrenched. Good relationships have to be established. It is an attitude which will help the poor to be rich. The terminology of the RDP and 'Black Consciousness' could be different but the fundamental aim is the same. I know this could not be acceptable to everyone, but it is true.

Concerning the terms: 'Black Consciousness' and 'African Consciousness', the interviewed people discern fundamental differences – arguing that 'Black Consciousness' is a terminology of its time and context. The term blackness was used as a form of identity and a consciousness of belonging together. African is viewed as an inclusive term for the oppressed and the oppressors. This view could be controversial. African is also viewed as a term defining all those who are from Africa. It is an affirmation of African norms and values. 'African Consciousness' has a tendency of Africanising western-European norms and values. 'African Consciousness' is an understanding and a philosophy that has to be entrenched without any feeling of inferiority. There is a tendency to regard everything African as backward, uncivilised and in need of cleansing. This tendency has to be ignored, discouraged and trampled down. African Consciousness is both a philosophy expressing a lifestyle of a unique group of people with their own customs and traditions living in a defined geographical context.

'Black Consciousness' embraced the black world view philosophically and culturally, without any fear of intimidation and isolation. It is not against any other philosophy and cosmology. It is unique in that blacks have to be proud of their being. Hence the phrases: "Black is Beautiful", "Black man you are on your own" and "Black Power" as it was started in America, but which had far reaching influences in Southern Africa.

Those interviewed, wholeheartedly embrace some of my arguments that Biko was a politician, historian and 'proponent' of African Traditional Religion. They found this topic interesting and worth the effort to set straight a distorted view that he was a

'communist' and an 'agitator'. A description used by the regime to discredit all opponents of the apartheid state.

## CHAPTER 6

### 6. Conclusion

The facts raised in this dissertation, the views expressed in the books referred to, interviews held and the general feeling of other people prove that indeed Steve Bantu Biko was a historian. As a historian, he was eager to refer Africans in South Africa back to the value and significance of African heritage – culture, identity and the past. One who studies the history of his people is attempting to give meaning to the roots of his people. History to such a person involves the nature, being, politics, economy, education, legal issues and religious-thought-forms of his or her nation. The teachings of Biko attempted to do this. He showed keenness to preserve and to rewrite the history of his people. He was inspired by the spirit of African Nationalism. Through 'Black Consciousness', he wanted his black brothers and sisters to be conscious of their history and to embrace it. The views he showed concerning the history of Africans, were a pointer to nation-building, true humanity, reconstruction and affirmative action. Because of his views towards history, he was supported by many people, especially the oppressed. He was hope, to all of us who were oppressed. His views were appealing. But to those who oppressed us, he was a threat, 'agitator' and a 'communist'. Through his views on history he encouraged pupils and students to critically evaluate history taught at schools and at universities. I decided to write about him because I regard him as my leader and a maker of history, especially in the

seventies. Unfortunately, the type of history he made, was never taught to pupils and students because the regime regarded it as 'undesirable information'. This attitude of the state to his views on history is clearly indicated by the manner of his death in detention at the custody of the security police. His views are history and even his death will always be history to the youth and all citizens of our country. His date of birth, the day on which he died and the day on which he was buried will always remain history to those who embrace him and even to those who opposed him. Repetition for emphasis, he did not study, write or analyze history. He was not a historian in the conventional sense and western sense. His writings, speeches, what he stood for and lived for, demonstrate that he was a historian.

History and religion are inseparable, like culture and religion. The history that he made had a bearing on African-religious-thought-forms. 'Black Consciousness' had an impact on African-religious-consciousness. The African-religious-consciousness has to be encouraged not only because it has been oppressed so long but because it inspires and uplifts our people. African Traditional Religion has a contribution to make to the religious debates.

On a broader perspective, his views indicate that he was indeed a politician. He addressed the political situation of our country. He challenged the oppressive political system in our country. He rejected the apartheid ideology. He embraced a long-standing view held by the church that apartheid was a heresy, and inhuman. He did not have a public office but spread his views through student organisations and community meetings. His political commitment is supported by his writings, his own

people and the interviews in this work. The oppressed saw him as their leader, a freedom fighter and a martyr of hope. His constant harassments, detentions and finally, his death are facts that he was feared by the regime. Through 'Black Consciousness' he envisaged true humanity, freedom and affirmative action. He saw his philosophy as the only one which would lead to a solution for the problems facing the country and bring lasting stability.

His writings and publications could not be quoted. As a result, many did not have a chance of being exposed to this wonderful son of the soil of Africa. Many will wonder what theology has to do with Biko? His political utterances also have a bearing on religion. Politics and religion are intertwined. People who attend church services have their broader context which is their history, politics and religious-thought-forms. Even Professor Mosala argues in his writings that "the Bible is an ideological product" (Mosala, 1987:1-6). In other words everybody's religiousness is shaped by his or her political context. Even Biko's attitude towards Christianity was moulded by his oppressive political context.

