Christology from Below: an examination of the Black Christology of Takatso Mofokeng in the context of the development of Black Theology in South Africa and in critical relation to the Christological ethic of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the framework for a Black Christology constructed by Takatso A.Mofokeng in *The Crucified Among the Crossbearers*(1983), and evaluates this work with the Christological assistance of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

The emergence of Black Theology in South Africa since the early 1970s is placed in the context of the black struggle for liberation and the philosophy of Black Consciousness. The result, theologically, is seen to be an anthropological concentration, an affirmative doctrine of oppressed humanity and a concern with human liberation. An identity with the suffering and liberative commitment of Jesus, together with a rejection of oppressive concepts of divinity, is shown to have led to a Black Christology based on engagement with the human history and struggles of Jesus. The message to whites is interpreted as a call to accept and repent of the guilt of the oppressors. Reflecting the early emphasis of Black Consciousness on the transformation of the black self-understanding, this is held to be Black Theology's first stage concerned with the perspective of the black oppressed as the privileged position from which to understand the Bible and the Christian faith. This biblical approach is seen to be common ground shared with most African Theologians, though some gave greater theological significance to the African experience.

A second stage of Black Theology is then described, corresponding to a shift in the Black Consciousness movement towards critique of the material structures of society. Theologically the results of this shift are

described as a more critical attitude to the biblical texts, in terms of their class interests, and the giving of greater weight to the black praxis of liberation as primary theological data.

Bonhoeffer's Christology, unfolding in the context of the ethical demands made by his resistance activities, is then described to highlight the fact that in a situation of conflict and division, a Christological ethic reaches beyond solidarity to engage in vicarious action on behalf of others. Bonhoeffer is used to stress Black Theology's call to committed whites to stand in guilty solidarity with their people and repent on their behalf.

It is then seen how Mofokeng draws on the work of J.Sobrino to engage contemporary liberation struggles with the history of Jesus and to give Christological significance to the struggles of those with whom Christ is in solidarity, as the work of his Spirit. It is also seen how Karl Barth is used to strengthen Mofokeng's concern with the birth of black people as acting subjects of their own history.

With the insights of Bonhoeffer's Christological ethic it is concluded that Mofokeng overstates black solidarity, taking insufficient account of black divisions and conservatism. Mofokeng is seen not to apply his own historical methodology consistently, leading him to underestimate the theological importance of the failure of the poor to remain in solidarity with the dying Jesus, and the significance of the faithfulness of his women followers.

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In memory of
Shaun November.

CONTENTS

Chalcedonian affirmations which laid down the generally accepted parameters of Christological orthodoxy. We agree with James Moulder that one cannot simply turn one's back on metaphysical theology[4], especially, we might add, since attempted explanations of the relationship between Jesus Christ and people today are invariably set in an ontological framework connecting the humanity of Christ to our humanity. There are, however, more and less convincing ways of explaining this ontological relationship and, given that the "old road to Chalcedon is in bad repair"[5], we want to suggest that rather than try to repair this road, as Moulder and Simpson wish, we now have the opportunity to learn from Black Theology about a different route.[6] This involves leaving aside metaphysics for a while - in a sense

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4. Moulder, "Some Questions about the Origins of Christology", *JTSA*, No.30, March 1980, p51.

5. Ibid., p50.

6. Moulder("A Model for Christology", *JTSA*, No.35, June 1981.) has tried to find his way back to the Chalcedonian formulae by constructing a philosophical defence which draws on Plato's anthropology concerning the pre-existence and after-death existence of the soul which can be used to identify Christ's humanity with ours and at the same time connect his soul to the 'divine soul'. Moulder's argument is philosophical(not to mention Apollinarian) rather than historical but it depends crucially on a doctrine of God drawn not from pre-conceptions of the nature of divinity but from the story of Jesus. While Moulder's approach to the story of Jesus is traditionally liberal rather than materialist in the manner of Black Theology - for example, he discusses the compassion of Jesus *upon* the poor rather than his solidarity *with* the poor - he at least shows how an historical approach can operate within a Chalcedonian framework. However, as the responses of Ben Engelbrecht and John Hick(*JTSA*, No.35, June 1981, pp18-23 and 24-6 respectively) show, neither conservative nor liberal western theologians are likely to surrender easily the pre-conceived, philosophically-derived notions of divinity which they share with the Chalcedonian fathers in favour of what they tend to see as an historically limited deity. Moulder, they hold, does not return to the God of Chalcedon. Hick's solution is to abandon Chalcedon; Engelbrecht argues that there is no philosophical, logical defence of the traditional Christological formulae, only a theological one. Whether or not different Black theologians get us back to Chalcedon, they all exploit the opportunity, recognised by Moulder, to approach the figure of Jesus from an historical perspective.

suspending our confession of the Chalcedonian formulae - and allowing Christology to be placed within the more concrete framework of the history of Jesus and of the material reality of his world and ours. The result, as we shall see, indicates a Gospel which is not only more material but also more political and more explicitly partisan than that of classical Western theologies.

So here we examine the Black Theology that has emerged in South Africa since the early 1970s, with Christology particularly in mind and focussing finally on the most detailed Black Christology to emerge to date, that of Dr.Takatso Mofokeng. This has involved the attempt to relate to the person of Christ not through ontological categories but by means of engaging his humanity and his history with the condition and history of oppressed black people today. In the process Black Theology has given some interpretative significance to black history and experience. However, much of the debate turns on the precise role to be given to the black condition. Is it simply the privileged perspective from which to understand the story of Jesus, as related in a Bible which has normative value? Or does black experience have some revelational value in itself which can be used not only to interpret but also to critique the biblical accounts?

Although this can come across as extremely threatening to traditional orthodoxies, we believe that Dietrich Bonhoeffer can do much to prepare Western ears to hear and learn from the new insights of Black Theology. We choose Bonhoeffer for this task because, in John de Gruchy's words,

> he provides those of us who by training and tradition are rooted in the Western theological enterprise with resources

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7. de Gruchy, *Bonhoeffer and South Africa: Theology in Dialogue*, Eerdmans,

needed to bridge these gaps and to do so in a creative manner.[7]

And Bonhoeffer not only provides us with theological resources but is a forceful reminder that the primary task in hand is not merely to understand what he, or any other theologian is saying, but to witness responsibly and understandably to Jesus Christ in the contemporary situation.[8] As Black Theologians do precisely this, attempting to address relevantly the needs of poor and oppressed black people from within their own suffering, Bonhoeffer can help white Christians who do not share this condition and this perspective to loose ourselves from the restrictions of our inherited Christology and move towards an ethical and confessional position from which we can learn to see Christ, and the least of his brothers and sisters, in a new light.

At the outset we see at least three points of contact between Bonhoeffer and Black Theology. Firstly, both present theologies of the cross, having the sufferings of Christ and the sufferings of people today at the centre.[9] Such a theological approach has important implications for how God relates to the world and how God can be known in the world[10] requiring of committed Christians an identification or solidarity with the victims, the suffering, the oppressed.

Secondly, we find that towards the end of his life Bonhoeffer was moving towards the kind of critique of his own privileged class position that

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Grand Rapids, 1984, p34.

8. Ibid., p34.

9. Ibid., pp26-8.

10. Ibid., p26.

belongs to Black Theology's critique of white or bourgeois theology. Thus in an essay entitled 'After Ten Years' written in prison at the beginning of 1943, near the end of his life, Bonhoeffer was able to write,

> We have for once learnt to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled - in short, from the perspective of those who suffer.[11]

This 'view from below' is the perspective from which Black Theology and other forms of liberation theology reflect upon the Christian faith in order to be in the service of the oppressed and powerless. But for Bonhoeffer, as a member of Germany's bourgeois, educated elite, it was a position to which he had to learn to move. He did this in the process of his opposition to the Nazi regime and its treatment of the Jews, in his solidarity with the Jewish victims, in his involvement with the conspiracy on Hitler's life, and in his subsequent imprisonment. If white South Africans and 'First World' whites in general are to learn anything from Black theology they will also have to make such an ethical and social relocation. But this will be, in de Gruchy's opinion, a liberation from the "self-imposed bondage" of privilege to which Bonhoeffer can make a useful contribution.[12]

The primary audience of Black theology consists, of course, of the 'crossbearers' for whom the message is one of solidarity and liberation, yet "although it directs its voice to black people, it nonetheless hopes

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11. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, SCM, London, 1971, p17.

12. de Gruchy, op.cit., p68.

13. Ananias Mpunzi, "Black Theology as Liberation Theology" in Moore(ed.), *Black Theology: The South African Voice*, Hurst, London, 1973, p139.

that white people also will hear and be saved."[13] Part of Bonhoeffer's usefulness for us is that he addresses the audience which is not the primary concern of Black theology, the 'crossmakers', the privileged, and hopes to be able to bring this audience to the point where it recognizes the need for confession of guilt, repentance and the forsaking of privilege.

Yet, thirdly, we wish also to raise the possibility that Bonhoeffer may be a useful partner in dialogue for South African Black Theology and one from whom Black Theologians may be able to learn. The two Christologies are not as far apart as they may seem. The Christological emphasis of both Bonhoeffer and Black Theology is not metaphysical but Christian existence and action today. Bonhoeffer discussed this in the language of ethics as obedience, conformation and deputyship. For Black Theologians the language used tends to be that of other theologies of liberation, as Christology finds its necessary outworking in praxis and in historical engagement with the projects of liberation of the oppressed.

For these reasons we shall suggest that Mofokeng could more fruitfully engage his theology with Bonhoeffer than with Barth, for then the consistency of his historical approach could be maintained without being encumbered by the obtrusive trinitarian baggage of Barth's theology. As we describe - in Chapter Four - the nature of Bonhoeffer's Christology, and as we become aware of the meagre positive fruits of Mofokeng's engagement with Barth - in Chapter Five - it is hoped that the reasons for using Bonhoeffer as a partner in dialogue for Black Theology will become clearer. Yet first we must turn to the development of South African Black Theology to understand it in its own context.

CHAPTER TWO: BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE BLACK STRUGGLE

2.1 The Context of Black Theology

2.1.1 Introduction

It is impossible to understand Black theology apart from the context of the political domination and the socio-economic exploitation experienced by the black people of South Africa and the history of their resistance to this oppression. This struggle has been going on, as Lebamang Sebidi[1] points out, for almost three and a half centuries, passing through a variety of economic conditions and social relations and with various levels and forms of opposition.[2] Throughout this time black people have theologised in different ways and in different circumstances: under missionary tutelage, as Africans within their traditional religions, in the African Indigenous Churches and in the so-called 'mainline' Churches, all against the backdrop of political opposition to settler colonialism.

However the Black Theology that emerged in the 1970s was a new departure, more coherent, more systematic, more militant than what had gone before and, as "the result of objective historical circumstances"[3], integrally associated with the philosophy of Black Consciousness. As Mosala has said,

> Black theology as a theological expression and theorisation of

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1. Sebidi, "The Dynamics of the Black Struggle and its Implications for Black Theology" in Mosala and Tlhagale, *The Unquestionable Right to be Free*, Skotaville, Johannesburg, 1986, p2.

2. Sebidi, ibid., pp3-13, and I.J.Mosala, "Black Theology Revisited", Paper delivered to AZAPO Annual Congress, Lenasia, Johannesburg, Jan.1984, pp1-3. Unpubl.

3. Mosala, ibid., p4.

> the black struggle for liberation cannot be understood outside the context of the Black Consciousness movement.[4]

The direction of Black Theology since the early 1970s has followed closely developments within the Black Consciousness movement in response to the dynamics of the black struggle for liberation. The 'era of Black Consciousness', we shall argue, has seen two stages so far, the approximate dividing line being the events associated with the June 1976 Soweto students' insurrection which set in motion an important shift within Black Consciousness. This shift has had profound consequences for Black Theology and ultimately helps to explain the differences between the two phases of Black Theology identified by Mokgethi Motlhabi.[5]

2.1.2 Pre-1976: The Priority of Consciousness

By the late 1960s Black Consciousness was an idea whose time had come. Bonganjalo Goba describes the period as one of political confusion in the black community in South Africa.[6] The years following the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 had seen the effective removal of much of the experienced black political leadership with the banning of the Pan-Africanist Congress(PAC) and the African National Congress(ANC), the Rivonia trial and the continuous activities of the state security apparatus. For almost a decade black political activity entered the shadows. By the mid-1960s the effectiveness of black resistance had been dealt another blow with some black leaders, notably Chiefs Mangosuthu Buthelezi and Kaiser Mantanzima,

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4. Ibid., p4.

5. Motlhabi, Introduction to Mosala and Tlhagale, p(xiii)

6. Goba, "The Black Consciousness Movement: Its Impact on Black Theology" in Mosala and Tlhagale, p62.

opting for a strategy of working within the system while still declaring their opposition to and their wish for the eventual destruction of all *apartheid* structures.[7]

Out of this disunity and political vacuum arose a reaction which took the form of "a kind of political awakening"[8] among black university students. Their first move was to reject all white leadership and initiative, beginning with their own move out of the multi-racial but white-dominated National Union of South African Students(NUSAS). With the more radical, and eventually largely black, University Christian Movement(UCM) as midwife, they formed, in 1969, the South African Students' Organisation(SASO) which was to become "the spearhead of Black Consciousness."[9] SASO's first President, Steve Biko, summed up the feelings behind the origins of Black Consciousness:

> The blacks are tired of standing at the touchlines to witness a game that they should be playing. They want to do things for themselves and all by themselves.[10]

So a "directionless and arrogant multiracialism" - which meant, effectively, integration into white society on its terms - was rejected in favour of "a purposeful unilateral approach"[11] for, as Nyameko Pityana

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7. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, David Philip, Cape Town, 1979, pp149-50.

8. Goba, op.cit., p62.

9. In Khoapa(ed.), *Black Review* 1972, Black Community Programmes, Durban, 1973, p187.

10. Biko, *I Write What I Like*, Heinemann, London, 1979, p15.

11. Pityana, "Power and Social Change in South Africa", in v.d.Merwe and Welsh, *Student perspectives on South Africa*, David Philip, Cape Town, 1972, p189.

stressed, "the Black person must realize that he is on his own."[12]

Going beyond the parameters of the older tradition of African Nationalism, which aimed at the transcending the tribal differences of *African* people[13], the new philosophy sought the unity and solidarity of all the so-called 'non-white' groups in the struggle against white racism and oppression. Thus the term 'black' was designed to include not only Africans but also so-called 'coloured' and Indian people and exclude only whites and those who accepted white values. For the latter, such as those who breached black solidarity by accepting the white-initiated homelands and other collaborators, the derogatory term 'non-white' was retained, with Biko describing them as "colourless white lackeys"[14] The word 'black' on the other hand was at the same time "a synonym for subjection"[15], and "a reflection of mental attitude"[16], a positive acceptance of black values and identity:

> BLACK shall be interpreted as those who are by law or tradition economically, socially, and politically discriminated against as a group in South African society, and who identify themselves as a unit in the struggle for Azania.[17]

Hand in hand with the rejection of integration went the need to create black solidarity. SASO's Policy Manifesto sets out this aim clearly:

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12. Ibid., p183.

13. Motlhabi, *The Theory and Practice of Black Resistance to Apartheid: A Social-Ethical Analysis*, Skotaville, Johannesburg, 1985, p107.

14. Biko, op.cit., p78.

15. Pityana, op.cit., p174.

16. Biko, op.cit., p48.

17. AZAPO *Constitution and Policy*, Frank Talk, Dormerton, Section 22.1, p15.

> before the black people should join the open society, they should first close their ranks, to form themselves into a solid group to oppose the definite racism that is meted out by the white society, to work out their direction clearly and bargain from a position of strength.[18]

While there may have been general agreement that solidarity could not include homeland leaders and other political collaborators - as the rather turbulent proceedings of the 1974 Black Renaissance Convention made clear[19] - there was less certainty about the black middle-classes. Thus although the businessman S.M.Motsuenyane set out his conviction that Black Consciousness should lead to a key role being played in the (capitalist) development process by the black entrepreneur[20], several commentators and participants warned against this very group. P.M.Gwala, for instance, warned that black people would have to place "constant watch on the Black elite" who were a small but opportunistic sector shuttling between the black cause and liberal politics.[21] And Nxasana and Fisher distinguished between the black 'functionaries' of the system who experienced oppression largely in the form of *discrimination* and the workers who experienced oppression as *exploitation*.[22] Yet the hope still remained that Black Consciousness could awake the middle-class functionaries to the fact that the only chance of ending oppression lay in Black solidarity.[23]

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18. Section 4(c); *Black Review 1972*, op.cit., p42.

19. *Ecunews*, 42/74, 18 Dec.1974, pp8-9.

20. Motsuenyane in *Black Renaissance: Papers from the Black Renaissance Convention*, Edited by T.Thoahlane, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1975, p50.

21. Gwala in *Black Renaissance*, ibid., p28.

22. Ibid., pp54-5.

23. Ibid., p55.

Solidarity further demanded that Black Consciousness be not confined to SASO and student issues but also provide the black masses with the mechanism to get involved in the development of a new consciousness. Thus in 1972 the Black Peoples' Convention(BPC) emerged from SASO as a "confederate Black political organisation"[24], and through the projects of the Black Community Programmes the movement made concrete efforts to tackle the causes and effects of physical suffering among black people. SASO stressed to its members the importance of the black community and its political, economic and social development and encouraged students to recognize their primary duty towards this community, in fact, to see themselves as black before they saw themselves as students.[25] Although led by intellectual, middle-class youth SASO and BPC did not, in Nolutshungu's opinion, further the interests of that social class only[26] and, although it was never a proletarian movement[27], it "did gain a broad sympathy across classes."[28] Despite constant police harassment, detentions and bannings, Black Consciousness was, as Louise Kretzschmar comments, "more successful in its attempt to influence the larger mass of people than any other previous black movement in South African history."[29]

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24. Motlhabi,*The Theory and Practice of Black Resistance to Apartheid*, op.cit., p111.

25. Ibid., p119.

26. Nolutshungu, *Changing South Africa: Political Considerations*, David Philip, Cape Town, 1983, pp161-2.

27. Ibid.,p193.

28. Ibid., p193.

29. Kretzschmar, *The Voice of Black Theology in South Africa*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1986, p59.

The proponents of Black Consciousness shared with African nationalists throughout the continent a common reference to the African past from which modern Africans had been cut off by white colonialism. But, as Aubrey Mokoena explained, the movement's concern with culture referred not to an historical interest in the past *per se* but to the need for "a liberating culture"; for Black Consciousness, African culture referred to the traditions, historical development and practices of *all* black people and not only 'Africans'[30] and the movement was never 'Africanist'.[31] It was, however, far more than a political movement. In Biko's words it was "the cultural and political revival of an oppressed people"[32], perhaps best described by the title of the conference held in Hammanskraal in 1974 as a *Black Renaissance*. This involved a rehabilitation of black history which colonialism had destroyed and distorted[33] and a rediscovery of black cultural identity, so long as black culture was recognized as dynamic and evolving and not as static and arrested in time.[34] Black people had to be made aware of their situation, their identity and their ability, together, to influence their situation.

At this stage Black Consciousness was an inward-looking process[35] but its contribution to the recovery of black pride and dignity and sense of

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30. Mokoena, "African Culture", *Pro Veritate*, May 1977, pp10-11.

31. Nolutshungu, op.cit, p153.

32. Quoted in Woods, *Biko*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1979, p135.

33. Biko, op.cit., p29.

34. Ibid., p70 and Pityana, op.cit., p181.

35. Motlhabi, *The Theory and Practice of Black Resistance to Apartheid*, op.cit., p112.

worth, and its the emphasis on solidarity soon bore fruit in an awareness of the power blacks could wield as a group. This potential was recognised in SASO's Policy Manifesto:

> The concept of Black Consciousness implies the awareness by the black people of the power they wield as a group, both economically and politically, and hence group cohesion and solidarity are important facets of Black Consciousness.[36]

Black economic power was most significantly realised and exercised in the 1973 Durban strikes and during the revival of black trade unionism which followed.

But perhaps the most significant expression of black power came with the 1976 Soweto student uprising and the wave of unrest which followed. This was widely interpreted as "a manifestation of Black Consciousness"[37] although the movement was not directly involved in the uprising. Here Nolutshungu comments:

> The real contribution of black consciousness to the revolt was in the demon it had aroused: the defiant attitude among the youth in the face of police violence, and the solidarity which emerged among Blacks in the year and a half of the revolt.[38]

Thus, following Nolutshungu, we can make two comments about the Black Consciousness movement in the period roughly prior to June 1976.[39] Firstly, Despite what Nolutshungu calls "a radical unease with

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36. Section 4(b)(iv); *Black Review, 1972*, op.cit., p41.

37. Motlhabi, *The Theory and Practice of Black Resistance to Apartheid*, op.cit., p146.

38. Nolutshungu, op.cit., p185.

39. Ibid., p160.

40. Ibid., p155.

capitalism"[40], the movement gave a privileged status to consciousness, challenging the effects of oppression on the culture, religion and political thinking of black people and on re-appropriating the right to think, and to think critically, about the black condition and the material causes of it, leaving other aspects of liberation to the exiled movements. The central concern of this phase was

> the realisation by the blacks that the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.[41]

This emphasis was essential to the work of conscientization, but was also imposed by the need to be able to operate openly and thus legally. However the result, as Lebamang Sebidi argues, was a tendency to draw Black Consciousness activists to idealist positions, believing that material changes would follow from changes in consciousness.[42] For many years the tactics employed by blacks against oppression were rooted in idealism as they appealed, protested, persuaded and negotiated in order to try and change the minds of the oppressors, with little hint of opposition to the whole economic system.[43] Although aimed at the mental slavery of the oppressed rather than the attitudes of their oppressors, Black Consciousness, at this stage, was still under the influence of this kind of idealism, focussing not on the oppressive structures of society but on the ideas shaped and determined by these structures. So, secondly, for this reason, together with the need to unite all blacks in opposition to *apartheid*, the movement avoided taking up positions on issues like

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41. Biko, op.cit., p68.

42. Sebidi, in Mosala and Tlhagale, op.cit., pp23-4.

43. Ibid., p27.

socialism which would have been divisive. After the events of 1976, however, these emphases were to change.

2.1.3 Post-1976: A Shift Towards Material Transformation

The events of 1976, Steve Biko's death in detention in September 1977, and the subsequent banning of all Black Consciousness organisations in the same year[44], mark the beginning of a new stage in black opposition to white domination. Now a painful awareness of the power and deep entrenchment of the *apartheid* system, and of the ruling group's determination to maintain domination at any cost led to something of a crisis among participants in the struggle over the adequacy of their analysis and strategy.

For the Black Consciousness movement the second phase began in earnest with the formation of the Azanian People's Organisation(AZAPO) in 1979 and saw also the establishment in 1983 of the National Forum as a loose grouping of non-collaborationist individuals and organisations. AZAPO's *Constitution and Policy* affirmed that membership would be open to blacks only[45] and committed the organisation to the philosophy of Black Consciousness.[46] Like SASO and BPC, AZAPO continued to maintain that South Africa belonged to its black inhabitants, that the struggle for liberation was theirs since only they had nothing to lose by the overthrow of the present system, and that integration belonged to the period of reconstruction but not to the era of struggle which it merely impeded.

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44. *Race Relations Survey, 1977*, SAIRR, Johannesburg, March 1978, p124.

45. AZAPO *Constitution and Policy*, op.cit., Section 3.1, p2.

46. Ibid., Preamble, p1.

There was however a discernible change of emphasis inherent in AZAPO's constitution and policy. With less reference to consciousness the stress was now on opposition to "oppressive socio-political structures."[47] Asserting that black people are "a race of workers"[48], AZAPO envisaged "a persistently militant system of Trade Unions" as "an instrument that can bring about the re-distribution of power."[49] Unlike the Black Consciousness Movement of Azania - BCM(A) - as the movement constituted itself in exile, AZAPO could not operate openly and, at the same time, support the armed struggle, and its constitution does not even use the word 'socialism'[50], but from 1976 a shift in this direction clearly took place within Black Consciousness.[51] As Mofokeng was to put it later,

> From a philosophy which rightly and timely emphasized among others the psychological dimension of black people, Black Consciousness Movement logically developed to a point where it adopted Scientific Socialism as its ideological instrument.[52]

Consequently Black Consciousness in its second phase has made more systematic use of class analysis while rejecting, as wholly inadequate to the South Africa situation, the position of sections of the white left that the issue is only one of class. Were that the case one would expect to find a solidarity of interests between white and black workers which

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47. Ibid., Policy 2b, p17.

48. Ibid., Policy 2g, p18.

49. Ibid., Policy 5, p19.

50. The Constitution of BCM(A) published by BCM(A), London, n.d., commits the movement to "scientific socialism"(Preamble, (b)(vii), p2) and armed struggle(Preamble, (b)(viii), p2).

51. Nolutshungu, op.cit., p206.

52. Mofokeng, "The Evolution of the Black Struggle and the Role of Black Theology", in Mosala and Tlhagale, pp121-2.

manifestly does not exist. One would also expect to find a black middle-class incorporated into the white bourgeoisie, a co-option which has been tried within the *apartheid* structures and has failed.[53] Restricted by the legally instituted racism of the South African socio-political order the black middle-classes could not participate fully in the advantages, even the economic advantages, of their class membership.[54] Since domination was expressed in racial terms, race had to be recognised as the major determinant of class in South Africa[55], with important consequences for the nature of opposition to the system.

> The mode of domination in South Africa, essentially related to the colonial origins of the social formation, supplemented the class places determined by the economic division of labour with racial places in the political and ideological superstructures which disfavour even those Blacks who might otherwise be disposed to defend the economic division and the underlying mode of production which gave rise to it. This establishes an interest for all Blacks in the removal of the structures of domination.[56]

So Black Consciousness has moved to a second stage of conscientisation. Nkosi Molala, AZAPO president since 1986, describes it this way:

> The objective is to consolidate and understand what socialism is all about, to expose the inequalities of capitalism and to bring socialism into sharp relief as the only relevant solution.[57]

As we shall see, this shift within Black Consciousness towards committed opposition to the capitalist exploitation so closely connected to racist

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53. Nolutshungu, op.cit., p148.

54. Ibid., p197-8.

55. AZAPO, Policy 4, p18.

56. Nolutshungu, op.cit., p198.

57. *The Weekly Mail*, Johannesburg, 20-26 February 1987.

oppression in South Africa, has had important consequences for the development of Black Theology, leading to a more profound questioning of not only the racial influence upon but also the economic and class interests behind the Christian discourses.

2.2 The Incidental Message to Whites

Black Consciousness expended little effort in trying to win the hearts and minds of whites. As the chairman of the BPC Ad Hoc Committee put it in 1972, "at present we have no attitude towards the whites. They are irrelevant." [58] The freeing of black thinking and living from domination by white concepts and values even involved a rejection of multi-racialism, non-racialism and integration because, in Biko's words, "the context of getting rid of white-black tensions was still a white context."[59] Whites had to understand that blacks were not asking to be allowed to integrate into white society but were calling for a radical structural transformation of South Africa's economy and body politic, for people "do not and cannot love each other if their material interests conflict."[60] This transformation would eventually lead to reconciliation between equals in a just and free society, but the means to this end had to be a strong black solidarity with which to confront racism: "...the devil must be driven out first. It is too soon to love everybody."[61]

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58. *Black Review 1972*, op.cit., p11.

59. In Woods, op.cit., p136.

60. Khoapa, in *Black Viewpoint*, Biko(ed.), Spro-cas, BCP, Durban, 1972, p66.

61. Ibid., p64.

The shock for many whites came when it became clear that this attack on white society included all white people and not only explicit racists or supporters of the Nationalist government. In fact the whites of whom proponents of Black Consciousness were most suspicious were the liberals, and for three reasons.

First, since even liberals benefitted materially from the system of white supremacy their real commitment to radical change was doubted. In Biko's words,

> White society collectively owes the blacks so huge a debt that no one member should automatically expect to escape from the blanket condemnation that needs must come from the black world. It is not as if whites are allowed to enjoy privilege only when they declare their solidarity with the ruling party.[62]

Second, their motivation was suspected to be guilt rather than genuine concern. Third, and perhaps more important, for these reasons their participation and their disproportionally great influence tended to "dilute the revolutionary fervour"[63] of the black struggle for liberation. Liberalism treated the South African system as a moral error on the part of whites which required correction and reform while Black Consciousness saw it as deliberate, needing only to be overthrown.[64]

In general liberal whites were hurt that their role and contribution to the black struggle should be so dismissed. Many found it hard to accept that their 'whiteness' placed them among the oppressors even if they had opposed

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62. Biko, *I Write What I Like*, op.cit., p66.

63. Mkhatshwa, *Reality*, May 1975, p8.

64. Biko, "Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity", in Moore(ed.), p40.

Afrikaner nationalism. As Alan Paton asked:

> What should white liberals do? Should they leave the country? Should they keep silent for ever more? Should they go north to be trained as guerilla fighters? Or should they just lie down and die?[65]

Yet others did seem to hear and understand Black Consciousness more clearly. Gerald Stone[66] argued that if white liberals really believed in justice they should not stand in the way of the Black Consciousness movement by insisting on dominating the black struggle for freedom. Nadine Gordimer saw that it was time for whites to give up the role of proctors for blacks and admit their guilt:

> Whether we like it or not, whether we support or oppose apartheid, we whites belong by virtue of our faces to white power.[67]

So the call to whites was effectively a call to repentance, to see and admit that they were the makers, or at least beneficiaries, of the crosses which blacks had to carry, and to recognise that anything they did within the system which did not contribute towards its radical transformation was like offering sour wine on a stick to the crucified. For Maurice Ngakane, associate General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches(SACC), Black Consciousness was an opportunity for whites to examine their sins:

> We want you to stand in tears before God. It will only be after you have repented to God that we shall return and meet you half-way.[68]

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65. Paton, *Reality*, March 1972, p9.

66. Stone, *South African Outlook*, Sept.1972.

67. Gordimer, in *Reality*, Nov.1971, p16.

68. Ngakane, *Ecunews*, 13 Aug.1975

So the first word of Black Consciousness to whites concerned the inescapable theological or ethical fact of sharing in the guilt of one's people, or social class which, in South Africa, is one's race. Thus it is puzzling that Biko should have regarded guilt as somehow an impure motive for white involvement, though perhaps he was simply wary of the kind of guilt which becomes obsessive in its need to make satisfaction and could thus lead to a wrong-headed, uninvited involvement in the black struggle. It would rather seem that for whites the bearing and confessing of guilt is the appropriate ethical starting point for engagement in the black-led struggle for liberation.

CHAPTER THREE: BLACK THEOLOGY IN SOUTH AFRICA

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Black Consciousness and Black Theology

A striking feature of the radicalism associated with Black Consciousness is that it maintained any interest in Christianity at all and did not simply write it off as irredeemably oppressive. Yet the BPC's concern "to re-orientate the theological system with a view of making religion relevant to the aspirations of the black people"[1] was echoed even by AZAPO one of whose aims was "to promote an interpretation of religion as a liberatory philosophy relevant to the black struggle."[2] The reason for this interest was explained by Biko: "Too many people are involved in religion for the blacks to ignore it."[3] Or as the American Black Theologian, James Cone, wrote in a paper for the Black Renaissance Convention:

> Some 'ultra Blacks' discard the Black church, but I remind them that there can be no revolution without the masses, and the black masses are in the churches.[4]

So de Gruchy talks of the "tremendous impact" Black Consciousness had on the churches[5], challenging Black Theologians, in Goba's words, to take seriously the particularity of black experience."[6] Black Theology thus

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1. *Black Review 1972*, op.cit., p12.
2. AZAPO Constitution, op.cit., Section 2, Aim 3, p2.
3. Biko, *I Write What I Like*, op.cit., p31.
4. Cone, in *Black Renaissance*, p72.
5. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, op.cit., p152.
6. Goba, in Mosala and Tlhagale, op.cit., p68.

emerged as a theological response to the challenge of Black Consciousness[7], and as what Motlhabi describes as a form of conscientization of the grass-roots.[8]

Theologically this meant a re-appropriation of the Christian message by and for the black oppressed. Oppressed black people wanted to look again at the Bible but from their own perspective, not that of the white missionaries, colonizers and rulers. Biko charged that the Bible had been interpreted in a manner totally irrelevant to the struggling masses, and had been so directed inwards and aimed at the belittling of people that it had become the ideal instrument for the maintenance of the subjugation of blacks.[9] But once they had reclaimed their own humanity and dignity, black people could no longer be content with such an interpretation which made them feel, in Gqubule's words, like "God's step-children."[10]

So, as we shall see, a reclaimed doctrine of humanity became the driving force behind Black Theology and this had a profound effect on the whole of the theological enterprise. Black Consciousness had led to "the birth of the new black subject"[11] and it was this person as "an active subject of his own history"[12] once again, who now did theology.

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7. Ibid., p62.

8. Motlhabi, *The Theory and Practice of Black Resistance to Apartheid*, op.cit., p260.

9. Biko, *I Write What I Like*, op.cit., pp56-7.

10. Gqubule, *JTSA*, Sept.1974, p19.

11. Mofokeng, *The Crucified Among the Crossbearers*, Kok, Kampen, 1983, p13.

12. Ibid., p11.

The result was a deep questioning of the god preached by the oppressors of black people; in Manas Buthelezi's words,

> People are waiting to hear something about God the liberator who takes sides by carrying the Cross and going out to where the struggle is at Mount Calvary and suffering for others.[13]

That is, the doctrine of God was being reconstructed through the person of Jesus Christ as the "centre, area and circumference"[14] of Black Theology. But this was not a Christology drawn from the doctrines of the Church, defining Christ in metaphysical categories concerning the relation of humanity and divinity in his person. Rather this was a Black Christology grounded in an anthropology which had its roots in Black Consciousness, helping black theologians "to see Jesus Christ as he is, particularly in our situation."[15] Guided by the concern to make black people whole, this was a Christology which came to Christ not to dwell on his divine characteristics but to draw upon his humanity.

3.1.2 Responsible Theology

As Black theologians set out on the attempt "to concretize the liberating message of Jesus Christ"[16], what Motlhabi refers to as Phase I of Black Theology got under way. He describes this phase as "polemic and

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13. Buthelezi in *Black Renaissance*, p23.

14. Baartman, "The Significance of the Development of Black Consciousness for the Church", in JTSA, No.2, March 1973, p20. See also Boesak, *Black Theology Black Power*, op.cit., p13.

15. Goba, in Mosala and Tlhagale, op.cit., p68.

16. Goba, "Doing Theology in South Africa: A Black Christian Perspective", *JTSA*, June 1980, p27.

17. Motlhabi, in Mosala and Tlhagale, op.cit., p(xiii).

definitional(introductory) with some passing allusions to method"[17] and Goba sums it up as a "prologemena" to a theology in the making.[18] The inspiration for this phase came from the collection of essays which was eventually published overseas under the editorship of Basil Moore.[19] Later it was to be the work of Manas Buthelezi - "the leading exponent of Black Theology"[20] - and Bonganjalo Goba which was to stand out, along with Allan Boesak's *Farewell to Innocence*[21], the first full-length scholarly work of South African Black Theology. This was "a theology of protest against apartheid"[22] and "a revolt against the spiritual enslavement of black people, and thus against the loss of their sense of human dignity and worth."[23]

The second phase identified by Motlhabi was to be more academic and characterised by attempts to take Marxist analysis, an element long present in Latin American liberation theology, seriously[24], and can be seen to parallel the shift we have identified within the Black Consciousness movement. Yet, while well aware that freedom has a structural as well as an attitudinal aspect[25], Black theology in its early stage tended to be

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18. Goba, *JTSA*, June 1980, op.cit., p25.

19. All references in this paper are to the British edition edited by Moore(*Black Theology: The South African Voice*, op.cit.)

20. Motlhabi in Mosala and Tlhagale, op.cit., p(xi)

21. Here we use the British edition, *Black Theology Black Power*, op.cit.

22. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, op.cit., p161.

23. Moore, in Moore(ed.), op.cit., p(ix).

24. Motlhabi in Mosala and Tlhagale, op.cit., p(xiv).

25. Mpunzi, in Moore(ed.), op.cit., p130.

suspicous of a class analysis that might cloud the race issue.[26] The focus at this stage was on the existential category of 'blackness' and the emphasis was on responsible theology, responsible not only to the Bible and Christian tradition but also to black humanity and the reality of its situation in South Africa.

3.1.3 Freedom from Racial Domination

Having identified racism as the primary cause of black suffering in South Africa, Black Theology in its first phase thus concentrated on liberation from a racially defined and expressed oppression. The emphasis was on black people doing theology by and for themselves, free of the dominating influence of whites. Thus Goba rejected as unreal the concept of a multi-racial church in South Africa which would, like all other multi-racial ventures, be dominated by whites.[27] Rather blacks had to rediscover their humanity within the context of the real South Africa, not within a fictitious multi-racialism, but in a black church in an oppressive society. Theologically, as well as politically, the "victims, and the victims alone have to be the liberators."[28]

Notwithstanding the emphasis on race, there was a deeper awareness of the nature of black oppression among many black theologians even in those early years. Thus a resolution on Black Theology produced by a seminar at Hammanskraal in 1971 in rejecting "interracial fraternisation as a solution to the problem of this country" did so because "the basic problem is that

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26. Motlhabi, in Mosala and Tlhagale, op.cit., p(xiv).