This gifted leader, was also a 'proponent' of African Traditional Religion. He never gave a systematic concept of God, but through reference to African culture, African way of life, emphasis on 'Black Consciousness' he implied the importance of African Traditional Religion. He may not have given a theological treatise, but through teachings on 'Black Consciousness', which is inward-looking, affirming human dignity and the pride of being black he was a 'proponent' of African Traditional Religion. As

a politician and leader, Steve Biko was bound to the history and religion of his people. The three fields are interrelated and are also pillars of any nation.

His political brilliance has left many young people thinking and full of determination to struggle and to be prepared to die in the quest for political freedom, peace, stability and prosperity for all in South Africa. The core within him was sound, sure and responded from an inner confidence and knowledge, that adapted and explored with fascination and curiosity and humour whatever presented itself. Those who knew him would acknowledge that his leadership and philosophy responded particularly well to the historical climate of the times into which he was born. He had gifts of leadership, coupled with his inborn political instinct "to get at humanity" (Arnold, 1978:21) that would also have responded with an astuteness to any time in the history of his country. This was because of the kind of questions he raised and because of his deep knowledge of who he was.

Biko was a Christian. He has demonstrated his conviction to Christian faith through his teachings, life and death in detention. He has publicly admitted to be a Christian. Earlier, it has been indicated in this work, when Bernard Zylstra interviewed him: "How does Christianity fit in with 'Black Consciousness'? Biko stated: "I grew up in the Anglican church . . ." (Woods, 1978:96). Biko, also came from a Christian background. His mother had a very deep spirituality. Stubbs had also indicated this about Biko: "Whatever his spoken criticism of the church might be Stephen never denied being an Anglican, and this was due chiefly to loyalty to his mother, and to admiration of the quality of her faith" (Stubbs, Martyr of Hope: A personal memoir; 1978:163). His

criticism of Christianity displays that Biko wanted a relevant theology that would address the plight of a black person in South Africa. It also indicates his awareness that Christianity was a new-found faith for the Africans. Blacks have their Traditional-Religious-Thought-Forms. According to Nolutshungu:

*Black Theology* had emerged to prominence in the *University Christian Movement* and was incorporated into the BCM in accordance with SASO's policy of encouraging independent black activity and bringing such initiatives under its hegemony. There were many in SASO who were *disdainful of all theology* but nevertheless felt that religion, being so important a part of the life of black South Africans, should be accorded a place in the struggle, provided it could be *humanised* and made more *expressive of the aspiration of blacks*, and an instrument of their liberation. (Nolutshungu, 1982:156)

It is observable that the students of the South African Students' Organisation were divided in opinion where theology was concerned. Those who were staunch Christians were forced to contextualise their theology hence the emergence of Black Theology. Biko was also a staunch member of SASO, hence his strong criticism of Christianity. His criticisms, have demonstrated that he also embraced pre-Christian ideas of African Traditional Religion. The contention that Black Theology and African Theology are two components of African Traditional Religion, seems to hold substance. In no time were blacks without a concept of God and irreligious. Naturally, a human being is a religious being.

Strini Moodley wrote: "Nothing anybody writes or says will ever express who Steve really was" (Wilson, 1991:5). Erik Erikson in his preface to his biography of Gandhi: "Those who knew Steve are the only witnesses to his life and their interaction with him remains locked up in what they have become, who they are" (Wilson quoting Erik Erikson, Wilson, 1991:5). He was indeed beyond what words can tell and was an

honourable person who posed a threat to those who opposed him. Even his contemporaries cannot exactly say who this man was because of his stature and wisdom. There are no words in this world to exactly describe his ability and his command.

Peter Jones said: "The man just must have had a sense of vision which projected him through short-term historical processes and that is why I am very hesitant to contemplate what he would have done if he did not die because people would want to reduce his life to a set of rational or understandable components, whereas he was much bigger than that. He was a normal person, extremely normal. I've never met a guy who was so normal and so humble" (Wilson quoting Peter Jones; Wilson, 1991:85). Almost everybody who has met Steve agrees that he was a leader, a gifted person, wonderful, a historian, politician and beyond the expression of words. His words and teachings bear connotations of African Traditional Religion.

Through 'Black Consciousness' self-reliance was perceived as a pillar of empowerment for people who had hitherto relied on others to do things for them. The sermon of the day was to restore a sense of independence. It was also deemed essential to promote black leadership and control over the allocation of resources within the black community. I am tempted always to compare these projects with the ideology of RDP of the present government, and the emphasis on affirmative action. This is not to the 'taste' of everybody. But there are similarities, because the basic idea of all these programmes is to improve quality of life.