27. Goba, *Pro Veritate*, Sept.1971, p9.

28. Mofokeng, *The Crucified Among the Crossbearers*, op.cit., p10.

of land distribution and the consequent disinheritance of the black people."[29] Nyameko Pityana saw, too, that "Christianity is rooted in an exploitative, basically selfish cultural system"[30] so that racism was not the only problem Black Theology would have to confront. Similarly, Boesak was critical of the failure of J.Doetis Roberts to challenge the American system in depth and his desire simply to have blacks included in the present establishment. Boesak, on the other hand, was more interested in transforming the system which keeps blacks oppressed.[31] For Boesak, Black Theology was "a new way of looking at the world we live in and at the responsibility of the church in the world"[32] in the process of which the church could no longer maintain "the bland kind of innocence"[33] which ignored the realities of rich and poor, oppression and liberation from oppression. It would be too simplistic to suggest that Black Theology in its first stage was concerned with race and the second stage with class, but the more systematic integration of class into the process of theologising certainly does belong to the second phase.

3.1.4 Liberating the Gospel

The self-understanding of Black Theology in its first phase reveals a concern not only with the freedom of black people but with the liberation

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29. *Pro Veritate*, July 1971, p25.

30. Pityana, "What is Black Consciousness?", in Moore(ed.), op.cit., p62.

31. Boesak, *Black Theology Black Power*, op.cit., p133.

32. Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, Orbis, Maryknoll, NY, 1984, p2.

33. Ibid., p3.

34. Mosothoane, "Towards a Theology for Southern Africa", *Missionalia*, Nov.1981, p99.

of the Gospel itself.[34] Boesak believed that Black Theology was not a new, politicised faith "but rather the age-old gospel"[35]:

> Liberation theology reclaims the Christian heritage and reinterprets the gospel to place it within its authentic perspective, namely, that of liberation.[36]

This same belief was the central message of Manas Buthelezi's *Six Theses* which saw Black Theology not only as an attempt to make the Gospel "relevant to the existential problems of the black man"[37], but as an attempt "to save Christianity in South Africa".[38] Black Theology was more than an assertion of black power and rights, it was an obligation to the truth, an intellectual and spiritual responsibility of black Christians.[39]

Central to this liberation of the Gospel was the exposure of the "Babylonian Captivity of Theology"[40]:

> Until now, white Western theology lived under the illusion that it was a *universal* theology, speaking for all those who call themselves Christian.[41]

The fact that traditional theology did not consider the oppressed but actually spoke for the rich and powerful led to suspicion of its

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35. Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, op.cit., pp26-7.

36. Boesak, *Black Theology Black Power*, op.cit., p147.

37. Buthelezi, "Six Theses", *JTSA*, No.3, June 1973, Thesis 1, p55.

38. Ibid., Thesis 3.

39. Buthelezi, *Black Theology: A Quest for the Liberation of Christian Truth*, LWF/DCC, All Africa Lutheran Consultation on Christian Theology in the African Context, Gabarone, 9-14/10/1978, p52.

40. Ibid., p53.

41. Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, op.cit., p55.

intellectualism and un-Jesus-like inaccessibility to ordinary people[42], its claimed objectivity and detachment from experience[43], the worship of antiquity[44], and the priority of theory over praxis.[45] This theorism, like intellectualism and objectivity, led to "a form of theologising that is not incarnational"[46] but was rather pietistic and individualistic. Black Theology, then, according to Cedric Mayson, was part of the reformation of the twentieth century, a "rediscovery of the original gospel of Jesus, whose most bitter opponents are the supporters of the status quo religion."[47] Even Biko declared that "black theology does not challenge Christianity itself but its Western package, in order to discover what the Christian faith means for our continent."[48] This is a fair description of Black Theology in its first stage, distinguishing Biblical Christianity from its Western husk, affirming black identity and rejecting oppression and the oppressed mentality. However, as we shall see, by the early 1980s Black Theologians, influenced by the developments within the Black Consciousness movement, were going further and questioning what in the first stage was still seen as the kernel.

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42. Buthelezi, *Black Theology: A Quest for the Liberation of Christian Truth*, op.cit., pp53-4.

43. Ibid., p54.

44. Ibid., pp54-5.

45. Ibid., p55.

46. Ibid., p55.

47. Mayson, *Pro Veritate*, May 1977, p15.

48. In conversation with Bernard Zystra, quoted by Woods, op.cit., p137.

3.2 The Influence of North American Black Theology

While the roots of South African Black theology are set firmly in its own historical and social circumstances, and it cannot be described simply as a theology imported from the United States[49], the emergence of Black Power and Black Theology in North America "powerfully influenced black people in South Africa" as both Boesak and Goba have testified.[50] Since only a few South Africans, notably Boesak himself[51], have engaged in serious and systematic dialogue with North American Black Theology, this influence must not be exaggerated but it was a significant factor in the early years of South African Black Theology's first phase - especially through the writings of James Cone - and we must take proper account of it.

American Black Theology has its earliest modern roots in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Significantly this locates the origins of Black theology not in the seminaries or universities but in the context of the black struggle for racial justice. In this period the primary aim was the integration of black people into white society, and the movement's theology emphasised love, reconciliation and peaceful protest. However Cone believes that following the march on Washington in August 1963 the integrationists among U.S. blacks began to lose ground to the black nationalist philosophy of Malcolm X, so that the philosophy of Black Power began to replace the demand for integration among many in the Civil Rights

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49. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, op.cit., p154; Kretzschmar, op.cit., p59.

50. Boesak, *Black Theology Black Power*, op.cit., p15; Goba, in Mosala and Tlhagale, op.cit., p62.

51. Boesak, *Black Theology Black Power*, op.cit., especially Chapters 2 and 3.

movement.[52] And it was especially under this more militant influence that Black Theology grew and developed.

Thus the conscious beginning of American Black Theology can be traced to the 1969 Atlanta Document of the National Committee of Black Churchmen(NCBC)[53] affirming "the justness, humanness and theological soundness"[54] of James Forman's revolutionary Black Manifesto[55], which had brought to a climax the demands of the Black Power movement. These black clergymen determined to take into account the black experience of faith and life in a community of poverty and oppression, and set themselves the task of addressing, as no other major theologian had ever done, the poor, the black and the downtrodden.

Theologically this involved a "rejection of European metaphysical speculations."[56] Cone describes the aim of the emergent Black Theology in this way:

> To theologize *from within* the black experience rather than be confined to duplicating the theology of Europe or white North

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52. Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church*, Skotaville, Johannesburg, 1985, p10.

53. In Wilmore and Cone, *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979*, Orbis, Maryknoll, New York, pp100-2.

54. See the initial response of the NCBC's Board of Directors, in Wilmore and Cone, p91.

55. In Wilmore and Cone, pp80-9.

56. Cone, "Epilogue: An Interpretation of the Debate among Black Theologians", in Wilmore and Cone, p611.

America was the main objective of the new black theology.[57]

For Gayraud Wilmore this was American Black Theology's first stage[58], rooted strongly in the black struggle and its social activism.

In the late 1960s American Black Theology began to enter a second, more academic stage[59] during which Cone, who played a major role, admits that, controlled by and serving the interests of black professors rather than the radical black clergy, "black theology and religion took on a more conservative bent."[60] Cone now sees the principal defect of this academic stage as the fact that Black Theologians were not sufficiently accountable to the black church and black community.[61] While Wilmore shows that even during this period Black Theology was not unaffected by external events[62], its main response was directed towards academic criticisms and challenges rather than the direct needs and experiences of the black struggle.

In his earliest works[63], Cone argued, relying heavily on the Bible, that liberation is the content of theology. Furthermore this content is inseperable from the oppressed condition of black people and gives them

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57. Cone, *For My People*, op.cit., p5.

58. Wilmore, General Introduction, Wilmore and Cone, pp4-5.

59. Ibid., p5.

60. Cone, *For My People*, op.cit., p26.

61. Cone, *For My People*, op.cit., pp26-7.

62. Wilmore in Wilmore and Cone, op.cit., p5.

63. *Black Theology and Black Power*, Seabury Press, NY, 1969; *A Black Theology of Liberation*, op.cit.

64. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, p17-30.

power to break the chains of oppression[64]:

> Through Christ the poor man is offered freedom now to rebel against that which makes him other than human.[65]

Racism was a denial of the Incarnation and of Christianity itself, and the white Church which perpetuated it was unChristian[66], requiring to reorientate its style towards blacks, identify with the oppressed, change sides and share the sting of oppression itself.[67]

Adopting a Christocentric focus consciously influenced by Karl Barth, Cone set out from the position that Jesus Christ is "the sole criterion for every Christian utterance" apart from whom one cannot talk about God or humanity.[68] Thus his theological starting point was not the history and present situation of the oppressed black community, but rather liberated black humanity as it was found in the biblical Christ. Taking from Barth the idea that the Gospel of Christ is the revelation and the giving of the righteousness of God, Cone concluded from Christ's identification with the poor and oppressed, and the righteousness held out to them in his message of liberation[69], that for twentieth century America the Gospel *is* Black Power, because Black Power *is* the righteousness of God.[70] Once Cone had identified Black Power as the expression today of the loving and righteous character of God, in his solidarity with the (black) oppressed and in his

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65. Cone, *Black theology and Black Power*, op.cit., p36.

66. Cone, "The White Church and Black Power", in Wilmore and Cone, p119.

67. Ibid., pp125-6.

68. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, op.cit., p34.

69. Ibid., pp44-5.

70. Ibid., p37.

anger against (white) injustice, there could be no compromise which implied reconciliation with unrighteousness. Insofar as Black Power was the concrete demand for justice in American society, Cone was being quite consistent to identify the Gospel with Black Power. Thus Cone connected the Christian message very directly and concretely with the present black situation.

This approach of Cone's was criticised by other Black Theologians, notably his brother Cecil Cone and Gayraud Wilmore, who were concerned about Cone's heavy reliance on non-black, European theologies to deal with the problem of black suffering, and as normative in relation to the black experience.[71] Wilmore believed that the complete uniqueness of black religion was the proper subject matter of Black Theology and not Christian categories as defined by white theology.[72] Both Wilmore and Cecil Cone argued that the black religious experience, which is not reducible to Christian doctrine, is the proper source of Black theology.

Cone soon accepted the validity of the argument that "Black religion or the Black religious experience must become one of the important ingredients in the development of a Black Theology."[73] Admitting that he had perhaps been excessively captive to European thinking, he began to list black experience, black history and black culture as sources of Black Theology alongside the revelation, Scripture and tradition[74]. He then settled on

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71. Young, *Black and African Theologies: Siblings or Distant Cousins?*, Orbis, Maryknoll, NY, 1986, p36.

72. Cone, in Wilmore and Cone, pp617.

73. Ibid., p618.

74. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, op.cit., pp54-74.

a norm which would emerge as a harmony between the black condition and the Biblical revelation[75], so that there could be no talk of liberation without reference to Christ and no talk of Christ without reference to black liberation.[76] Having accepted that the resources of black experience had to be probed more deeply as primary data for Black Theology[77], Cone was nevertheless critical of his brother's "superficial" analysis of black religion[78] which seemed to lead him to understand black religion in such spiritual terms that it was distanced from all politics.[79] James Cone connected black religion more closely with politics[80] but at the same time the distance which his new methodology now created between the Bible and black experience led him to share his brother's concern that Black Theology should not become ideology.[81]

However in *My Soul Looks Back* Cone offers a defence of his early methodology which clearly still has some force for him. There he points out that the concern of the Black Church with the person of Jesus Christ, with the Bible as the Word of God, and with preaching as the means of communicating the Word of God today, is closely paralleled by Barth's emphasis on the three-fold form of the Word of God, the Revealed Word in

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75. Ibid., p76.

76. Ibid., pp78-9.

77. Motlhabi, "The Historical Origins of Black Theology", in Mosala and Tlhagale, p42.

78. Cone, in Wilmore and Cone, op.cit., p618.

79. Ibid., p620.

80. Ibid., p620.

81. Ibid., p619.

Jesus Christ, the written Word in the Bible and the Word preached.[82] Thus taking seriously black religion as it is actually practised in the black community, rather than as the academics would wish it to be, Cone does not find the use of Barth's theology as alien to black experience, nor indeed as conservative, as his critics seemed to find it.

Yet while Cone did move away from his earlier, and more strictly Barthian, hermeneutic there is little evidence that he wished to give any revelational significance to the black experience *per se*. Rather, accusing Wilmore of omitting Scripture entirely from his list of the sources of Black Theology[83] it still seems to be "the biblical Christ who is present in the black experience but not limited to it"[84] that is the norm of Cone's theology. The black condition confers a privileged perspective for understanding the Bible, and black liberation - in more recent years broadened to include the liberation of black women and liberation from capitalist exploitation[85] - is the primary aim of Cone's theologising. But he would still appear to regard the Scriptures as the Word of God and as a sufficient resource for the liberation of the oppressed.

The criticisms of Cone from South African Black Theologians such as Allan Boesak[86], and Desmond Tutu[87] tend to focus on his earlier methodology

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82. Cone, *My Soul Looks Back*, Abingdon, Nashville, 1982, pp80-1.

83. Cone, in Wilmore and Cone, op,cit., p618.

84. Ibid., p619.

85. Cone, *For My People*, op.cit., Chapters Six and Nine.

86. Boesak, *Black Theology Black Power*, op.cit., p97-8.

87. Tutu in a review of Cone's *God of the Oppressed*, *JTSA*, No.31, June 1980, p74.

when he identified the Gospel exclusively with Black Power, apparently not noticing that Cone soon moved from this position. As we shall see, Cone's later hermeneutic was very similar to that developed by most South African Black Theologians in the first phase. This is clear from their respective Christologies.

Cone is worried about the danger of making Christ in one's own image by giving pre-eminence to the present situation over and against the Bible.[88] His answer is to stick closely to the historical Jesus, stressing that history is "the indispensible foundation of Christology."[89] By 'historical Jesus' he does not mean the Jesus behind the text, as in the 19th century 'quest', for he finds all that is necessary for black liberation in the New Testament Jesus who identifies with the poor, brings the Kingdom of God to them and empowers them for liberation. The means whereby Cone relates this historical Jesus to people today is to insist that the Christological significance of Jesus is found in his blackness[90]; this does not refer to the literal colour of Jesus but locates him theologically as "a fellow sufferer"[91], one whose blackness expresses the concreteness of his continued presence in the world today. As we shall see this was the kind of Christology that was soon to develop in South African Black Theology.

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88. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, op.cit., p201.

89. Ibid., p212.

90. Ibid., p213.

91. Young, op.cit., p42.

3.3 Humanity

3.3.1 An Anthropological Starting Point

The impact of Black Consciousness on South African Black Theology was to give priority, and considerable influence, to its doctrine of humanity. As Black Theologians struggled to engage in theological reflection on the situation of black living in South Africa it was clear to them that the black situation had never been taken seriously in the theology of a church which, after Constantine, effectively became white.[92] The 'humanity' of white theology had become increasingly bourgeois and unrepresentative of people in the real world, an abstraction which could only distort theological thinking. No account had been taken of the 'non-whites', those who were alienated and excluded from the social, economic and political goods of a white-dominated society. And so in the context of dehumanisation and oppression it was essential, as Sabelo Ntwasa argued, for black seminaries to give priority to the doctrine of humanity as a doctrine which must be reworked with reference to the black situation, and in concrete not idealistic or utopian terms.[93]

This search for black identity, dignity and humanity, when placed in the context of the Christian faith, was interpreted, biblically and Christologically, as the creation of the new person in Christ. He was the one who shared the condition and sufferings of black humanity and yet was able, against all adversity and opposition, to be wholly and authentically

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92. Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, op.cit., p30.

93. Ntwasa, "The Training of Black Ministers Today", in Moore(ed.), op.cit., p146.

human. In solidarity with this Jesus black people were set on the road towards the full realisation of their true humanity.[94] The context of this search for identity was also firmly that of liberation for it was "a struggle for wholeness through liberation."[95] Any gospel which was not a gospel of liberation was not based on a doctrine of black humanity and inevitably sided with the oppressor.

So Black Theology began by insisting that since the human situation is one of "a house divided against itself"[96], the theological concept of humanity could not be treated as if it were a single, undifferentiated whole. The idea that Black Theology was arguing *against* was neatly put by Byang Kato in one of his customary blasts against all deviations from what he, and many others, saw as the evangelical faith:

> The Incarnation of our Lord is the assumption of humanity in general and this includes both the rich and the poor, the oppressor and the oppressed, the black and the white.[97]

Such a position, argued the Black Theologians, just did not take the story of Jesus seriously for he did not assume a general form of humanity but came as one oppressed.

> His message had an effect among the poor. It had little or no positive effect among the rich and the privileged.[98]

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94. Buthelezi, "The Theological Meaning of True Humanity", in Moore(ed.), op.cit., p98.

95. Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, op.cit., p48.

96. Dwane, "Investigating God's Liberating Love", *JTSA*, Dec.1982, p40.

97. Kato, "An Evaluation of Black Theology", *Bibliotheca Sacra*, July-Sept.1976, p250.

98. Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, op.cit., p11.

An examination of the Gospel accounts made evident Jesus' option for the poor and oppressed for he "summoned the lowly to claim and to strengthen their own humanity."[99] It was also clear that Jesus directed different words and warnings to the poor than he did to the rich and the rulers. For Black Theology this fact had theological significance. As James Cone wrote:

> Jesus had little tolerance for the attitude of the middle- or upper-class religious snob which attempted to usurp the sovereignty of God and destroy the dignity of the poor.[100]

Poor, black, oppressed humanity, on the other hand, was in no danger of usurping the sovereignty of God and Black Theology wanted to lay its emphasis on God's lifting up of this humanity.

Yet, as Siggibo Dwane stressed[101], Black Theology's challenge to white theology did not represent an exclusive appropriation of the Gospel by blacks. In fact Louise Kretzschmar talks about the remarkable restraint of Black Theology in not excluding whites.[102] Black people were certainly claiming the right to do theology by and for themselves, rejecting white definition and white tutelage, but the black nationalism and exclusivism of Albert Cleage's theology was not taken up in South Africa. So Black Theology never dismissed reconciliation as a central theme of Christian theology, although against a background of an all too easy preaching of cheap reconciliation the emphasis was now put on the cost of reconciliation

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99. Ibid., p13.

100. Cone, "Black Theology and Black Liberation", in Moore(ed.), Op.Cit., p54.

101. Dwane, "Christology and Liberation", *JTSA*, June 1981, p31.

102. Kretzschmar, op.cit., p82.

and the impossibility of its co-existence with injustice and oppression.[103]

Black theology, like Black Consciousness, aimed not for black victory but for the inclusion of both whites and blacks in "a true humanity where power politics will have no place."[104] Exactly what role this allowed whites to play in the struggle was a matter of disagreement. Boesak reflected the dominant political climate of the 1980s when he said, at the founding of the non-racial United Democratic Front in 1983, that while he understood those who rejected black-white cooperation until after liberation, the fact that apartheid did not have the support of all whites, some of whom had paid heavily for their involvement in the struggle, meant that all who were committed to justice had to fight together.[105] But for whites inclusion was dependent on the recognition of their collective guilt as perpetuators or beneficiaries of the apartheid system. Only if white people committed themselves to the black struggle for liberation in ways that went far beyond liberal sympathy and allowed themselves to enter concrete solidarity with the poor and be counted among the oppressed could Black theology treat them any differently. But,

> If White Christians are going to play the role of Ananias and Saphira, or the rich young man, then they cannot belong to the new covenant community.[106]

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103. Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, op.cit., p29.

104. Biko, in Moore(ed.), op.cit., p39.

105. Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, op.cit., pp160-1.

106. Dwane, *JTSA*, June 1981, op.cit., p31.

3.3.2 Community and Solidarity

Ntwasa expressed a common belief amongst Black Theologians when he charged that in European theology there was a "negative concentration on the individual."[107] This had misled Africans to attempt to solve individually problems that affected them as a group; black solidarity was thus broken. Black Theology gave priority to its recovery.

Goba held that in order to rediscover their rightful place in South African society, blacks had to recover the deep-rooted sense of solidarity found in the African kinship system.[108] He identified as central to this system the concept of 'corporate personality', also found in ancient Israel, which understood individuals to exist in and out of relationships with each other in community and solidarity of being and action.[109] This traditional solidarity also contained within it a strong measure of vicariousness, "a love that suffers selflessly for others"[110], which other Black theologians also stressed as a vital element of the Christian presence in the struggle. Mere presence, argued Buthelezi, was an act of solidarity and, insofar as it involved a sharing in the sufferings of others, contained a vicarious, redemptive component.[111] But this sense of

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107. Ntwasa, "The Concept of the Church in Black Theology", in Moore(ed.), p111.

108. Goba, "Corporate Personality: Ancient Israel and Africa", in Moore(ed.).

109. Ibid., pp65-6.

110. Ibid., p69.

111. Buthelezi, "The Christian Presence in Today's South Africa", *JTSA*, Sept.1976, p6; "Mutual Acceptance from a Black perspective", *JTSA*, June 1978, p75.

corporate personality had been destroyed by materialism and capitalism, for solidarity was broken by the creation of a black elite which had turned its back on the black masses.[112] However it could be recovered by "a broad community coalition"[113], a united front within the black community which would see individualism superceded by concern for the welfare of the community, and privilege surrendered or used for the good of all.

This use of the idea of corporate personality in itself responds to the criticism of David Bosch who believed that many of the writers in UCM's Black Theology anthology of the early 1970s, and especially Goba, exaggerated the extent of traditional African solidarity which tended to be limited to members of the extended family. A solidarity which extends beyond the tribe to include all the destitute and the needy was not to be found anywhere in Africa, argued Bosch.[114] Bosch however was operating with a very static understanding of African culture while Goba was appropriating the concept of corporate personality for service in the modern struggle in a way that was dynamic and open to change according to the demands of the circumstances. Since it was not one tribe or clan but all blacks who were now being oppressed as a group the shared belief in the corporate personality could be appropriately used in the service of solidarity in their common struggle. Thus Buthelezi placed black solidarity firmly in the context of modern South Africa where the black Christian shares "the stigmata of alienation" with non-Christians, drinks

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112. Ibid., p69.

113. Ibid., p71.

114. Bosch, "The Case for Black Theology", *Pro Veritate*, 15 August 1972, p7.

from the same wells and necessarily discovers with them a "solidarity in alienation."[115] This does not allow Christians to withdraw into a spiritual or ecclesiastical ghetto but keeps them in the struggle, filling others with the same hope and assurance of victory that sustains them.[116]

3.3.3 A Positive Doctrine of Humanity

Essential to Black Theology's anthropology, in the context of the denial and denigration of black humanity, was a far more positive and optimistic view of humanity than that taught by Western Christianity.[117]

> Now traditional Christianity, as taught us by our know-all white tutors, has set out to teach us a lot about our shortcomings and little about the positive and essentially good nature of man.[118]

Behind the traditional Western emphasis on the sinfulness of human nature Simon Maimela identified a white view of South African history "in which every human self is the enemy of every other human."[119] This fear of others had led, in the past and present, to apartheid and, with regard to the future, to proposed alternative political dispensations which sought to protect minorities.[120] The result was a theology which "often delights in rebuking social activists for their optimism about human possibilities

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115. Buthelezi, in Moore(ed.), op.cit., p151.

116. Ibid., pp147-8.

117. Mpunzi, in Moore(ed.), op.cit., p137-8.

118. Ntwasa, in Moore(ed.), op.cit., p111.

119. Maimela, "Man in 'White'Theology", *JTSA*, Sept.1981, p31.

120. Ibid., p33.

121. Ibid., p35.

to change and to do good"[121], and a belittling of human creativity and contribution. [122] Such an anthropology Maimela rejected not only because it ignored or denied the inter-racial trust and cooperation to which South African history itself was witness, but also because the teaching of the Bible made clear that while people were thoroughly sinful, they were not irredeemably so and had the capacity, in Christ, to live otherwise. Thus Black Theology wished to awake black people from a powerlessness and weakness which masqueraded as faith by drawing on that aspect of the Christian tradition which affirmed rather than abased humanity. Such an anthropology was rooted in the story of oppressed black people, not in the distant history of middle-class Europeans, and was concerned not with cutting arrogant people down to size but with the creation of acting black subjects, people who could wrest control of their own history, not from God, but from their oppressors.

This did not mean that Black Theology was unconcerned with the sin of black people. Boesak charged that blacks were not totally innocent when they helplessly accepted or participated in their own oppression[123], and he spoke of the guilt of those whose only Christian concern seemed to be fleeing this world into heaven.[124] This aspect of sin was that stressed by most Black Theologians, but Buthelezi went further to incorporate a wider, and perhaps more traditional, view of sin into his understanding of the Church in Africa. The Church could not be allowed to see itself - as it did under the influence of a European pietism which separated the religious

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122. Maimela, "Towards a Theology of Humanization", *JTSA*, Dec.1982, p63.

123. Boesak, *Black Theology Black Power*, op.cit., pp5-6.

124. Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, op.cit., p9.

from the secular - as a righteous, holy island in a sea of unrighteousness.[125] Insisting that all Christians are *simul justus et peccator*, Buthelezi laid emphasis on the fact that the Church is "a community of forgiven sinners instead of rewarded saints"[126], so that the Church's solidarity with the world is a "solidarity in sin with the world."[127] So the sin of black people was not denied but was placed most usefully in the context of the black Church's solidarity with black humanity. However, given the concern of Black Theology with a positive anthropology and with the liberation of those who are sinned against, the working emphasis tended to be on Boesak's definition of sin.

3.4 God

3.4.1 Rejecting the White God

The omnipotence, omniscience and supreme authority of the God of the missionaries was rejected by Black Theology for two reasons. The first reason was that Black theology was not interested in "the nature of God and his perfections."[128] Mpunzi charged that while the Trinity did represent the heart of the Christian doctrine of God, Western theology had wrongly interpreted it for "it is not a metaphysical doctrine. It is deeply and passionately human."[129] Western theology had sought in the doctrine of

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125. Buthelezi, "The Concept of the Church in an African Setting", LWF/CCC Regional Consultation, Arusha, Sept. 1973, p32.

126. Ibid., p31.

127. Ibid., p30.

128. Maimela, "Black Power and Black Theology in Southern Africa", *Scriptura*, June 1984, p46.

129. Mpunzi, in Moore(ed.), op.cit., p138.

God an explanation of how things are so that as knowledge expanded, and human explanations were found, the deity was reduced to what Mongameli Mabona referred to as a 'God of the gaps' to explain those areas not yet illuminated by human wisdom.[130] Recognizing that such a God will ultimately become meaningless, Mabona insisted that the Christian God was not such an abstraction but an integral part of the whole of life in which sacred and secular could not be separated. The doctrine of God was not an explanation of anything, according to Mpunzi, but a vision of how things ought to be. It affirms the uniqueness of the persons of the Trinity who live in community; people are made in the image of this God with no superiority or authoritarian power over others.[131]

And it was this emphasis on authority that constitutes the second problem that Black theology had with the Western god. This divine image was seen to be one which emerged from the top of the social structure, reflecting a god to whom the proper response was simply surrender and obedience which were precisely the demands made on black people by the dehumanising, white racist authorities in South Africa. This was "a sectarian God"[132], a white god, belief in which perpetuated and justified the racism and oppression of the status quo and reinforced a sense of black inferiority and worthlessness. So Black Theology sought a different image of God:

> In the place of these authoritarian images we should explore those images which speak of the suffering God who is identified with the oppressed in their suffering and who struggles in and

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130. Mabona, "Black People and White Worship", in Moore(ed.), p105.

131. Mpunzi, in Moore(ed.), op.cit., p139.

132. Maimela, in *Scriptura*, June 1984, op.cit., p46.

133. Motlhabi, "Black Theology and Authority", in Moore(ed.), p127.

with them to lift the burden of oppression.[133]

Ntwasa and Moore argued that the authoritarian image of god had to be replaced by a relational concept which could still see God as Person, but not one 'over' or 'beyond' his people, rather one who affirms human authenticity, freedom and wholeness, and gives the room to be and to be fully.[134]

3.4.2 God the Liberator

Since Black theology identified liberation as "a central Scriptural motif"[135] - Boesak agreeing with Cone that liberation is not merely part of or consistent with the Gospel but is "the content and framework of the gospel of Jesus Christ[136] - the primary picture of God to emerge was naturally that of Liberator. The character of God was seen to be revealed in two texts which had priority as interpretative keys for the rest of Scripture: the Exodus narrative, which described the paradigmatic event in God's dealings with the world[137], and Jesus' quotation from Isaiah 61 in Luke 4.[138] In this way Black Theology saw itself as recovering "the Lord of the Scriptures"[139] whose love and justice are revealed simultaneously in concrete, liberative deeds. So while emphasising human history, rather

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134. Ntwasa and Moore, "The Concept of God in Black Theology", in Moore(ed.), pp26-7.

135. Dwane, *JTSA*, Dec.1982, op.cit., p44.

136. Boesak, *Black Theology Black Power*, op.cit., p9.

137. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, op.cit., p163.

138. Mosothoane, "The Use of Scripture in Black Theology", in Vorster(ed.), *Scripture and the Use of Scripture*, 1979, p31.

139. Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, op.cit., p71.

than some spiritual realm, as the arena of God's encounter with humanity this was understood primarily in terms of biblical history. And since God's involvement was at its deepest in the story of Jesus of Nazareth it is to Christology that we must turn for a proper understanding of the God of Black Theology.

3.5 Christology

3.5.1 On Traditional Christology

We can usefully gain insight into the direction in which Black Theologians wished to take their "self-consciously christocentric"[140] theology by noting some responses to the traditional Christological debates. Dwane recognized Athanasius as the great champion of the teaching that Christ is true God and truly human but he had problems with the Alexandrian method. This approached Christology from the side of eternity, as the becoming human of the second Person of the Trinity and interpreted salvation as a process of divinisation,[141] suggesting also that salvation consisted in the overcoming of humanity. This tendency was exaccerbated by Athanasius who, in reaction against the Arian claim that the Logos is a creature, overstressed the otherness of Christ in a way that tended to separate Christ's humanity from that of others.[142] Frank Chikane has also pointed out the limits this kind of 'Christology from above' places on the humanity

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140. Maimela, "The Atonement in the Context of Liberation Theology", *JTSA*, June 1982, p45.

141. Dwane, "Christology and the Third World", *JTSA*, Dec.1977, p4.

142. Ibid., p6.

143. Chikane, "The Incarnation in the Life of the People in Southern Africa", *JTSA*, June 1985, p38.

of Jesus.[143] Not only does this allow believers to bring their own pre-conceived concepts of divinity to Christ, but it also points them away from the world to see salvation only in vertical terms.[144] This model of Christology, Chikane believes, has so divided divinity and humanity that in the crisis in southern Africa, "humanity without divinity" is headed towards disaster.[145]

Dwane found a better model for Christology in the Antioch school where salvation was understood in terms of humanisation.[146] This was an approach which took seriously both humanity and the humanity of Christ, and highlighted the essential solidarity which the incarnation created between them. Black Theology could make use of such a Christology, for it started in the real world where black people suffer, and it did not merely take the humanity of Jesus for granted but asserted it aggressively.[147] This, in Chikane's view, is to begin with an open concept of divinity and allow the words and the praxis of Jesus to shape and mould the image of God. Then, following Albert Nolan[148], Chikane sees that divinity is not something entirely different from humanity since Jesus' divinity is the transcendent depth of his humanity.[149] For Chikane, Jesus destroys the dichotomy between humanity and divinity in our lives so that there is no distinction between the sacred and the secular, the vertical and the horizontal, but

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144. Ibid., p38.

145. Ibid., pp42-3.

146. Dwane, *JTSA*, Dec.1977, op.cit., p7.

147. Ibid., p8.

148. Nolan, *Jesus before Christianity*, David Philip, Cape Town, 1976.

149. Chikane, op.cit., p39.

only between good and evil, justice and injustice.[150] So Chikane will not speculate on the relationship between humanity and divinity in Christ since to him the humanization brought about by the incarnation is at the same time divinization, and his interest is focussed not on the philosophical explanation but on ethics.[151]

Black Theology's concern to recover the humanity of Jesus also found precedent in Liberal Protestantism but, notes Dwane, the results were disappointing, leaving only "an anemic Jesus, whose Gospel amounted to no more than a mere handful of moral precepts."[152] Approaching the story of Jesus from the perspective of the black oppressed, Black theologians in general were convinced that they would find a more substantial historical Jesus than these bourgeois European liberals.

It might be thought that the concern for history would lead Black Theology towards an 'Event' Christology as opposed to the traditional Western emphasis on the 'Person' of Christ, but Dwane rejected any forced choice between the two.[153] Believing firmly that "Jesus is the Man through whom God reveals what true humanity is"[154] and that in this human being we have to do with God's own self, Dwane affirmed a 'Person' Christology which

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150. Ibid., p44.

151. Ibid., pp44-5.

152. Dwane,*JTSA*, Dec.1977., op.cit., p8.

153. Dwane, *JTSA*, June 1981, op.cit. Chikane, on the other hand, seems to prefer a functional model for the South African context, which will focus on the acts rather than the person of Christ, and will emphasise salvation rather than the question of the humanity and divinity of Christ.(Chikane, op.cit., p39.)

154. Ibid., p37.

emphasised the act and character of God. But any 'pure' concentration on the Person of Christ which did not take into account his interaction with, challenge to and effects upon the history in which he participated would be inadequate, and so an understanding of the events must be allowed to inform, shape and deepen knowledge of the Person. Dwane, in company with most other proponents of South African Black Theology in its first phase, was not giving up belief in the full humanity and full divinity of Christ, but Black Christology was not concerned with 'how' this could be explained.[155] Rather, with the focus redirected from divine being to earthly involvement, the concern was with the ethical implications of God's participation in human affairs for those who claim to be his disciples.[156]

Simon Maimela's survey of traditional Western theories of the atonement, from the perspective of the oppressed[157], is also instructive for an understanding of the Christological concerns of Black Theology. The typically liberal 19th century moralistic theory, seeing in the cross a revelation of the love of God which moves and inspires people to repentance, Maimela rejects as wholly inappropriate. The work of Christ was made inward and subjective, principally because the bourgeois life did not experience much concrete suffering, and consequently suffering had to be posited in abstract terms.[158] Such theories serve oppressors well for

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155. Ibid., p37.

156. Ibid., pp33-5.

157. Maimela, *JTSA*, June 1982, op.cit.

158. Ibid., p47.

159. Ibid., p47.

they seem "incapable of grasping the radical quality of concrete evil and oppression"[159], and present no challenge to the structures of oppression and no liberation from them.

The satisfaction theory of the atonement, which describes Jesus as satisfying the justice of God, by accepting humanity's punishment and thus fulfilling on behalf of others the demands of God's unchangeable law, Maimela also rejects as inadequate. The main problem with this theory is that it so focusses on the death of Christ that it effectively bypasses the rest of his life and so "fails to comprehend the extent of divine involvement in human suffering on behalf of the oppressed."[160]

> It ignores the fact that God is totally for the cause of man, and that he risked his divinity through the Incarnation in order to fight for and on behalf of man.[161]

Thus relationships between God and people are placed within a legal framework which, at the very least, implies a divine distance from and indifference towards human suffering, and, at worst, pictures God as a feudal lord or even enemy of humanity. Moreover, Maimela points out, the satisfaction theory, by over-emphasising individual sin, deals no better with the situation of oppression in which black people live than does the liberal theory. Maimela wants to insist that the atonement does far more than the satisfaction theory suggests; not only does it forgive sins, it transforms the human situation.[162]

The ransom theory, Maimela argues, at least takes evil seriously as an

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160. Ibid., p48.

161. Ibid., p48.

162. Ibid., p49.

objective power, manifest as principalities and powers. Jesus is described as a ransom paid to the devil in order to release humanity from the bondage of sin; the devil accepted, hoping to destroy the power of God for ever, but his failure to hold Jesus in bondage represents his ultimate defeat and powerlessness before God. However, as Maimela shows, this theory once again tends to focus on personal rather than structural evil, and "it fails to historicize this divine struggle against earthly oppression and injustice."[163]

So Maimela finds these traditional theories of the atonement "grossly inadequate to express the full and comprehensive dimension of what the life and death of Jesus on the cross entail."[164] He then goes to the heart of the differences between liberation theologies and traditional Western theology to identify the root cause of his dissatisfaction:

> The disagreement is on what is the right understanding of what is wrong with humans and their earthly situation(traditionally expressed by the term SIN) and how this human situation or problem can be solved.[165]

Theories of the atonement, Maimela notes, depend on how sin is understood. For Black Theology, as for all theologies of liberation, sin is not merely an inner, personal reality, but a social, historical fact which manifests itself in broken community and in structures which keep people apart, in enmity and in oppressive, dehumanising social relationships. To be effective "the atoning work of Christ ushers in a totally new state of existence in which all forms of human deprivation, degradation and misery

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163. Ibid., p50.

164. Ibid., p50.

165. Ibid., p51.

are abolished."[166] This is scarcely recognised by traditional Christology which by and large emerges from, and addresses itself to, the European middle-classes who are not oppressed; the historical and structural aspects of sin and evil are just not recognised by those whose humanity is the beneficiary rather than the victim of such oppression.

3.5.2 Concrete Christology

Black Theology has been very conscious of the black oppressed as the recipient community of God's revelation in Christ, and of the privileged position conferred by that perspective for interpretation of that revelation. So,

> Black Theology calls to black churchmen to start defining the Christ-event for themselves and to stop waiting for others to do it for them.[167]

This they did not by beginning with eternity and divinity and confessional concepts, but from the side of humanity and history and the historical Jesus. Black Christology was indeed an answer to the question 'Who do you say that I am?'[168] - and most agreed with Boesak that "Jesus of Nazareth was the concrete and living image of God"[169] - but black humanity was integrally involved in this enquiry so that the question really became 'Who is Jesus for us?'[170] The answer witnessed to a God who was not far away in his infinity and his perfections, but a God who has taken sides with

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166. Ibid., p52.