"Black Consciousness" managed to attain unprecedented success in empowering activists in its ranks at all levels. Most of these individuals attained total psychological liberation and realised the meaning of being active agents of history. The impact also had multiple effects on the wider black community. Developing role models was by far one of the most successful aspects of "Black Consciousness" during the 1970s.

Biko is dead but his spirit and ideas are 'alive'. The nationalist government, through its severe measures towards those who were prepared to die in the quest for freedom, has been responsible for many lives that were lost in the South African prisons. What the regime failed to realise was that they were unable to kill the spirit and the ideas of those called 'agitators' and activists. It is a strong belief in African Traditional Religion that when a person dies his spirit is able to be a blessing to those who are alive. Even in the case of Biko, his followers were and are still convinced that his spirit is still 'alive' and directing the course of events amongst his fellow-freedom-fighters. I have attended many funeral services of those who had died in the struggle, including rallies that are always used for important leading figures to inform their followers about political developments.

The slogan, "Long live the spirit of" Biko or any other person is always used. Although this slogan is used in political rallies, it is embedded with religious connotations. It is meaningful in the context of African Traditional Religion. The context of describing the relationship that always exists between the living and the dead. The body may be dead but the spirit does not die, it lives on to eternity. And it influences the thinking and the activities of the living. Although Biko is dead, some of his ideas are

circulating around, others appear now and again, as we discuss the way forward in the new South Africa. He is a living spirit and his ideas will always permeate our thinking as we attempt to formulate a theory of African Traditional Religion.

In describing African Religion, I have included 'Traditional' thus the phrase 'African Traditional Religion'. Biko strongly believed that Africans had their own religion before they came into contact with Christianity, through missionary movements. He was very proud of this and constantly mentioned that our religion is embedded in the African way of life. Africans drink beer during sacrificial practices, like 'ukukhapha' (accompany away the dead), 'ukubuyisa' (to bring home the spirit of the dead) in circumcision ceremonies, hunting expeditions and initiation ceremonies. Reference to God is made in all these ceremonies. African Traditional Religion is always traced in the life and daily activities of Africans. 'Black Consciousness' proponents believe that these activities find added meaning in a political context, this includes African Traditional Religion. Biko never wrote long papers on African Traditional Religion but his writings and ideas bear religious implications. Although he was a historian, a politician, his views on African Traditional Religion give witness that he was also conscious of God and the unseen world. Just like my situation, Biko was caught up in two worlds – the dominant western world, and Christian theology, and the despised, African Traditional world. He was very conscious of African way of life, African culture, black-value-systems and religious beliefs.

His reference to history and African Traditional Religion imply that history, politics and religion of black people matter. The assumption created by missionaries that Africans

had no religion and knowledge of God, was indeed a fallacy and unacceptable to Biko. This was also his way of restoring dignity and humanness to the whole being of Africans. A speculation that depicts his intention to restore the tarnished dignity of his people.

Today, we are living in South Africa, in a democratic non-racial, non-sexist, free new South Africa. A new South Africa based on democracy. The questions raised by Biko in connection with Christianity imply that he was reflecting for how long will Africans live in two worlds? Is it either or both? I will attempt to respond to these two questions in reference to religion.

They are related to the argument that Biko was a politician, historian and 'proponent' of African Traditional Religion. The two worlds are African Traditional Religion and Christian faith. The first world of an African is his or her way of life, culture and his or her religion. As an African for example, I respect my background and I respect my culture and my African Traditional Religion. I just cannot be whole without. My problem is this, everything African, including my religion has been termed backward, heathen, pagan and superstition. I know this is false. It is a challenge to correct this misconception. Attempting to correct it is like hitting my head against a big and solid wall that has existed for years. A lot of lies have been told about our religion. In schools, churches and in history books, African culture and religion have been treated as not so important. How long will I continue to live in this false attitude towards my being and my roots? This is what motivated me to write this dissertation. I want to rethink, rewrite and rephrase all the negative attitudes and perspectives about my

culture and religion. I recommend that African culture and African Traditional Religion should be taught at schools, colleges, universities and that churches should adopt a positive attitude and a sympathetic position. Students and theologians should be encouraged to write papers and books on African Traditional Religion.

The second world is that of living under the direction and auspices of Christianity. This is a very deep-rooted influence and cannot be easily wished away. Christianity has had a very wide influence in the world. Christian norms and values have been used to determine the lives of many Africans. A very reasonable percentage of Africans embrace Christianity as a newly-found and an important religion. As a result of the impact of Christianity on the lives of Africans, this newly-found Christian faith, has forced many to live in two worlds: the African world and the western world. Western world, because Christianity was spread by westerners within our country and among our people.

As I watch and participate in Christianity, I think it is totally impossible for African Christians to discard Christianity and embrace solely, African Traditional Religion at this stage. But, I speculate that maybe after some time in the new South Africa, one could see a change in attitude towards African norms and values – African Traditional Religion. Africans have lived in two worlds for some time and this will continue being so for a long period. Living in the African world, without feeling inferior and ashamed will occur when humanness – "ubuntu" is embraced in a true non-racial, democratic South Africa.