167. Ntwasa, in Moore(ed.), op.cit., p112.

168. Gqubule, *JTSA*, Sept.1974, op.cit.

169. Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, op.cit., p10.

170. Goba, *JTSA*, June 1980, op.cit., p27.

black humanity and whose character is defined in relation to his love for them and his concern to lift them out of their oppressed condition.

As an incarnational theology, drawing on the insistence of Gregory of Nazianzus that Christ can only heal that which he assumes, Black Theologians in general affirmed Christ as the Black Messiah. Most would not go as far as Albert Cleage[171] who insisted on the literal blackness of Jesus, but Boesak acknowledges the debt Black Theology has to Cleage for this emphasis:

> The importance of the concept of the Black Messiah is that it expresses the concreteness of Christ's continued presence today.[172]

To be the Redeemer of black people Jesus had to take upon himself black existence and black experience, and share in black history in all its oppression by and opposition to whiteness.

However Black Theologians did not wish to distort the identity of Jesus and, aware of the danger of an ideologised picture of Christ, the emphasis was on the life and ministry of Jesus as witnessed to by the New Testament.[173] To do this is simply to take the "concrete reality" of the incarnation seriously[174] in all its social, political and economic

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171. Cleage's Black Messiah actually represented a confessional, rather than an historical position, i.e., he insisted on the Black Messiah for theological not historical reasons.

172. Boesak, *Black Theology Black Power*, op.cit., p42.

173. This approach was echoed by the Latin American Liberation Theologian, Orlando Costas, at SACLA held in Pretoria in July 1979; see his "Contextualization and Incarnation", in *JTSA*, Dec.1979, p29.

174. Buthelezi, "Daring to Live for Christ by Being Human and by suffering for Others", *JTSA*, July 1975, p8.

aspects, as well as in its ethical implications. Thus Mosothoane wanted to draw out the historical and theological significance of Jesus' association with the poor and the outcasts, stressing the actual situation of these people, their oppression, their poverty and their temptation to collaborate. Then Mosothoane wanted to place liberation in the wider framework of the Kingdom of God with which comes freedom from destitution, oppression, indignity, isolation and alienation.[175] For Dwane this reminder to theology that Jesus was poor and kept humble company represents a rediscovery of the humanity of Jesus, a humanity which has tended to be obscured by the institutional Christ who suits the culture and concerns of the middle- and upper-classes of Western society.[176]

> The rediscovery of the humanity of Jesus, and the fact of his poverty have led to a new understanding of his work of salvation as liberation and humanization.[177]

The Christ of Black Theology is thus the Liberator who frees both from internal bondage and from external enslavement.[178] Jesus does not stand in a neutral position between oppressed and oppressor, exploited and exploiter, good and evil, God and the devil. Rather, in a situation of conflict, he makes "a preferential option for the victims and against the victimizer."[179] In this divine bias is the assurance "that, in the end, Christ and his own will triumph over any sort of evil and suffering.

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175. Mosothoane, "The Liberation of Peoples in the New Testament", *Missionalia*, Aug.1977, p74.

176. Dwane, *JTSA*, Dec.1977, op.cit., p8.

177. Ibid., p10.

178. Pityana, in Moore(ed.), op.cit., p63,

179. Chikane, op.cit., p46.

Victory is certain."[180]

The general position of Black theology at this stage, then, was to approach the humanity of Jesus without questioning the traditional confessional standpoint, rejecting adoptionism[181] and affirming that in this Jesus we have to do with God. The resurrection was thus seen not as any proof of the divinity of Christ nor as a divinisation but as the vindication of his humanity, of the human life he had lived in solidarity with the poor.[182]

3.5.3 Ethical Christology

The ethical orientation of Black Christology sprang from the conviction, expressed by Dwane, that "God's engagement with the world in Jesus Christ has the character of a partnership"[183] with the humanity of Christ as "the archetype of the partnership between God and man."[184] Similarly Maimela described the liberation attained by the atoning work of Christ as

> a dynamic historical process in which man is given the promise, the possibility and the power to overcome all the perverted human conditions on this side of the grave.[185]

Human power and the earthly condition are thus identified as important foci of Black Christology.[186] Ntwasa made clear the implications of such a Christology for the life of the Church:

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180. Muzorewa, op.cit., p105.

181. Ibid., p11.

182. Ibid., p10.

183. Dwane, *JTSA*, June 1981, op.cit., p35.

184. Ibid., p36.

185. Maimela, *JTSA*, June 1982, op.cit., p52.

186. Buthelezi, *JTSA*, June 1975, op.cit., pp7-8.

> The Church therefore cannot be seen simply as the company of believers who have had spiritual experiences. It is the company of those whose lives are perceived to have the quality of Christ-in-his-struggle-against-human-bondage. It is thus the company of liberators, or it is not the Church.[187]

The political concern of Black Theology was guided by the nature of its Christology. So Goba explained that the death of Christ was political, not because of the political circumstances surrounding his execution, but because "in his death we see God identifying Himself with the wretched, the downtrodden of the earth."[188] It was the mere fact of Christ's, and Christian, solidarity with the victims, and the experience of pain and view of reality from that perspective, that was subversive of the socio-political structures, even before anything 'political' was said or done.

In South Africa, then, the Christian faith is political "not ultimately because of the existing political conditions but because the gospel is itself the hope and source of liberation for those who are victims of oppression."[189] Desmond Tutu has frequently underscored the concrete, material concerns of the Gospel to which self-interest has blinded the rich oppressors but which can be understood from the underside of society:

> It seems to me that those who have opposed the so-called social gospel have usually been those who enjoyed the status quo and did not wish to see it overturned. It is almost always the ones whose bellies are full who say religion and politics don't

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187. Ntwasa, in Moore(ed.), op.cit., pp114-5.

188. Goba, "The Task of Theological Education in South Africa", *JTSA*, March 1978, p28.

189. Ibid., p28.

190. Tutu, "Church and Nation in the Perspective of Black Theology", *JTSA*, June 1976, p9.

mix.[190]

The Gospel is intrinsically, and not merely incidentally, political and this is so because Christ came in solidarity with the poor.

This focus on Christ's identification with the victims gave suffering a key role in Black Theology's ethic, because this was seen to be the point of contact between the story of Jesus and black experience. For Buthelezi this treated seriously, as theologically central, both the violence of the cross and Christ's whole life of suffering, as well as the experience of those for whom life seems like one long Good Friday.[191] He distinguished between two types of suffering. There was oppressive suffering, such as experienced by black people in South Africa, which was an evil not to be endured or borne stoically like the sufferings of Christ; rather it had to be opposed and fought.[192] On the other hand there was redemptive suffering, "after the model of Christ's suffering"[193] which flowed out of love for others and concern for their plight:

> All suffering occasioned by striving to live for others to the point of placing one's life at stake is redemptive.[194]

Here Buthelezi was taking Black Theology's ethic a stage further than solidarity with the victims, for redemptive suffering is, essentially, vicarious, an act of love on behalf of the neighbour, which is, in turn, a

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191. Buthelezi, "Violence and the Cross in South Africa Today", *JTSA*, Dec.1979, 53.

192. Buthelezi, *JTSA*, June 1975, op.cit., p9.

193. Ibid., p9.

194. Buthelezi, "Giving Witness to the Heart of the Gospel", *IRM*, Oct.1984, p417.

195. Buthelezi, *JTSA*, Dec.1979, op.cit., p54.

sign of "Christian fellowship in a deep sense"[195] While he argued that oppressive suffering is not in itself redemptive, Buthelezi believed, a year before the 1976 uprisings, that the suffering of blacks in South Africa was becoming redemptive, with many prepared even to make the ultimate sacrifice in the struggle for the freedom of their people.[196] This vicarious living was, for Buthelezi, the epitome of the Christian ethic in the unrest and violence of the South African situation:

> To serve one's neighbour means to identify oneself with him and take his place in doing what he cannot do for himself.
>
> In serving your neighbour you vicariously become him in the sense in which Christ became ourselves on the Cross.[197]

So Buthelezi placed the ethical act in a Christological framework, involving the risk of suffering which Christ took when he made concrete his love for humanity, as a vicarious act arising out of the deep commitment of solidarity.

At this stage there would appear to be something of a tension in Black Theology. One stream could perhaps be called 'activist theology' under which heading much of the theology of Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak falls, emphasising a Christ who is the living incarnation of what Biko called "a fighting God"[198], taking up the struggle for the poor and encouraging the oppressed to protest and resistance. Here the emphasis was on civil disobedience, opposition to forced removals, non-violent action - all in the name of the God who actively works for justice in the world - and the

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196. Buthelezi, *JTSA*, June 1975, op.cit., pp9-10.

197. Buthelezi, "Theological Grounds for an Ethic of Hope", in Moore(ed.), p153.

198. Biko, in Moore(ed.), op.cit., p43.

aim was explicitly to bring about political changes, to transform the oppressive and inhuman structures.[199] It was this political imperative that would not allow Boesak to permit any emphasis on reconciliation - which he agrees is properly part of the Christian ethic - to detract from *Black Theology's* concern with liberation, insisting that there could be no short-cut to God's love which by-passed his justice.[200] This approach was described by Boesak as "an ethic of transformation"[201] and perhaps this was what Moltmann had in mind when he described liberation theology as a theology of the Exodus and Resurrection, rather than a theology of the Cross.[202]

However Moltmann's comment does not do justice to the whole of South African Black Theology when we consider that alongside this 'activist theology' there developed, particularly in the work of Buthelezi, a significant theology of the cross. No less committed to active Christian participation in the struggle, Buthelezi tended to describe this involvement in terms of a more passive pain-bearing solidarity, and he spoke of suffering for others as the Christian contribution, and of *kenosis* or emptying oneself, rather than resistance, being the principle of social action.[203] Similarly Dwane, when he discussed Jesus' solidarity with the poor, the homeless and the oppressed, did so using language like

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199. Boesak, *Black Theology Black Power*, op.cit., p145.

200. Boesak, ibid., p131.

201. Boesak, ibid., p148.

202. Moltmann, "The Liberation of Oppressors", *JTSA*, March 1979, p25.

203. Buthelezi, *IRM*, Oct.1984., op.cit., p418.

204. Dwane, *JTSA*, Dec.1977, op.cit., p9.

'defenceless' and 'weakness'.[204] In view of this emphasis on the cross it is puzzling that Boshoff should comment that "the cross of Christ does not figure in Black Theology as much as in classical Biblical Theology."[205] Admittedly the cross may not mean for Black Theologians what it has meant for white theology which even Moltmann describes as "the forgiveness of sins, repentance and rebirth to new life in discipleship to the Crucified."[206] But Dwane describe the cross as the setting free of the oppressed from self-pity, anger bitterness, hatred and desire for revenge.[207] For Black Theology in general the cross has been a sign of God's solidarity with the oppressed and of his judgement of their oppressors. And seen as it always is in the light of the victory of the Resurrection, Buthelezi could describe the ethic flowing from this theology of the cross as "an ethic of hope."[208]

This tension had possible theological implications. Both groups accepted the Bible as the norm for Black Theology. However 'activist theology' tended to begin with the situation and demands of the black struggle, allowing this experience to set the theological agenda; the function of Black Theology was to provide the biblical resources for transformation. On the other hand, Buthelezi and Dwane started with and centred on the cross of Christ from which hope is derived and which determines the nature of participation in the political struggle. This theology of the cross tended to stress the distinctively Christian contribution to the struggle -

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205. Boshoff, "Christ in Black Theology", *Missionalia*, Nov.1981, p122.

206. Moltmann, op.cit., p25.

207. Dwane, *JTSA*, June 1981, op.cit., p31.

208. Buthelezi, in Moore(ed.), op.cit., p150.

in terms of vicarious, Christ-like suffering - and saw this contribution as adequately defined by Scripture, the South African situation providing only the context and not the content of Christian action. However, activist theology by at least recognising a two-fold starting point - the Bible and the situation - was perhaps more open to the suggestion that black experience be given more weight in the theological hermeneutic.

3.6 The Critique from African Theology

3.6.1 Black versus African Theology

One important source of criticism of Black Theology has been from the school of thought which identifies itself as African Theology. Leaving aside the argument about whether there need be any absolute distinction between Black and African theologies, we simply note that a distinction has been made and an important debate has taken place which has a bearing on our discussion. By African Theology we mean that theology done by Christians in Africa which is concerned with the insights and values of traditional African culture and religion, and their relationship to the religion brought by the missionaries. Black Theology, on the other hand, emerging as it does from situations of oppression in southern Africa, focusses on the present political imperative of liberation and the role in achieving this goal of the religion of the black Christian. Our interest in the debate concerns the charge of African Theology that Black Theology does not take sufficient account of the African past and the African experience in its theologizing.

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209. Mbiti, "An African Views American Black Theology" in Wilmore and Cone, pp477-82.

Indeed to the African Theologian, John Mbiti[209], it seemed that Black Theology was a response to the American rather than the African situation and was thus avoiding other important theological issues not directly related to liberation. He saw it as a theology that was so restricted in its concerns that it had little direct relevance for an Africa whose situation of Christian living it hardly knew. Mbiti admitted that "Black Theology has a measure of relevance in Southern Africa"[210] though he saw its Black Theology so far(1974) as no more than an echo of North American Black Theology.

The nature of James Cone's response to Mbiti's criticisms is interesting. While the debate in large measure turned on the precise nature of the black predicament, Cone based his defence of Black Theology not on the disputed nature of the black experience but on the common ground of Scripture. He argued that African Theology's concern for indigenisation and selfhood was quite legitimate, but the political ingredient of the Gospel could be ignored by any theology that seeks to be faithful to the Biblical witness.[211]

However in South Africa, participants in the debate have addressed themselves directly to the matter of the interpretation and use of the black experience. Manas Buthelezi[212] recognized that it could be difficult to distinguish between Black and African Theology on the African continent since both purported to arise from and address the

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210. Ibid., p481.

211. Cone, in Wilmore and Cone, op.cit., p497.

212. Buthelezi, "An African Theology or a Black Theology", in Moore(ed.).

life-situations of black Africans, but he distinguished between them in terms of their different methodologies. African Theology, he believed, had an ethnographic approach[213], where the theological starting point was an ethnographic *reconstruction* of the African past. This was both possible and valid, but he questioned the use of these reconstructions - such as 'the African mind' and 'the African worldview' - as points of departure for theological methodology, for two reasons. Firstly, this tended to treat culture as static and see the African worldview as something independent of and isolated from the present anthropological reality of African people. And secondly, Buthelezi recognised a tendency to romanticize this ethnographically reconstructed past at the expense of present-day realities. He admitted that the past could be used as a resource for liberation today but was worried that it might become escapist. For theology to be indigenous it must not only deal with 'African things'[214] but it must also reflect the living realities of modern African life.

Buthelezi contrasted this with the anthropological approach of Black Theology which began theological reflection in the real-life situation in which the Gospel found people. This treated 'blackness' as a category which has "some existential decisiveness"[215], which in South Africa determines the existence, circumstances and possibilities of Africans:

> The realisation of our authentic humanity as black people does not consist merely in reconstructing the old patterns of a past theological and sociological world-view, but in gaining access as black people to that which constitutes the wholeness of life

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213. Ibid., p31.

214. Ibid., p33.

215. Ibid., p29.

in the present day world.[216]

While the past could certainly be an inspiration in the present, for Buthelezi in South Africa

> an African theology tied to a past traditional heritage smacked of something similar to the Government's attempt to link the political future of the Black man to past traditional institutions like the chieftanship.[217]

Buthelezi wanted to be able to assert pride in the traditional heritage but he clearly suspected that a missionary attitude and the self-interest of whites was behind the attempt to ground a relevant theology in traditional culture, which might only serve to further enslave the African mind.[218] He saw the strength of Black Theology as residing in the theological honesty with which it recognized the realities of black life, in all its poverty, humiliation and dehumanizing aspects.

African Theology has been accused of political naivete but this should not blind us to the fact that it too has political roots so that its concerns do not necessarily blunt the political imperative of Black Theology. Mbiti has argued that, in contrast to Black Theology, African Theology arose not from the pain of oppression but from the joy of Christian experience in Africa.[219] However Josiah Young points out that, parallelling the political background of Black Theology in both the United States and South Africa, African Theology emerged against the background of African

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216. Ibid., p34.

217. Buthelezi in Becken(ed.), *Relevant Theology for Africa*, Lutheran Publishing House, Durban, 1973, p20.

218. Buthelezi, in Moore(ed.), op.cit., p34.

219. Mbiti, in Wilmore and Cone, op.cit., p481.

220. Young, op.cit., p91.

nationalism and opposition to colonialism in the post-war era.[220] During that period, which saw the political independence of an increasing number of African countries, a new Africa-consciousness was awakened which is perhaps best epitomised by Leopold Senghor's philosophy of *Negritude*. In political terms the "affirmation of the African personality"(Patrice Lumumba)[221] sought expression in Nkrumah's Pan-African vision and in the African Socialism of Nyerere and others, while in religious terms the result was African Theology.

In many ways African Theology still has its roots in the optimism of the independence era, convinced that the key to a better future lies in the good soil of African tradition and culture but unable to make any systematic challenge to the new political realities.[222] Despite Henry Okullu's warning about the dangers to the Church of living in "the period of Constantine"[223], African Theologians, with notable exceptions such as Okullu himself and Burgess Carr, formerly of the All-Africa Conference of Churches(AACC), have taken little serious account in their theologising of the political problems of post-colonial Africa. Thus Tutu has commented that "African theology has failed to produce a sufficiently sharp cutting edge"[224] not only in his own South Africa but also throughout the rest of the continent:

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221. *Lumumba Speaks: The Speeches and Writings of Patrice Lumumba, 1958-61*, Little, Brown and Co., 1972, p320.

222. Hastings, *A History of African Christianity, 1950-1975,*, CUP, 1979, p232.

223. Okullu, *Church and Politics in East Africa*, Uzima Press, Nairobi, 1974, p12.

224. Tutu, "Black Theology/African Theology - Soul Mates or Antagonists?", in Wilmore and Cone, p490.

> it has by and large failed to speak meaningfully in the face of a plethora of contemporary problems which assail the modern African...very little has been offered that is pertinent, say, about the theology of power in the face of the epidemic of coups and military rule, about development, about poverty and disease and other equally urgent present-day issues.[225]

When Boesak looked at the rest of Africa he saw "a wounded continent", one which is "torn by conflict and war"[226] and he wrote, in a manner clearly critical of the social analysis of Afritan Theology:

> Africa knows too many iron-fisted rulers who have no respect for human rights. The colonial governor's mansion is now occupied by the representatives of new power elites that have as little concern for the people as did the colonialists. All too often "independence" has not meant a new, meaningful life for the people, or a return to the values of African life that would have revitalized society. Values such as the wholeness of life, the meaning of human-beingness, and the relationship between human beings and nature have not been resuscitated in African life, because these values tend to subvert the economic interests of the new elites and their neocolonial masters.[227]

In practice, African Theology has tended to ignore these realities.

However, their criticisms notwithstanding, several of those, in South Africa, who would call themselves Black Theologians have affirmed a positive interest in the emphases of African Theology. Thus Bonganjalo Goba has argued for the recovery of African religious and cultural identity to be given equal weight alongside the struggle for political freedom as interrelated and equally important aspects of authentic liberation.[228]

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225. Ibid., p490.

226. Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, op.cit., p70.

227. Ibid., pp70-1.

228. Goba, *JTSA*, March 1978, op.cit.

229. Mosothoane, in *Missionalia*, Aug.1973, op.cit.

Mosothoane[229] and Buthelezi[230] have affirmed the importance of the traditional sense of solidarity in African family and community life. And Boesak writes

> The final concern of liberation theology in South Africa is the contribution that traditional African thinking and African traditional religion can make to our contemporary thinking and theology. I believe that both our traditional religion and our traditional thinking have a liberating and humanizing word to say to our situation.[231]

Mokgethi Motlhabi insists that a "present without a past is barren." and argues that Black Theologians need to undertake serious research into what it means to be "sons and daughters of Africa"[232], and to

> examine their traditional religions for the unique religious contributions that can be made by them to the Christian teaching and Black Theology.[233]

The consensus seems broadly to be that while the "existential urgency"[234] of Black Theology gives it more direct relevance to the South African situation, African Theology's interest in traditional religion and culture cannot be rejected, as it was by Gqubule[235], as a thing of the past. It is recognized that there are powerful liberative elements in African tradition and that these could be used as resoures in the total liberation and humanization of black Africans, as long as culture

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230. Buthelezi, "The Problem of Work in Contemporary Africa", *Lutheran World*, 1968.

231. Boesak, "Liberation Theology in South Africa", in Appiah-Kubi and Torres, *African Theology en Route*, Orbis, Maryknoll, NY, 1979, p175.

232. Motlhabi, in Mosala and Tlhagale, op,cit., p48.

233. Ibid., p54.

234. Tutu, in Wilmore and Cone, op.cit., p489.

235. Gqubule, *JTSA*, Sept.1974.

is not defined as if it were static but in the concrete and dynamic terms insisted upon by Steve Biko.[236]

Yet, as Buti Tlhagale has shown, in South Africa culture has been defined by the ruling group, with an emphasis on racial and cultural differences, in a way that legitimates its own hegemony.[237] So preoccupied have the ruling elites been with group identity and self-preservation that culture has emphasised the past, the 'heroic tradition' of the Afrikaner and, rather than the "subversive memory"[238] which Tlhagale identifies in African history, the claimed separate and primitive tradition of African societies. But Tlhagale stresses that culture is far more than social heritage and past achievement, for it is a "moving horizon" with a utopian dimension.[239] In South Africa the utopian dimension takes account of the cultural pluralism of the society but it need not be expressed in symbols of conflict or competition where divisions are prominent and domination results. Rather Tlhagale believes in the possibility of an open pluralism in which all cultures are accepted and taken seriously in working for a common goal of a just and equitable society, trust and integration.[240]

Mosala[241] has been critical of both African and Black theologians for their failure to fully identify with the African people and their

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236. Biko, in Moore(ed.), op.cit., p45.

237. Tlhagale, "Culture in an Apartheid Society", *JTSA*, June 1985, pp27-30.

238. Ibid., p32.

239. Ibid., p33.

240. Ibid., pp34-6.

241. Mosala, "African and Black Theologies", Unpublished UCT seminar paper, op.cit.

struggles. This failure emerged from a liberal ideology which isolated the present from the past and has thus protected the privileged position which the liberal elite occupy under the present system, no matter how much they criticise it. This has given African Theology an *apolitical* character which, as we have argued, is not inherent in it but which, in Mosala's view, prevents the rediscovery of African culture from being used as a resource for present-day liberation. Equally the liberalism of Black Theologians has made their theology *ahistorical* and has denied the people they purport to represent the resources that their past development has made available to them to become the subjects rather than the objects of their own history. Mosala thus insists on the essential inseparability of the concerns of Black and African theologies though he perhaps overstates the extent to which the proponents of each have isolated the present and the past from each other. As we have seen, several significant Black theologians - including Buthelezi, Goba, Tutu, Mosothoane and Boesak - have recognized the value of aspects of tradition for the present struggle. And the fact that some African theologians, such as Gabriel Setiloane[242] and Kwesi Dickson[243], have stressed the modern political implications of African culture, albeit under what they insist is the broader heading of cultural freedom, allows us to expect to find in African Theology resources to assist the liberative endeavours of Black Theology.

3.6.2 The Use of the African Experience

The question then arises of how to use traditional African religious

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242. Setiloane, "Confessing Christ Today", *JTSA*, Sept.1975, pp36-8.

243. Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, DLT/Orbis, NY, 1984, pp129-40.

experience and culture in the development of a modern relevant theology. African Theologians have provided three broad approaches to the problem.

In its earliest stage African Theology tended to stress the continuity between Africa's religious past and Christianity as, for example, in John Mbiti's *Concepts of God in Africa*.[244] Traditional religion was thus explored as a possible *preparatio evangelica* in Africa. The conclusion of this approach was that Africa's "cultural waters are deep enough to contain the gospel"[245], for the Gospel could be fully expressed without reduction or distortion in the culture of Africa and should therefore deepen its roots in that culture. The problem of Christianity in Africa was seen as the problem of Africanisation exemplified by Bolaji Idowu's argument that his own church had to bear the unmistakable stamp of the fact that she is the Church of God in Nigeria and not the mission station of some European church.[246] This process of reclamation of the Christian message by Africans as Africans was a stage African Theology had to go through but soon the Gospel and African culture had to be more critically engaged. Thus Harry Sawyerr had to warn[247] that even Europeans like Bengt Sundkler[248] were in danger of over-stating the continuity between traditional religion and Biblical Christianity.

And so a second stage began which was to emphasise not only the continuity

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244. SPCK, London, 1970.

245. Mbiti, "Christianity and African Culture", *JTSA*, Sept.1977, p31.

246. Idowu, *Towards an Indigenous Church*, OUP, 1965.

247. Sawyerr, "The Basis of a Theology for Africa", IRM, 1963.

248. Sundkler, *The Christian Ministry in Africa*, 1960.

but also the discontinuity between traditional religion and the Christian faith. Sawyerr recognised that there were important points of continuity between many elements of African religion and aspects of the Gospel, but he also stressed the radical difference between, for example, the Hebrew concept of history as the unfolding of God's gracious purpose and the traditional African view that the profane world is not real which means that the historical event has no value in itself.

> Sawyerr, then, conservatively makes a case for an African Theology based solidly on Scripture and the Christian tradition from Paul to Barth.[249]

Kwesi Dickson was also concerned to stress that African Theology must proceed under the authority of Scripture and not simply seek sanction from the Bible for the incorporation of certain aspects of African life and thought into the Christian expression.[250] Mbiti has also contributed to the 'discontinuity' stage with his *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background*[251] which seeks to lead his own Akamba people beyond their traditional perceptions by stressing a Christian eschatology to which their religious background has no parallel. The whole thrust of this approach then has been to stress as distinctively Christian that which arises from the *discontinuity* between traditional religion and Christianity. In order to balance the discoveries of the continuity stage more emphasis was now placed on the argument that the "Gospel is a stranger in every culture" and

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249. Josiah Young, op.cit., p73, discussing Sawyerr's *Creative Evangelism*, London, Lutterworth, 1968.

250. "Towards a *Theologia Africana*", in *New Testament Christianity for Africa and the World. Essays in Honour of Harry Sawyerr*, London, SPCK, 1974.

251. OUP, 1971.

"greater than any single culture and all cultures put together."[252] This we can describe as the mainstream of African Christian Theology, stressing that African Christians must be Christian first and African second[253] and that the Scriptures are fundamental to any Christian theology.[254]

A radically different approach is represented by Christian Gaba, John Kibicho and Gabriel Setiloane. They are critical of the kind of study represented by Mbiti's *Concepts of God in Africa* which tends to skim the surface of African religions looking for concepts that can be related to Christian beliefs. Such an approach, they believe, is superficial in its treatment of traditional religion and ends with a serious devaluation of African concepts of God. What is needed is for African Theologians to do proper groundwork by examining in detail the religions of particular peoples, preferably their own. Thus Gaba's study of the ritual utterances of his own Anlo people[255] reveals a wide, all-encompassing religious understanding emphasising the participation of the material in the transcendent. His description of Anlo piety is in fact very different from the impression given by Mbiti's *Concepts*; MAWU, the Supreme Being, is only referred to occasionally with far more interest being shown in the mediatorship of ancestral spirits. Similarly, Setiloane[256] argues for the richness of the Sotho-Tswane perception of MODIMO which is not

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252. Mbiti, *JTSA*, Sept.1977, op.cit., p27.

253. Mbiti, ibid., pp38-9.

254. Muzorewa, op.cit., p22 & p27.

255. *Scriptures of an African People: Ritual Utterances of the Anlo*, Nok Publishers, NY, 1973.

256. Setiloane, "MODIMO: God Among the Sotho-Tswana", JTSA, No.4, September 1974.

understood in a conceptual, rational way but is experienced as "the wholly other".

> MODIMO, the Supreme Deity of the Sotho-Tswana, is in fact a much deeper concept than the Christian translation for God in the Bible or other Christian literature.[257]

Setiloane also argues that African myths of origin make more sense than the Genesis creation myths in terms of portraying people as living in community from the beginning. Kibicho takes this position to argue that "the African had already a full revelation of God, even before the arrival of Christianity in Africa"[258] while the Ugandan Okot p'Bitek took the argument as far as it can go and gave up the Christian faith altogether to return to the superior and more fulfilling practices of traditional African religion.[259] The significance of this more radical approach is that it emphasises the discontinuity between Christianity and African religion not in terms of what the Gospel has to teach Africa, but in terms of what traditional religion has to teach even Biblical Christianity in order to enrich its view of life, humanity and the Divinity. Here the challenge to traditional Christianity concerns more than a greater emphasis on some long neglected Biblical themes, but goes as far as questioning the depth and basis of elements of Biblical teaching in the light of traditional African insights.

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257. Setiloane, "Where Are We in African Theology?", in Appiah-Kubi and Torres, p60.

258. Quoted by Carvalho, "Who is Jesus Christ for Africa Today?", ATJ, 1981, p28.

259. p'Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship*, East African Literature Bureau, Nairobi, Kampala and Dar-es-Salaam, n.d.(probably 1971)

3.6.3 Christ in African Theology

It might be thought that the approach to African Theology represented by Setiloane is not very promising ground for the development of a Christology along the lines sought by Black Theology. The latter seeks to learn of God from the history of Jesus, and to set aside all preconceived notions of divinity, especially those derived from Western philosophy. Setiloane, however, approaches Jesus only on the basis of a careful consideration of traditional African religious beliefs and especially those of his own Sotho-Tswana people, including beliefs about MODIMO, the Source and Force of all life.[260] Rather than attempt to empty the African mind of such beliefs, Setiloane wants to help Africans understand who they are and what they and their ancestors feel and believe in order to be better able to approach the man Jesus less under the influence of 'Western civilisation' and more as Africans with African questions.[261]

The result is that, even while he holds African beliefs superior in many ways to those of Christianity, Setiloane finds African people vitally attracted to Jesus, the man of Nazareth, whose humanity they recognize and whose divinity, as if by some divine possesssion, they have no difficulty in accepting.[262] In fact, Setiloane himself often testifies to having been 'bewitched by Jesus', and it is this close relationship, as if to an ancestor not long dead, rather than any doctrinal belief, that is the basis of his Christology. What he does is to ensure that an African mind-set and

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260. Setiloane, *African Theology: An Introduction*, Skotaville, Johannesburg, 1986, pp27-8.

261. Ibid., pp35-6.

262. Ibid., pp34-5.

African questions are brought to bear on a Christology which is, like that of Black Theology, fundamentally based on the history of Jesus. Thus Setiloane writes,

> I find it enough that the basic record of Jesus, the Man of Nazareth, as the one in whom divinity(bo-Modimo) is found as it has never been found in any living person before and after, is fully accepted by Africans.[263]

From this basis Setiloane believes African Christians can even confess, as at the AACC's first Assembly in Kampala in 1963, that "Jesus Christ is the *only* Lord and Saviour."[264] The effect of Christ on the African world-view is to universalize it, bursting all barriers of clan and tribe to extend "the circles of fellowship, community and mutual responsibility" to the whole of humanity[265] - a belief shared by Mbiti[266] - while at the same time Christ opens up African culture and religion as a resource available to the whole Christian world, for the deepening of its understanding of God and of human relationships.[267]

Setiloane's interest in the humanity of Jesus has been echoed by others who can be regarded as more in the mainstream of African Theology. Thus Mbiti held that Africans are less interested in the sacrificial aspect of the cross than in its indication of the humanity of Jesus, as one who had to go

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263. Setiloane, *JTSA*, Sept. 1975, op.cit., p35.

264. Ibid., p35.

265. Ibid., p36.

266. Mbiti, "Some African Concepts of Christology", in Vicedom(ed.), *Christ and the Younger Churches*, SPCK, London, 1972, p61.

267. Setiloane, *JTSA*, Sept., 1975, op.cit., p38.

268. Mbiti, "Some African Concepts of Christology", op.cit., pp56-7.

through the same rites of passage that all people experience.[268] It is this fellow-feeling for the humanity of Jesus, recognized by Africans as the perfect and complete human being[269], that allows him to be readily accepted as the firstborn among his brothers and sisters, as an elder brother and "a defender, mediator and protector."[270] This identification with the man Jesus also led, centuries before Cone and Cleage, to the teaching of Jesus as the Black Christ, by the prophetess Chimpa Vita, by Simon Kimbangu and in the indigenous Church movements.[271]

So relating to Christ as one who was human like them, and therefore black like them, Africans could relate to Jesus as an ancestor. The importance of ancestrology to Christology in Africa is given some emphasis by many African Theologians.[272] For Goba, this is the basis of "an African Christology to which a new dimension is added of Christ as the forerunner of the living-dead ancestor par excellence, the one whose spirit continues to live in our consciousness."[273] Both African ancestrology and the incarnation itself have at their centre the concept of mediation and so Goba stresses that unless Christ is seen as an ancestor the African view of Christ will be overshadowed by the ancestors.[274]

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269. Ibid., p57.

270. Carvalho, "What do the Africans say that Jesus Christ is?", *ATJ*, No.2, 1981, p17.

271. Ibid., pp18-20.

272. e.g. Muzorewa, op.cit., p14.

273. Goba, *JTSA*, March 1979, p10.

274. Goba, "Three christological models in third world theology", *Theologia Evangelica*, Nov.1982, pp63-4.

If Christ is to make sense against the background of traditional African religion

> it is imperative for Jesus in the African context, to be presented as the man...with a genealogy and an ancestry which establishes his human claims firmly and indubitably.[275]

Most African Theologians, therefore, would find no disagreement with Black Theology's desire to base Christology firmly on the Gospel records, as long as these are not approached with European doubts and questions. The Nigerian, S.O.Abogunrin, has shown that the European quest for the historical Jesus arose in a context and in answer to questions very different than those which characterize present-day Africa. Recognizing that "the thought-world of Africa and that of the Bible are very much identical"[276], he insists that since a Jesus emptied of all supernaturalism is not sought by the African[277], the Christ of European liberal theology is meaningless in Africa. A Christology based on the Gospel records - miracles, healings and resurrections included - does not, therefore, present African Theology with the same difficulties as it does European theology.

Out of the solidarity which they perceive Jesus to have with them and their condition, Mbiti argues that it is important for Africans to be able to welcome Christ as Saviour, as *Christus Victor* who has power to save "in

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275. Dwane, *JTSA*, March 1982, pp22-3.

276. Abogunrin, "The Modern Search of the Historical Jesus in Relation to Christianity in Africa", *ATJ*, Nov.1980, p26.

277. Mbiti("*ho soter hemon* as an African Experience", in Lindars and Smalley(eds.), *Christ and the Spirit in the New Testament*, CUP, 1973, pp413-4.) makes the same point.

278. Mbiti, ibid., p410.

concrete and demonstrable ways."[278] Here the Black Theologian, Simon Maimela, draws on his African heritage in recognizing that the African tradition has a very different understanding of the nature of human problems and the meaning of salvation than that brought by the missionaries.[279] The deliverance offered by traditional religion is not so much from personal sin as from evil, from daily problems, needs and misfortunes, from the injustices of life, from the fear and distress generated by evil spirits, malicious people and wronged ancestors, from the danger of the loss of vital power[280] and from the difficulties created and accentuated by modern social, economic and political changes.[281] This evil is not seen, as in Western religion, as a philosophical problem to be pondered though hardly solved, but as an ethical problem from which salvation is expected. While Mbiti believes that its minimizing of the question of personal sin means that "African Christianity may be seriously defective in its (applied) christology"[282], he nevertheless accepts that, attracted as Africans are to Christ as "physical rescuer and redeemer"[283], the salvation offered to African Christians must be broad enough to deal with the evils that assail them and from which traditional religion provides no ultimate redemption[284]:

> The greatest need among African peoples, is to see, to know,

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279. Maimela, "Salvation in African Traditional Religions", *Missionalia*, Aug.1985, p72.

280. Ibid., pp68-9.

281. Mbiti, "*ho soter hemon*", op.cit., p408.

282. Ibid., pp412-3.

283. Ibid., p411.

284. Ibid., p406.

> and to experience Jesus Christ as the victor over the powers and forces from which Africa knows no means of deliverance.[285]

We should, however, also note Chikane's point that this emphasis on the victorious Christ tends not to be so prominent in the thinking of African Theologians in southern Africa, where the suffering of blacks draws them irresistably to the crucified Christ.[286] Thus in Setiloane's poem, *I Am An African*, it is when Christ is seen by Africans on the cross that they recognize him and cannot resist him.[287]

Given the continuing influence of the African world-view among African Christians today, to which Setiloane[288], Goba[289] and Mogoba[290] have testified, these insights of African Theology can strengthen the Christology of Black Theology. Both schools of thought give a central, and even normative, place to Jesus Christ, both emphasise and attempt to learn from the humanity of Jesus and both seek a practical and ethical, rather than philosophical, Christology. One danger for African Theology, as far as its ethics are concerned, is that its anthropological and Christological concentration on community may tend to give such a conformist sense to the meaning of solidarity that the story of Jesus is not permitted to exercise any critical role over the black community, and the Christian is given no

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285. Mbiti, "Some African Concepts of Christology", op.cit., p55.

286. Chikane, *JTSA*, June 1985, op.cit., p40.

287. Setiloane, in Anderson and Stransky(eds.), *Mission trends No.3: Third World Theologies*, Paulist/Eerdmans, 1976, p130.