As the present newly elected government is involved in the RDP, nation-building and eradication of deep-rooted seeds of apartheid, theologians have a task of decolonising Christianity. This could be done by organising seminars, encouraging proponents of Christianity to re-evaluate their attitude towards African Traditional Religion and other religions that exist in South Africa. By encouraging ministers of Christian denominations to preach on their pulpits a sympathetic and accommodating approach towards African Traditional Religion. I am sure that Biko would feel at home with that approach and methodology. Again, as decolonisation of Christianity is suggested, I appeal to all theologians to develop and introduce a language of African Traditional Religion. And this language, should trace the language and traditional terminology that was used by Africans before contact with Christianity, to define for example the relationship between the living and their ancestors.

Christian missionaries thought that Africans 'worship' their ancestors. They had failed to give the exact language. Developing a language of African Traditional Religion I think, is a step in the right direction to attempt to go back prior to Christianity. And this is empowerment, an infusing back of our dignity, self-reliance, self-examination, inward-looking, as it was suggested by proponents of 'Black Consciousness'. This is a task that demands patience, commitment, nationalism and keenness to rewrite African history, politics and norms and values of African Traditional Religion. I recently visited a high school in Retreat in Cape Town. My daughter was due to give a paper on education. When she asked the principal whether it was appropriate to open with a prayer before she delivers the address? To my surprise and I think a step in the right direction, the principal refused. He suggested that religion is a sensitive and a

personal issue. And that his school consists of pupils and staff members from different religious persuasions. I suddenly appreciated the principal's feelings and assessment of his school on religious matters. And I thought this is a step in realising that South Africa is a country consisting of many religions. I thought, the assumption that Christianity is 'the religion' should cease. Having analysed Biko's ideas on religion, I think he would be happy too with the principal's stance on religion in his high school. I leave that as a challenge to all other schools, colleges and universities to reflect and do something about it.

I have tried to show that Biko was a leader and politician of exceptional ability. Aware of the history of his people, he attempted to reach for their spirit and the spirit of their forefathers. He did not just want to address the needs of the body, he wanted to renew and revive the spirit of our nation. He did this by using examples and symbols from African Traditional Religion.

Convinced about the lasting quality and value of African culture, he sought ways and means to build the nation on these. He was aware that the African could not regain his humanity or dignity until he returned to, and respected, his history. Only on this firm ground could a lasting African identity be built. This historical approach would enable our people to see how colonialism and apartheid had poisoned their minds.

He opened people's eyes and minds by saying: do not look to the here and now, look at your history. You were once a noble and cultured people with your own customs and traditions. It was colonialism and apartheid which reviled and defiled your

customs. Our people heard his message, and they embraced his philosophy of 'Black Consciousness'. Even those who were not of African origin, supported him e.g. Reverend Stubbs, the coloured people and the producers of the film "Cry Freedom".

One of the most important contributions Biko made, was to urge Africans not to be afraid of the white man. He knew that the whites were afraid even though they had superior guns. As a leader, he saw the white man's weaknesses and exploited them for political ends. He knew his own people well. He set about to remove the "victim" from them. He said to them: you are not a victim, you yourself can change your political conditions. These conditions were created by man, and you are a man, you can change them. Look at yourself, what are you doing to free yourself? Only you yourself can get yourself out of the mess you are in. Biko encouraged people to examine themselves. He instilled in them self-respect, self-awareness and a quest for independence. He said to them: dark-skin or black is beautiful. Respect yourself, be proud, be courageous. Our people were aware of their traditions and beliefs but had been misled and cheated into abandoning them in favour of Christianity. They were also afraid of the military might of the white man. They were physically and spiritually defeated. In defeat, they were frightened, prostrated. It is at this point in our history that Biko emerges to arouse our dormant spirit. He instinctively feels he has to awaken our spirit in order for our bodies to respond and function properly. The philosophy of 'Black Consciousness' is directed at the spirit of every African. One reacts to it from deep down in one's own soul. Here lies the actual strength of 'Black Consciousness'. It is not only materialistic, it is also spiritual. True to African Traditional Religion, it tries to raise from the ground and heal the whole human being.

Africanism has always been there, latent in the African psyche. Marcus Garvey, Du Bois, George Palmore and Kwame Nkrumah expounded it in their writings. Unfortunately, up to now, it has not had time to be practised in any society in Africa. But it is there, hovering like the sun above us. It is about our history, culture, customs and traditions. It is about establishing African institutions, African administrative systems, African science and African technology. The difficulty lies in that when Africans express their beliefs, hopes and aspirations, it is called racism. Whites always find ways of expressing their racism in sweet language. Throughout this dissertation, I have tried to argue that to value, nurture, cultivate and respect our language, our customs and our African Traditional Religion is to affirm ourselves, giving ourselves human dignity as a people and a nation.

Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe has expressed the following sentiments on African Nationalism:

African Nationalism is the only *liberating creed* that can weld these masses who are members of heterogeneous tribes into a solid, disciplined and united force; provide them with a loyalty higher than that of the tribe, and *give formal expression to their desire to be a nation*. (Sobukwe, 1949-1959:29)

African Nationalism like 'Black Consciousness' is a 'liberating creed'. It is a force that encourages introspection and expression of Africanism. A force that instills 'African Consciousness' and worthiness of African way of life and the African continent. 'Black Consciousness', in its quest for a true humanity, also implied value of African Nationalism. It gives "formal expression to their desire to be a nation". It is a unifying force toward a state of the nationhood. 'Black Consciousness', having united the

South African Students and the masses, also bears these merits – of African Nationalism.

John Hendrik, giving a tribute to W.E.B. Du Bois had stated:

A tribute to W.E.B. Du Bois, is appropriate on two levels. One, the participants in this meeting of the United Nations Special Committee. Against apartheid are part of the *international community*, and they like Dr. Du Bois, relate to their respective *country* and *culture* in particular, and the world community in general. Two, the papers of this special meeting calls attention to the fact that the independence of African nations is not secure *until Southern Africa is liberated*. The unity and liberation of all Africa was the main mission of the life of W.E.B. Du Bois. He did not pursue this mission in isolation. He sought allies whenever he could find them. (John Hendrik Clarke, 1978: Introduction)

'Black Consciousness', was not solely concerned with the emancipation of the oppressed, but also of the oppressors. The ideology of apartheid was not only condemned in South Africa. It was also condemned in the African continent and internationally. African Nationalism was also not only a South African concept, but a concept of the African continent and the international world. What is common in 'Black Consciousness' and African Nationalism, is the basic enthusiasm to gain liberation, true humanity, value-system of Africanism, and culture. As Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe has stated: "Western civilization finds a new and purer life from Africa" (Sobukwe, 1949-1959:10).

With the same expression I suggest that Christianity finds a new and purer life from African Traditional Religion. Christian Theologians, Black Theologians – here I refer to proponents of Black Theology and African Theology; have a task to come together and seriously consider the value and impact of African Traditional Religion. I am totally

aware that Christian Theology, Black Theology and African Theology, are theologies of the book – based on the Bible; their source book. African Traditional Religion has still a task, that of identifying its sources. Cross-pollination is indeed very difficult to ignore in these theologies, since a religion cannot perfectly and purely exist in isolation.

The encouragement to establish Black Community Programmes and the Zanempilo Community Health Centre are concrete examples. Biko gave freedom a deeper meaning than just promises of jobs, better wages and houses. He went further and touched at the spiritual needs of Africans. He spoke of self-awareness, self-examination, self-pride, discipline in living and determination to teach our people that only self-help will truly liberate them. This was medicine of the spirit for a people who, for three hundred years have been told they have no culture.

**NOTES**

1. The word 'Historian' is put in inverted commas to highlight the point that Steve Bantu Biko was not a historian in an accepted conventional sense. He never wrote historical books and never analysed historical documents. But his utterances about the value and significance of African heroes, culture, African norms and values are an indication that he was a 'historian'. His contemporaries regard him as a historian.
2. The word 'Proponent' is also in inverted commas. This is to indicate that Steve Bantu Biko's criticism of Christianity is an indication for his regard of the value and significance of pre-Christian religious-thought-forms of Africans. He asserted that it was the task of Black Consciousness to unwrap the western package from Christianity to let it speak to the black man's situation in Africa. His emphasis on Black Consciousness is a consciousness of African-Traditional-Religious-thought-forms. His regard of African Traditional Religion is implied in his utterances on religious-thought-forms of Africans.
3. The word 'traditional' has been used in this work to indicate in pre-Christian period, Africans had their own religious-thought-forms. There was never a period when Africans were irreligious.
4. 'Collapse of Africanism' is also put in inverted commas to indicate that there were forces keen to see the collapse of Africanism: like colonialism. But Africanism never really collapsed in its totality. It continued to survive.
5. Black Consciousness is widely accepted by many that one cannot talk about Black Consciousness without Steve Bantu Biko.

## APPENDIX – INTERVIEWS

### Interview with Barney Pityana a colleague and contemporary of Biko:

**Z.S. :** Would you say that it is a correct analysis of Biko's views to say that he was a politician?

**B.P. :** One cannot separate culture from religion. His attack on liberalism, this was his main source. As a politician this is the most obvious. But this is to be seen in broader perspective. Everything he said was serving political objective.