288. Setiloane, *JTSA*, Sept.1975, op.cit., p34.

289. Goba, *JTSA*, March 1979, op.cit., p4.

290. Mogoba, *JTSA*, Sept.1985, op.cit., p6

ethical direction beyond the limits of an affirmative solidarity with the community. On the other hand African Theology can usefully remind Black Theology that defining evil beyond the area of personal sin also carries it beyond the political problems affecting black humanity, so that there is a need to take seriously and address the whole range of evils experienced by ordinary black people in their daily lives.

3.7 The Reaction of White Theologians

A 1973 article by G.C.Oosthuizen can be taken as representative of the instinctive reaction of many white theologians towards Black Theology.[291] He listed six criticisms. First, Oosthuizen insisted, anthropology is not theology.[292] Second, Black Theology was insufficiently grounded in the Scriptures which, he asserted, are the only source of Christian theology.[293] Third, Black Theology was in danger of being used as an ideology. Fourth, it overstressed the horizontal at the expense of the vertical.[294] Fifth, Oosthuizen believed, Black Theology tended to violence, revenge, hatred and revolution. And sixth, Oosthuizen objected to the use of the word 'solidarity' because it contained a sense of conflict whether it is applied to whites or blacks.[295]

Oosthuizen's objections are interesting because, while they did express a genuine Christian concern, they also revealed the political interests which

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291. Oosthuizen, "Black Theology in Historical Perspective", SAJAA, 1973.

292. Ibid., p84.

293. Ibid., p89.

294. Ibid., p77.

295. Ibid., p89.

lie behind a white theology which regards itself as pure and free of ideology. Emerging as it does from a dominant social position, white theology tends to define the Gospel in a politically harmless way, as to do with individual forgiveness and personal salvation. Any attempt to focus theological concern on the material human condition or to involve talk of God in an analysis of social reality is seen as a complete politicising and obscuring of the Gospel. Thus Oosthuizen was uneasy about Black Theology's concern with anthropology, though he did not seem to recognize how deeply Christological and incarnational this anthropology is. He disliked Black Theology's focus on the 'horizontal' and its attempts to concretize these concerns, which he labelled 'ideological'.

Yet behind these apparently theological objections there can be identified a fear that Black Theology will shine too bright a light on the structures of society and on those Christians and theologians whose interests these structures serve. Thus Oosthuizen's objection to the conflictual elements in Black Theology failed to recognize that these elements are merely a reflection of the social reality which Black Theology has identified but which white theology would prefer to keep unexposed. The response of Black Theology, as Oosthuizen rightly saw, is revolution in some sense, yet it is not theology but social and political self-interest that makes him read violence, revenge and hatred into this and to attempt to remove as a defence against the powerful front of white domination the necessity of black solidarity. And so Oosthuizen wanted to remove the spotlight from humanity and society and point it in the politically safer direction of God and heaven. Defensive as many white theologians have therefore been about the social position they occupy, it is not surprising that Oosthuizen and others far to his right, such as Carel Boshoff, should grossly exaggerate

the American and European influences on South African Black Theology.[296] This closely echoes the findings of the Steyn Commission of 1982 that Black Theology is Marxist-inspired and pro-violence[297] and, indeed, it reflects the whole of the South African government's propaganda concerning the 'total onslaught' against white domination and supremacy in the sub-continent. Thus even the more 'legitimate' theological concerns of white theology, over the place of Scripture in Black Theology and over whether the motif of liberation is broad enough to describe the whole of the Biblical message[298], must be seen in the light of these dominating political and social interests.

While it is not surprising that whites should feel excluded by the theological emphasis on blackness, the intention of Black Theology was not the exclusion of whites but their conversion and the restructuring of their theological thinking and commitment. Allan Boesak has spoken of the kind of commitment he seeks from whites:

> I speak of those white Christians who have understood their own guilt in the oppression of blacks in terms of corporate responsibility, who have genuinely repented and have been genuinely converted; those whites who have clearly committed themselves to the struggle for liberation and who, through their commitment, have taken upon themselves the *condition* of blackness in South Africa.[299]

Such whites would not be liberals eager to include blacks in a white, or

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296. Boshoff, "Christ in Black Theology", *Missionalia*, Nov.1981, p111.

297. Kretzschmar, op.cit., p102.

298. Boschoff, op.cit., p123.

299. Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, op.cit., p22.

even multi-racial church, but those who accept to be brothers and sisters in a church with a black identity, whose life and message is guided by its blackness, with a commitment to the black community and its struggle for liberation, though this will be a critical involvement.[300]

This message has been heard by white theologians such as David Bosch and John de Gruchy. Thus Bosch saw the necessary first response of white theologians to be "sincere self-examination", a revaluation of theological priorities and assumptions and "a new and radical conversion" to concern for the poor and to share the perspective of the poor.[301] De Gruchy has written of the need for whites to be liberated from their oppressing and he appreciates as one of the fruits of Black Theology the "deep and profound concern for white liberation" to be found among black Christians in South Africa, and exemplified by Buthelezi's *Six Theses* on evangelism.[302] For de Gruchy, white South Africans are challenged by Black Theology in their racism and in their privilege, and they are offered a liberation from their fear.[303] But more than this, whites need to confess their guilt. It was precisely this effect of Black Theology that the South African authorities feared and one of their accusations against the Christian Institute was for "trying to inculcate a feeling of guilt among whites of South Africa."[304] But de Gruchy insisted that it was not guilt but the lack of a sense of

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300. Ibid., pp22-3.

301. Bosch, in Wilmore and Cone, op.cit., p235.

302. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, op.cit., p186. Buthelezi's *Six Theses* are found in *JTSA*, June 1973.

303. de Gruchy, ibid., pp187-8.

304. Boesak, *Black Theology Black Power*, op.cit., p5.

guilt on the part of whites for what has happened to black people in South Africa that is part of the problem.[305] For de Gruchy, whites had to recognize, admit and accept their real guilt, not as a sign of weakness, but as a matter of maturity.[306]

Yet it was perhaps Jurgen Moltmann, in a paper given at a seminar in the University of Cape Town in 1978, who best reflected the message which Black Theology has been trying to get across to whites.[307] Moltmann, consciously as a white European, looked at oppression from the side of the oppressor, believing that there was a need for a "liberating theology for oppressors"[308] to free them from the sin of oppression. The stumbling block to this he identified as a failure of oppressors to recognize themselves as such and an inability to accept their need for liberation from a sin which operates so much to their advantage.[309]

The first step, then, was to do what in effect Black Consciousness had been trying to say to whites in South Africa:

> We want to be liberal and neglect thereby our own liberation. Whoever wishes to help the oppressed to gain their own freedom must begin with himself: he must cease being their oppressor.[310]

Moltmann recognized at the root of racial oppression - as in sexism and

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305. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, op.cit., pp189-90.

306. Ibid., p190.

307. Moltmann, *JTSA*, March 1979, op.cit.

308. Ibid., p25.

309. Ibid., pp24-5.

310. Ibid., p25.

capitalism - not merely moral error, but a compulsive aggression which arises out of anxiety and the need for self-assertion and self-justification and which in turn is expressed in a love and trust directed away from God and on to the oppressor's race - or masculinity or capital. Such an oppressor will not be helped by moral accusations but by seeing in the crucified Jesus "the humanity of God"[311], "the humanity that he has persecuted, oppressed, and destroyed in himself and others."[312] The One who identified with the oppressed and humiliated is recognized by the oppressor as God, and "He discovers the God whom he despairingly loves, in the victims he has killed out of hatred."[313] Thus oppressors see their judgement in the suffering of their victims[314] but the forgiveness inherent in this suffering relieves the oppressor of the need for self-justification. The only response can be to abandon everything and follow the Christ they have recognized in the world's crucified, to abandon the protection of their whiteness, masculinity and capital. This involved, for Moltmann, the betrayal of one's own class for,

> there is no solidarity with the victims of racism, sexism, and capitalism without the betrayal of their betrayers. Whoever desires communion with the victims must become the enemy of their enemies.[315]

As examples Moltmann mentioned Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Che Guevara

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311. Ibid., p32.

312. Ibid., p33.

313. Ibid., p33.

314. Ibid., p34.

315. Ibid., p35.

316. Ibid., p35.

and Fidel Castro, none of whom came from the working-class but who were "class-betrayers."[316]

Moltmann thus placed the necessary response of whites to a theology of liberation in a thoroughly Christological framework. In order to come to repentance the oppressors need to recognize Christ in their victims and, having done so, by identifying with these victims they commit themselves to Christ. Thus, in the manner of Breyten Breytenbach, Beyers Naude, Helen Joseph and Neil Aggett - indeed like Christ himself - they become traitors to their own class.

3.8 Methodology in the First Phase

3.8.1 A Biblical Theology

With its roots so firmly set in Black Consciousness it should not be surprising that what Motlhabi has identified as Black Theology's first phase[317] parallels in many ways our description of Black Consciousness in its first stage. This involved a recovery of the black perspective at the level of religious consciousness, a conscientizing of black Christians to the way Christianity had been used to maintain their oppression and a freeing of the black Christian mind by means of appropriating the Christian tradition in the service of their liberation. And given the important place held by the Bible in the lives of black people in South Africa, this had to be the place to start.

Thus Black Theologians in general understood their endeavours "to be true

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317. Motlhabi, in Mosala and Tlhagale, op.cit., p(xiii)

318. Mosothoane, in Vorster(ed.), op.cit., p29.

and faithful to Scripture"[318], to be "soundly biblical."[319] Their efforts were directed towards finding the resources within the Bible and the Christian traditions for a critique of white theology and the structures of white domination and for the promotion of black liberation. Thus we find Allan Boesak, the Calvinist, and Manas Buthelezi, the Lutheran, taking their traditions and the biblical witness to Christ as far as they would go in terms of providing inspiration and resouces for the black struggle for liberation. For Dwane this was

> the attempt to draw out more fully the implications of the biblical statement that God is the Father of the fatherless, the husband of the widow, and the One who sets at liberty those who are captives.[320]

It was a natural conclusion of this theology that apartheid and all racial oppression are a deviation from the teaching of the Gospel, a heresy, and inconsistent with Christianity.[321] Boesak stressed that the Scriptures were the controlling factor in his hermeneutic and he defined Black Theology as "self-critical reflection under the Word of God."[322] Similarly Mgojo held that it was Scripture that was the binding authority and primary source for Black Theology while black experience, history and culture had a secondary role as lesser sources or formative factors.[323] And while Mosothoane was aware of the danger of distorting Scripture, he insisted that the central biblical theme of liberation did not represent a

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319. Dwane, *JTSA*, June 1981, op.cit., p30.

320. Ibid., p31.

321. Maimela, *JTSA*, Dec.1982, pp63-4.

322. Boesak, *Black Theology Black Power*, op.cit., p121.

323. Mgojo, "Prologemenon to The Study of Black Theology", *JTSA*, Dec.1977, pp29-31.

canon within a canon but was rather used as a hermeneutical key and point of entry into Scripture.[324]

This procedure involved far more than a re-emphasis of some long-neglected biblical themes for it was shown that by approaching Scripture from the perspective and interests of the oppressor, Western theology had used the wrong- or rather, politically safe - hermeneutical keys to understand the Bible and this had led to a total misunderstanding of the nature of God and the meaning of the incarnation. Having exposed the ideological captivity of Western theology, hidden under the cloak of spiritual and politically neutral pretensions, Black Theologians then set about re-appropriating the Bible and to a lesser extent the doctrines of the faith in the service of the liberation of the black oppressed in South Africa. This approach is typified by the sermons of Tutu[325] and Boesak[326], often beginning with a descriptive analysis of the black situation followed by its theological interpretation which usually placed oppressed blacks in the position of oppressed communities in the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament. The firm belief was that the Bible witnessed unequivocally to the fact that God is a God of justice and liberation of all humanity for all time, whose liberative character was best exemplified in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.[327]

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324. Mosothoane, in Vorster(ed.), op.cit., pp32-3.

325. e.g.Tutu, *Hope and Suffering: Sermons and Speeches*, Skotaville, Johannesburg, 1983.

326. e.g.Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, op.cit.

327. Julian Kunnie, "Christianity, Black Theology and Liberating Faith", in Mosala and Tlhagale, op.cit., p155.

3.8.2 The Role of Black Experience

So most South African Black Theologians disagreed with what they understood Cone's position to be, that the black situation and experience had some revelational value for Black Theology[328], though we have seen that this was not Cone's earliest instinct. It is interesting, however, that Black Theologians in South Africa did not accept the criticism, levelled at Cone and heeded by him in some measure, that black sources were the proper primary determinants of a Black Theology. Rather, as Boesak stated:

> The black experience provides the framework within which blacks understand the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. No more, no less.[329]

This was not to say that the Bible was seen as the Word of God in a pure form[330] for it was the recognition of its contextual and situational nature that provided the justification for taking the black situation in South Africa with equal seriousness. The objection was to the absolutizing of the black situation and experience.[331] Thus, in a discussion of the views of the Indian, M.M.Thomas[332], Boesak argued that to say that God is active in the world today and present in social upheavals inasmuch as they contribute to the struggle for true humanity is not to ascribe revelatory significance to these situations. The task of discerning *in the light of Scripture* where Christ is active in history is risky but necessary, and it

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328. Boesak, *Black Theology Black Power*, op.cit., p12.

329. Ibid., p12.

330. Buthelezi, *JTSA*, June 1977, p56.

331. Kretzschmar, op.cit., p76; Mgojo, op.cit., pp29-30.

332. Boesak, *Black Theology Black Power*, op.cit., pp81-90.

is the risk of faith that must be taken if theology is to be genuine.[333]

3.8.3 The Beginnings of a New Methodology

For Frank Chikane, Black theology's critique of Western theology carried with it the suggestion of a radically different methodology.[334] The rejection of the neutral and universal pretensions of Western theology went together with a recognition of its support of and commitment to an exploitative and oppressive socio-political system.[335] Having been dissatisfied with the fruits of this theology Chikane, with Goba, was now applying J.L.Segundo's concept of "a hermeneutic of suspicion"[336] to the social and economic roots of white theology. Black Theology did not claim to be neutral but rather, drawing on the ideas of Latin American liberation theologians, in particular Sobrino and Miguez Bonino, Chikane stressed that theology does not fall from the sky but emerges from a definite social praxis and social interests. The praxis of Black Theology was a conscious and deliberate commitment to the liberation of the black oppressed in South Africa in opposition to the dominant praxis from which white theology, emerged.

The main conclusions Chikane drew from this "newly emerging methodology"[337] were practical. Theology is not merely read and studied

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333. Ibid., p90.

334. Chikane, *JTSA*, June 1985.

335. Ibid., p47.

336. Goba, *JTSA*,Sept.1986, p64.

337. Chikane, "Doing theology in a situation of conflict", in Villa-Vicencio and de Gruchy, *Resistance and Hope*, Philip, Cape Town, 1985, p98.

but is *done*, as a reflection on one's participation in the struggles of the people.[338] Theologians "must relinquish their position of privilege and choose rather to suffer with the people of God"[339], they must take sides, opt preferentially for the poor and make a commitment to social change.[340]

But Chikane did not draw out the full theological consequences of the new methodology. Having reversed the traditional order of theological reflection so that instead of knowledge preceding action, action precedes knowledge[341], more weight was thereby given to what is happening today as a source, or at least a medium, of knowledge. In fact, Chikane defined theology as "a reflection on the continuing activity of God in the world"[342], that is, not merely reflection on God's actions in the biblical history but also in present history. With God already identified by Black Theology as being on the side of the poor and present with them in their struggles for liberation, this left the way open to giving the black experience some hermeneutical value in the new methodology. God could be seen to be revealed in the history of the liberation of the poor. However Chikane did not draw these conclusions explicitly, focussing as he did on the *orthopraxis* which resulted from the new methodology.

Goba shared Chikane's views and, sought to learn from the sociology of knowledge that modes of thought arise from and are shaped by their social

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338. Ibid., p100.

339. Ibid., p100.

340. Ibid., pp101-2.

341. Ibid., p99.

342. Ibid., p99.

context and the experience and interests of the thinker.[343] He too drew the conclusion that Black theology must emerge from the black context and be committed to the black struggle for liberation.[344] His social analysis recognized "conflicting elements in society over the question of power resources"[345] so that "Black theological reflection is inclined to conflict theory"[346] and a radical commitment to the transformation of society.[347] To this end Goba wanted a new theological methodology[348], but ultimately he did not go much further than Chikane. Goba explicitly stated that the new hermeneutic would be one which took the black socio-cultural experience seriously[349] but he did not give this experience a hermeneutical significance. He wanted to re-read, re-interpret, re-appropriate the Bible, but for him the Bible, understood anew, was still normative, for his goal was "to rediscover the authority and place of the bible in the South African struggle."[350]

3.8.4 The Perceived Danger of Ideological Captivity

Given this self-consciously biblical methodology Black Theologians were particularly sensitive to any suggestion that Black Theology was becoming

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343. Goba, "Towards a 'Black' Ecclesiology: Insights from the Sociology of Knowledge", *Missionalia*, Aug.1981,p47.

344. Goba, *JTSA*, June 1980, op.cit., p23.

345. Ibid., p29.

346. Ibid., p29.

347. Goba, *JTSA*, Sept.1986, p65.

348. Goba, *JTSA*, June 1980, op.cit., p31.

349. Ibid., pp25-6.

350. Goba, "Theology and Existential Commitment", *JTSA*, Dec.1982, p51.

captive to an ideology. This was the worry of some sympathetic white theologians, like de Gruchy and Bosch, who were afraid of the kind of exclusive theological justification of the political aspirations of a particular group that South Africa had already experienced and suffered from with the Afrikaners.[351] The same warning was implicit in the criticisms of African Theologians who saw Black theology as so identified with the project of black liberation in South Africa that it could not possibly have any role to play once freedom had come.

The general response of Black Theologians, as we have seen, has been to stress, with Boesak, the priority of Scripture as the source of their theologizing, to define 'black' not in a narrow racial way but in terms of condition and commitment, and to proclaim their belief that the Gospel of Jesus Christ transcends all cultures, peoples and interests, and cannot be identified with the political ideology of any group.[352] So too, theology is described as *critical* reflection so that there is no blanket justification of everything black people do or wish to do to promote their liberation. To counter the criticisms Boesak has pointed to the eschatological dimension of the Christian faith, of the promises of Christ and of the liberating deeds of Yahweh[353], and Mosothoane has written that the future of Black Theology lies not in its own self-perpetuation but in its vision of what lies beyond its theologizing.[354]

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351. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, op.cit., p167; and *Scriptura*, 1984, p52.