**Z.S. :** Would you say that it is a correct analysis of his views, to argue that he was a historian?

**B.P. :** To assert and bring new life he needed to demythologise. He raised questions pertaining to land, cattle, Bible which came from whites to Africans. They brought us the Bible. In the process Africans ended up with the Bible and lost control over their land. He argued that Africans are makers of history. This was his main point.

**Z.S. :** Would you say it is a correct assessment of his views to say that he was a 'proponent' of African Traditional Religion?

**B.P. :** He saw through culture, that culture of Africans was not static. African traditions were very important things to him. And he saw these as having been lost. He strongly believed in ancestors and sacrifice. Sacrifices to ancestors were seen by Steve Biko as a humanising relationship. He was not a theologian or philosopher, was not critical in relationship with women – was not able to have a critical eye. Did not take sufficient account of modernity. Was not necessarily a strong proponent of African Traditional Religion. Through 'Black Consciousness' he wanted a quest for true humanity.

**Z.S. :** Which political party would he join if he was still alive and why?

**B.P. :** Very hard to answer this question – perhaps ANC, he definitely could find it discomfoting to leave BCM people.

**Z.S. :** I have related his ideology of 'Black Consciousness' to the idea of the ANC's Reconstruction and Development Programme and Affirmative Action – how do you feel about this comparison?

**B.P. :** Steve is one of the early proponents of reconstruction. For example, 'ubuntu' caring of one another. In those days all development was done by liberals.

**Z.S. :** Is 'Black Consciousness' the same term as 'African Consciousness'?

**B.P. :** "Black Consciousness" is a terminology of its time. Blackness of category, of identity. 'African Consciousness' includes oppressed and oppressors. If you are black you did not have a choice, liberals had a choice.

**Interview with an ANC member – Tony Yengeni – Member of Parliament:**

**Z.S. :** Would you say that it is a correct analysis of his views to say that he was a politician?

**T.Y. :** I make a distinction between a freedom fighter and politician. A politician is in office, works in public office. A freedom fighter sacrifices family and friends, like Steve Biko decided to commit himself in a noble cause. He was not classified as a politician but freedom fighter. Politics and politicians have been polluted. A different kind of image exists between a politician and freedom fighter. Politicians are known to be corrupt etc.

**Z.S. :** Would you say that it is a correct analysis of his views, to argue that he was a historian?

**T.Y. :** Yes, he based his argument on the history of his people. He called black people back to their roots, and stated that before whites came we were a people with values, culture, religious beliefs. We had our own economy. When whites came they imposed their values. Steve Biko believed that the best way to stop colonisation is to make a black man rely on his liberation. He was not afraid of challenging the state and was proud of our history. He used that history as a weapon. Did not teach and write history. He taught that oppressors told lies. Steve made people join the ANC. 'Black Consciousness' encouraged people to be proud to be black. He discouraged those who used AMBI lotion to make their skin lighter. He encouraged us to be ourselves.

**Z.S. :** Would you say it is a correct assessment of his views to say that he was a 'proponent' of African Traditional Religion?

**T.Y. :** 'Black Consciousness' made us to believe that we have our own beliefs. 'Abantu bakuthi babenqual' uQamata'. Christianity was used as a weapon to subdue our people. 'Black Consciousness' challenged white superiority against black domination. It taught us our own history, values and religious beliefs. Whites have always been part of a problem. We had our own concept of God. Through 'Black Consciousness' we eventually understand

our history. Thanks to great sons of our land. Steve had contributed greatly to our liberation movement. He has given ideas on history, as politician and on religion. Although he is dead his ideas cannot be killed.

**Z.S. :** Which political party do you think he would join, if he was still alive and why?

**T.Y. :** He would join ANC. His ideas are ANC. ANC embraces "Black Consciousness" and not black chauvinism. Steve had links with the ANC. He had discussions with ANC leadership. This was the cause of his death. He had links with student movement, hence the Black Power salute. He was a forward looking man and was a scientist and not a prisoner of the past.

**Z.S. :** I have related his ideology of "Black Consciousness" to the idea of ANC's: Reconstruction and Development Programme and Affirmative Action, how do you feel about this comparison?

**T.Y. :** There is a link, and he was concerned with programmes on the ground e.g. clinics, self-help projects and creche. He wanted a fundamental change through these programmes. He encouraged people not to fold arms. There is a link in philosophy, difference, because RDP takes place in a democratic society.

**Z.S. :** Is 'Black Consciousness' the same term as 'African Consciousness', why?

**T.Y. :** Difference, the term black includes coloureds and Indians. 'African Conscious' as defined by Nkrumah, Samora Machel and others in defining people from the continent – Africa. Africa is one continent and that will be clear when it is liberated from colonialism. Africa for Africans – PAC is very strong on Africanist concept. Pan Africanism is another element. 'African Consciousness' was part of "Black Consciousness"! African assertiveness was a form of identity of African norms and values.

**A joint interview with PAC members – Michael Siyolo – Regional Organiser – Western Cape. Mpazamo Yonana former Apla Commander:**

**Z.S. :** Would you say that it is a correct analysis of his views to say that he was a politician?

**M.S. :** As a politician, he looked on a political perspective of our situation. He wanted to change an oppressive order.

**M.Y. :** Steve was one of the youngest arrested in 1960. A court could not sentence him because of his age. Had a link with Robert Sobukwe – the late PAC president. He has referred to marriage, religion and education, in his writing: I write what I like he mentioned that even education is political.

- Z.S. :** Would you say that it is a correct analysis of his views, to argue that he was a historian?
- M.S. :** As a historian he taught that politics came out of the politics of the situation. He encouraged Africans to go back to their history.
- M.Y. :** He had secret links with the late PAC president, Robert Sobukwe. Encouraged Africans to go back to their history and roots. He demanded what was taken from us. Taught that history should be accepted critically.
- Z.S. :** Would you say that it is a correct assessment of his views to say that he was a 'proponent' of African Traditional Religion?
- M.S. :** His understanding of religion reveals that he was a strong 'proponent' of African Traditional Religion.
- M.Y.:** His concept of God: Qamata. He once mentioned: "look at them, why they go to the mountain to worship." As a leader, he was aware that Africans can pray through sacrifices to the ancestors. He questioned Christianity. When an African has excelled in sport and anything good, he would say: "Yindoda ke le" this utterance gives appreciation and praise for a good attempt. This indicated his depth of African Traditional Religion.

- Z.S. :** Which political party do you think he would join, if he was still alive and why?
- M.Y. :** He contributed to the coming into being of 'Black Consciousness' and AZAPO. He was arrested for 'poqo' activities. Could have merged with PAC. He had contact with founders of PAC. The chosen movement was PAC to SASO members, although not all of them.
- Z.S. :** I have related his ideology of "Black Consciousness" to the idea of ANC's: Reconstruction and Development Programme and Affirmative Action, how do you feel about this comparison?
- M.S. :** No links necessarily, Steve's social activities were for job creation projects and encouraging blacks to do things on their own.
- M.Y. :** Not entirely wrong. He was also not happy with the 'pass' system. Apart from RDP, he proposed the very essence of quality of life, all liberation movements were meant for the improvement of quality of life.
- Z.S. :** Is "Black Consciousness" the same term as 'African Consciousness'?
- M.S. :** "Black Consciousness" is a mental process that seeks to identify the past. It would be interesting for you to read PAC documents on Pan Africanism.

**M.Y. :** Many members of SASO felt strongly on PAC ideology. The strength of PAC in the sixties was the same as that of "Black Consciousness" in the seventies. The clamp down was heavy in the sixties than seventies.

**An Interview with Sabelo Ntwasa a 'contemporary of Biko, in the development of Black Consciousness approach which we saw and still see as the most authentic to rid ourselves of all the shackles that bound us to perpetual servitude in our natural background':**

This is how he introduced himself to me, an introduction which really shows clarity on the ideology of "Black Consciousness". And a clear understanding of the oppressive situation of his time. It also shows his surety of possessing his stolen land Azania. And clearly shows that he also contributed to the ideology of "Black Consciousness". People of his calibre and insight are a rare commodity indeed.

**Z.S. :** Would you say that it is a correct analysis of his views to say that he was a politician?

**S.N. :** Basically, Steve was a liberationist, somebody whose ethos was first and foremost based on the complete emancipation and liberation of black personhood in its totality, i.e. firstly from psychological oppression, i.e. a complete rejection of definitions by white society of who he was and how he should react to his given situation of blatant oppression, suppression and depression by the racist white dominating society.

Secondly, for him political, social and physical domination could only be advanced by a strong black solidarity, which meant the coming together of all those who in his time were designated non-whites in occupied Azania, in order to map out and express who they were, where they intended going to. And finally, to be the architects of their own destiny.

**Z.S. :** Would you say that it is a correct analysis of his views to argue that he was a historian?

**S.N. :** For Steve history was of prime importance in the coming into consciousness of the black community. He realised that white history about black people, their origins, culture and way of life was a deliberate distortion in order to make the black person feel ashamed of his or her past. And strenuously endeavour to ape the white coloniser, in regard to all his hands and value as the epitome of civilisation and look at his own past as savage and barbaric. History for him had to be rewritten from a complete black perspective.

With a special stress on the communalism of black society its deep rootedness in sharing and community, as opposed to individualistic and capitalistic soul-destroying, weltanchung of white Christian, western society.

**Z.S. :** Would you say it is a correct assessment of his views to say he was a 'proponent' of African Traditional Religion?

**S.N. :** For Steve, it was important to understand why Christianity found a ready market in the black community. For in no time was the black community Godless and devoid of values that were dissimilar to the Christ ethic. For him, the positing of God as a demanding being who you had to believe in or else would end up in hell, was the height of western Christian intimidation, to an already religious community, whose ethos, was not based on a religious practice that seems to stress the acquiring of holiness, based on certain practices centred on a specific day of the week. But rather for him, to be religious was what he saw in the African ethos which stressed the sanctity of the community. And that to be religious in the black community simply meant to be a useful member of the community or to part company with it. For him it was a cardinal sin for a child to look down on his or her elders. But this white and new religion seems to instill in its pupils an understanding of regarding everything African as heathen and unscientific. How could then a pupil have any respect for his elders if what he or she was taught was totally deprived prior to the coming and all knowing 'Makhulu Baas', in the guise of the white trader, colonialist and Christian missionary.

- Z.S. :** Which political party would he join, if he was still alive and why?
- S.N. :** The essence of Steve's political ethos would make it arrogant on my part to surmise to which political party he would belong. Suffice for me to say, Steve's whole life was spent in pursuing black unity and black solidarity at all costs, if total liberation of the black community was to be actualised.
- Z.S. :** I have related his ideology of "Black Consciousness" to the idea of the ANC's: Reconstruction and Development Programme and Affirmative Action, how do you feel about this comparison?
- S.N. :** I would feel that if Steve were to look at the RDP as expounded by its present proponents as black people, affirming themselves and I quote Steve: "That is all we want because we are aware that white people are sitting around our table, decorate it in true African style, and invite whoever wants to sit down to do so."
- Z.S. :** Is "Black Consciousness" the same term as 'African Consciousness'?
- S.N. :** No, 'African Consciousness' has a bias, that revolves around the indigenisation of African cosmological thinking to suit already existing white or western thought and philosophical moves, that is Africanising western-European values. For example: Dr Manas Buthelezi was once asked to deliver a paper on Africanising Christian burial rites. His response was "I

refuse to create a theology out of panic, for to bury the dead is simply to bury the dead." How you Christianise this was beyond his conception.

"Black Consciousness" however, has its point of departure, the black worldview philosophically and culturally as its starting point with no reference whatsoever any other cosmological departure. And is therefore unique in that it is its own point of reference. It is not anti any other philosophical, cosmological departing point. But insists that it will operate in all spheres of life from its own sitz im leben as its bottom line.

**An Interview with Kuku Mampota as a Member of AZAPO and was a Coordinator of Projects:**

**Z.S. :** Would you say that it is a correct analysis of Steve Biko's views to argue that he was a politician?

**K.M. :** He was a politician deprived of the opportunity to be a practising politician, because blacks had no political rights. He was against a system that totally disregarded our culture. As a result 'ubuntu' – humanness no longer exists. As my leader, he freed me mentally and taught me to value our traditions. He inculcated in us that 'Black man you are on your own'. Corruption has been introduced to us. As my political leader and a person who has sacrificed a lot through even his death, I question the way the film "Cry Freedom" has been arranged. I suggest that it has to be rewritten to

depict exactly what Steve stood for, taught and how he was treated in detention until his death.

**Z.S. :** Would you say that it is a correct analysis of his views to argue that he was a historian?

**K.M. :** Yes, he was a historian. He made examples of our history in his speech. And he quoted successes and failures of our leaders. Taught that our history should be rewritten. Questioned the type of history taught in our schools.

**Z.S. :** Would you say that it is a correct assessment of his views to say he was a 'proponent' of African Traditional Religion?

**K.M. :** The terminology used in "Black Consciousness" depicts African Traditional Religion. "Wasifundisa okokuba makhe sizame ukugrumba izithethe namasiko ethu. uThixo usidale ukuba sizidle ngobuntu nobumnyama bethu. Wakhuthaza okokuba siphuthume ubuntu bethu."

**Z.S. :** Which political party would he join if he was still alive and why?

**K.M. :** He would be involved in the "Black Consciousness" movement. When Steve was detained and many organisations banned after his death, a new movement was formed – AZAPO. He would be a president of AZAPO.

**Z.S. :** I have related his ideology of "Black Consciousness" to the idea of the ANC's: Reconstruction and development Programme and Affirmative action, how do you feel about this?

**K.M. :** 'Azidibani tu' – what are they reconstructing and developing? I suggest that black people be self-supporting and independent. I am against dependence. Self-help projects would do for example, in the informal structures – 'ematyotyombeni' – self-help projects are flourishing. I discourage donations for example, I am against President Mandela's recent visit to the USA. Why is the USA interested in investing in South Africa? And how are we going to repay American donations to our country?

**Z.S. :** Is "Black Consciousness" the same term as 'African Consciousness'?

**K.M. :** "Black Consciousness" is to be proved to be black whenever you are, even in the USA. 'African Consciousness is consciousness within the continent – Africa.

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