352. Boesak, *Black Theology Black Power*, op.cit., p121.

353. Ibid., p121.

354. Mosothoane, *Missionalia*, Nov.1981, op.cit., p100.

Thus the concern about ideological captivity expressed by Black Theologians in this phase seems to be closely related to their biblical methodology. Goba believed that one problem with Latin American liberation theology was its "ideological captivity"[355] and by this he seems to have meant the loss of the biblical revelation as the sole determining criterion of theology when greater weight is given to present experience and extra-biblical history.

Yet there is a danger that to insist on de-ideologizing theology beyond these disclaimers is to risk de-concretizing it entirely. It may be that these arguments have in mind Sebidi's definition of an ideology as "a blueprint adhered to with passion, of what society ought to be"[356] in which case the concern is understandable for the Gospel does not appear to provide such a blueprint. But even European theologians, such as Karl Barth, believed that the Gospel has definite, concrete political implications[357] and Black Theology's claim to concreteness depends to a considerable extent on being able to spell out its implications politically. As Goba puts it:

> Black Theology is a way of thinking and acting by black Christians as they attempt to discover the political implications of their faith in a given situation.[358]

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355. Goba, *Theologia Evangelica*, op.cit., p66.

356. Sebidi, in Mosala and Tlhagale, op.cit., p33.

357. See in particular Barth's 1946 essay, "The Christian Community and the Civil Community", in *Community, State and Church*(Anchor Books, Doubleday and Co., Garden City, NY, 1960), in which he deduced from the Biblical revelation, using the concept of analogy, a fairly detailed moderate socialist programme of political action.

358. Goba, in Mosala and Tlhagale, op.cit., p60.

Goba goes on to argue that all theologies are ideological[359], especially one as avowedly contextual as Black Theology, and he is is critical of Boesak's position as ahistorical:

> I make this observation because the starting point of a relevant theology is actual involvement in the struggle and as such involvement reflects or embodies the emancipatory interests of those who are in it. So Black Theology occurs within the context of the black struggle and inescapably will reflect the ideological interests of the black community. If it doesn't it ceases to be Black Theology.[360]

South African Black Theology represents, as we have seen, a theological reflection on a struggle which has its ideological roots in Black Consciousness which in turn, as Goba argues, "constitutes a serious political programme of action."[361]

The involvement of Black Theology in this struggle may not be uncritical and may indeed be concerned that the praxis of the oppressed community should not be absolutized, but Black Theology is still committed to that communal praxis and that political programme. So in the sense that the ideology of Black Consciousness plays a central role in Black Theology and commits it to concrete political activity in a particular direction, Black Theology is ideological. For Boesak and others to claim that this is not so seems to be a defensive response to criticisms from a white theological perspective and actually contradicts a central tenet of Black Theology's attack on a white theology which claimed to be pure and free of any ideology. As a human activity theology cannot claim to be socially neutral but will inevitably serve the interests of those with whom it identifies;

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359. Goba, *JTSA*, Dec.1982, op.cit., p50.

360. Goba, in Mosala and Tlhagale, op.cit., pp65-6.

361. Ibid., p66.

only by following Christ into solidarity with the poor and oppressed can it hope to reflect the truth, that is the perspective and commitment of God.

3.8.5 Commitment to Social Transformation

Nevertheless during this first phase several Black Theologians shared the same "radical unease with capitalism"[362] felt by many adherents of Black Consciousness. Boesak was critical of American Black Theologians whose ethic implied that "racism is the only demon blacks have to fight."[363] Insisting that there is "a relation between racism and capitalism"[364], he charged that "Cone ultimately leaves the American capitalistic system intact"[365] and offers no alternative to the present American way of life. For Boesak, Black Theology was not aiming for equality with whites in the same South African system but "the transformation of oppressing and inhuman structures"[366] and "a totally new social order."[367] Motlhabi too went behind the racism of the South African system to attack its authoritarianism and the vast discrepancies in the distribution of power. The influence of these evils, he insisted, had not only to be tackled in theology and in the image of God, but also in the actual structures of the Church, the family and in the political organisations created to build a

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362. Nolutshungu, op.cit., p155.

363. Boesak, *Black Theology Black Power*, op.cit., p148.

364. Ibid., p149.

365. Ibid., p150.

366. Ibid., p145.

367. Ibid., p151.

368. Motlhabi, in Moore(ed.), op.cit., pp27-8.

new society[368]; otherwise 'freedom' would mean little to those at the bottom of the power pile. For the most part, though, capitalism was simply associated in the minds of Black Theologians with the white power structure, Western values, individualism and racism, falling under that general condemnation[369] and no attempt was made to enter into any systematic theological critique of capitalism.

There is little evidence that the liberation of women was a vital concern of Black theology in its first stage although some were aware of this need. Thus Ntwasa and Moore attacked not only the racial concept of God but also the male imagery of the traditional Christian view of divinity and even the "striking amount of anti-feminism in the Bible."[370] And in 1982 Dwane expressed a desire for a true human partnership between men and women, based on the doctrine of creation which teaches equality and joint responsibility over creation.[371] Thus he writes:

> The struggle for women's rights is as important as the struggle for liberation from oppression.[372]

However, the vast majority of Black and African Theologians being male, the oppression of women as women was given little consideration in this phase of South African Black Theology.

These concerns -with the oppression of women and the structures of capitalism - were to come more to the fore in the second phase of Black

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369. e.g. Mpunzi in Moore(ed.), op.cit., p132.

370. Ntwasa and Moore, in Moore(ed.), op.cit., p21.

371. Dwane, *JTSA*, Dec.1982, op.cit., p41.

372. Ibid., p41.

Theology in South Africa when the influence of Marxist thinking became more evident. During the first stage, however, as de Gruchy commented in 1979,

> Black theologians in South Africa..., unlike some Latin Americans, have never advocated any ideological alliance with Marxism.[373]

Despite a shared emphasis on the situation out of which and to which theology must speak, and the common commitment to liberation in the context of oppression, there were, as Kretzschmar notes, few references to primary thinkers in Latin America and little contact between South African and Latin American theologians.[374] However by the time she wrote, in 1986, that there was little evidence of Black Theologians embarking on radical class analysis of a Marxist kind[375], this trend had in fact begun to take place, as we shall see.

3.9 The Second Phase

3.9.1 A More Rigorous Historical Perspective

A distinguishing characteristic of the second phase of Black Theology has been a more "thorough-going historical perspective"[376] in its attitude to South Africa's inherited Christianity, together with the use of Marxist tools of analysis in the theological enterprise.[377] Those Black Theologians who have entered this second phase - and we should note that

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373. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, op.cit., p159.

374. Kretzschmar, op.cit., p71.

375. Ibid., p102.

376. Mosala, AZAPO address, op.cit., p1.

377. Sebidi, in Mosala and Tlhagale, op.cit., p22.

many have not - have thus addressed not only black alienation from their own history and culture, but also alienation from the land[378] and have located their theology in the historical struggle for land, power and economic resources between the indigenous African people and the European colonial settlers, as the former were conquered and incorporated into the social, political and economic system of the latter.[379]

Black Theologians, expressly wish to avoid romanticizing the African past.[380] Yet although, at the advent of colonialism, southern African societies were in the process of undergoing a shift from "communal to tributary social formations"[381], it is held that "African producers prior to colonialism had access to the fundamental means of production: land and cattle."[382] African religion reflected these material conditions and relations in society[383] while Western Christianity "functioned as a cultural-ideological tool for the production and reproduction of European Feudal and capitalistic social relations."[384] Hence conflict took place most fundamentally at the material, political level in resistance to the dismantling of African societies. But it also occurred at the level of the ideological superstructure, where theology operates, for "black organized

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378. Mofokeng, *The Crucified Among the Crossbearers*, op.cit., p23.

379. Sebidi, ibid., pp1-14; Mosala, AZAPO address, op.cit, pp1-2; Tlhagale, "Towards a black theology of labour", in *Resistance and Hope*, pp128-9.

380. Mosala, AZAPO address, op.cit., p2; Tlhagale, in *Resistance and Hope*, ibid., p128.

381. Mosala, ibid, p2.

382. Ibid., p2.

383. Ibid., p2.

384. Ibid., p3.

Christian religion became a history of a protracted theological struggle against ideological manipulation of the religious sentiments of blacks with the aim of reinforcing the subjugation of black Christians."[385]

The critique of white theology was now focussed on the exploitative social relations of production which it sought to justify or obscure. Thus white theology's emphases on human sinfulness and on a trans-historical heaven were seen as mystifications which had to be exposed. Black theology would not allow the demand for justice to be postponed to an unknown future.[386] But in order for the causes of oppression to be more clearly identified, Black Theology was now taking more seriously its roots in the historical struggle:

> Black theology is an attempt to theorise the struggle from a position of commitment to the black side of the conflict that has its roots in the 17th century.[387]

3.9.2 Class Analysis and Black Consciousness

Black Theology's new historical and material perspective inevitably led to an analysis of the South African situation in which awareness of the class aspect of oppression was heightened. This created something of a problem for Black Theology which, as Sebidi notes, naturally gravitated to a race analysis because colour was seen to be co-terminus with oppression in South Africa as in the United States.[388] Now, however, Black Theology was forced to enter the old race/class debate as its original tendency to

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385. Mofokeng, in Mosala and Tlhagale, op.cit., p114.

386. Mosala, AZAPO address, op.cit.,p3.

387. Ibid., p3.

388. Sebidi, in Mosala and Tlhagale, op.cit., pp20-1.

analyse the situation in terms of race alone was criticized as superficial and an erroneous reading of South Africa's predicament, one which failed to recognize the structural malady of society and the economic roots of exploitation.[389]

Sebidi's own analysis of the history of the black struggle suggests that race and class are twin elements which describe the basis of oppression and exploitation in South Africa. Racism, far from being innate, has a material basis and arises out of the struggle betweeen the settlers and the indigenous people for land and resources.[390] This he sees as particularly clear during the periods of the resistance of the Khoikhoi and San people to the usurption of their land in the 17th century[391], and the conflicts between the white settlers and African tribes on the eastern frontier in the 18th and early 19th centuries.[392] However the success of the settlers in dispossessing the people entirely led black resistance into what Sebidi calls a nationalistic phase during which race was seen as the principal reason for black exclusion and the fundamental problem of South Africa was believed to be discrimination.[393] The material divide thus came to be seen as a racial divide and the economic origins of the conflict were in danger of being obscured.

The value of the Black Consciousness era was that it rejected the

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389. Ibid., pp21-2.

390. Ibid., p26.

391. Ibid., pp3-4.

392. Ibid., pp4-7.

393. Ibid., pp7-12.

superficial call for integration though Sebidi believes its strategy still tended to idealism, based on a race analysis and focussing on the alteration of consciousness.[394] It was only after the events of 1976/7, when the Black Consciousness movement moved into a deeper analysis of black oppression, recognizing its economic basis and class aspects, and committed itself to the struggle for a socialist Azania, that the historical perspective on the black struggle was taken with any great seriousness and the necessary strategy for liberation became clearer. Now the transformative efforts were aimed at the material conditions of life, allowing participation in liberative action to transform consciousness, ethical behaviour and personality:

> This is the internal effect that comes simultaneously with the external impact of the praxis of liberation which Black Theology has to bring about.[395]

Black Theology's second phase emerges clearly from this second stage of Black Consciousness and it consciously addresses itself to a situation of racial oppression and economic exploitation, in short, to the system of racial capitalism.[396] This has meant, primarily, a new and more aggressive emphasis by Black Theologians on social transformation, meaning for some, an explicit commitment to socialism and the role of the black worker in theology. Mosala's whole emphasis is "anti-capitalist" at the same time as being "anti-racist"[397] and Tlhagale sees Black Theology as

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394. Ibid., p28.

395. Mofokeng, in Mosala and Tlhagale, op.cit., p124.

396. Ibid., p35.

397. Mosala, AZAPO address, op.cit., p5.

398. Tlhagale, in *Resistance and Hope*, op.cit., p131.

participating, at a critical, reflective level, in the "subversion of capitalism."[398] The focus of Tlhagale's 'Black Theology of Labour' is, like the emphasis of Black Consciousness in the 1980s, on "labouring black people"[399] as the acting subjects of his theology. Using the historical-material approach he seeks to expose the manner in which black workers are denied the dignity of being co-creators with God of their own environment, operating on the principle that "Labour in the service of capital runs contrary to the Christian understanding of justice."[400] For similar reasons Mosala rejects all Western attempts to make the Gospel relevant to the needs of modern people because this has been done generally in terms of capitalist society, as secularization or development, concerned with resignation to and participation in capitalist technology and industrialization. It is not development or inclusion that Black theology is after now, but transformation.[401]

Yet even in this second phase there is good cause for complaint about "The invisibility of Black Women in Black Theology."[402] However two of the contributions to the Mosala and Tlhagale volume do deal with the liberation of women. In particular, Bonita Bennet begins to analyse the triple exploitation of those who are black, workers and women[403] and she discusses women's liberation Christologically, focussing, as Black Theology

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399. Ibid., p127.

400. Ibid., p130.

401. Mosala, AZAPO address, op.cit., p3.

402. Jaquelyn Grant, quoted by Bernadette Mosala, "Black Theology and the Struggle of the Black Woman in South Africa", in Mosala and Tlhagale, p130.

403. Bennet, in Mosala and Tlhagale, p170.

in general does, on the historical Jesus as the one whose attitude to women was liberative and revolutionary.[404] Simon Maimela, too, in the same volume, makes several references to the need for women's liberation and lists sex alongside the race and class divisions in society.[405] As editors, Mosala and Tlhagale are clearly aware of South African Black Theology's failure so far to address the issue of sexual oppression but as women's issues become more prominent in the struggle for liberation this is likely to be reflected in Black Theology.

In South Africa, Black Theology shares in the crisis of black politics in the mid-1980s. Black Consciousness is no longer the unifying force it was seen to be in the early 1970s[406] and there are now ideological and strategic differences in the black community which have broken out into open conflict between supporters of the UDF, on the one hand, and Black Consciousness organisations such as AZAPO[407] on the other. The question of political strategy, which Sebidi describes as "whether to forge alliance trans-racially for the struggle, or to operate solely on the basis of black solidarity, black unity"[408] is also a question for Black Theology.

For Mofokeng, Black Theology has been "inseperably linked to the Black Consciousness philosophy and based on the Black Consciousness praxis as it

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404. Ibid., pp172-4.

405. Maimela, in Mosala and Tlhagale, p105 & p107.

406. Chikane, in Mosala and Tlhagale, op.cit., p(xviii)

407. Ibid.

408. Sebidi, in Mosala and Tlhagale, op.cit., p34.

409. Mofokeng, in Mosala and Tlhagale, op.cit., p122.

developed dialectically."[409] But this is not spelt out in terms of political commitment and in general Black Theologians seem reluctant to take sides in the UDF/AZAPO dispute.[410] Thus Chikane describes the aim of Black Theology's second phase to be to "rally these divergent ideological approaches to give them a purpose and a goal."[411] But Goba still holds that race is the primary determinant of oppression in South Africa and he believes that Black Consciousness provides the vital context for the development of a black theological hermeneutic.[412] Goba does not spell out clearly whether this means a commitment to socialism and the strategy of black exclusivity, but for those theologians whose efforts belong properly to the second phase of Black Theology this is exactly the conclusion. They would continue to theologize according to the needs of their community and using black tools of analysis and enquiry with no need to refer to Western methods.

3.9.3 Questioning the Bible

Perhaps the most significant characteristic of South African Black Theology's second phase has been one that has emerged through a deeper struggle with the Bible. Tlhagale has testified to the problems he has with a number of biblical sayings, notably with the whole thrust of the Sermon on the Mount which he finds makes no sense in the context of black South

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410. e.g. Chikane, pp(xviii)-(xix); Sebidi, pp34-5; and Goba, pp64-5; all in Mosala and Tlhagale, op.cit.

411. Chikane, in Mosala and Tlhagale, op.cit., p(xix).

412. Goba, in Mosala and Tlhagale, op.cit., pp65-9.

413. Tlhagale, "On Violence: A Township Perspective", in Mosala and Tlhagale, pp147-8.

Africa.[413] The scandal of the Gospel among the oppressed, he suggests, is that "the life history of Christ makes no room for the use of violence to right the wrongs of society."[414] The needs and demands of the black situation are, for Tlhagale, not obviously met by the resources within the Scriptures. He would not agree with Goba and other Black Theologians whose hermeneutic belongs to the first phase, that the Bible is necessarily "a liberating word"[415] to the black oppressed.

The new approach of Black Theology to the Bible is made clearest in the work of Itumeleng Mosala. He believes that Black Theology has not taken its own criticism of white theology seriously enough and has remained captive to the hermeneutical principles of a theology of oppression.[416] He then takes the use of Marxist tools of analysis one step further and applies them to the Bible itself. Black Theology had proceded as if only white and other forms of theology, including Black Theology, were ideological and conditioned by their material basis and commitment while the Bible was the universally valid 'Word of God'.[417] This Mosala questions for, with the American biblical scholar Norman Gottwald, he sees the Bible as a reflection of the social struggles in Israelite society, a site of struggle between oppressors and oppressed, a product and record of these class

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414. Ibid., p149.

415. Goba, "A Theological Tribute to Archbishop Tutu", in Tlhagale and Mosala, *Hammering Swords into Ploughshares*, Skotaville, Johannesburg, 1986, p64.

416. Mosala, "The Use of the Bible in Black Theology", in Mosala and Tlhagale, p176.

417. Ibid.,pp177-8. Mosala criticises Dwane(p179), Gqubule(p181) and Mgojo(pp181-2) for accepting the Bible uncritically in this way as the Word of God.

struggles which is ultimately the account of the dominant group, "a ruling class document and represents the ideological and political interests of the ruling class."[418] To insist on the Bible as the Word of God errs by universalizing sectional class interests. Thus the whole Bible is not necessarily on the side of the oppressed and may even militate against the struggle for liberation.

For Mosala then, the Bible becomes an object of criticism in the light of the black experience.[419] Applying the historical-materialist method consistently he locates both the black experience and the Bible itself in their particular historical contexts and goes that one final step to give a hermeneutical significance to the black experience in history. No longer is the black experience seen merely as the context from which black questions emerge to be answered by a normative Scripture. Now some normative, theological, even revelational value - though Mosala would not use the word - is given to the struggles of black people:

> The particularity of the black struggle in its different forms and phases must provide the epistemological lenses with which the Bible can be read.[420]

Mosala does not deny that liberative material is present in the Bible but more importantly it can be gathered from what is absent from the text, from what has been omitted by the ruling class authors. However the class origins of Scripture mean that these liberative elements cannot be appropriated in any certain way from a starting point within the Bible. The

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418. Ibid., p196.

419. Ibid., p178.

420. Ibid., p185.

starting point must be a commitment to the struggles of the black oppressed today which takes the liberating aspects of the history, culture and ideologies of dominated black people as a hermeneutical starting point. This trains the understanding "to observe the kin struggles of the oppressed and exploited of the biblical communities in the very absences of those struggles in the text."[421] Mosala describes the new hermeneutic in this way:

> Black Theology has roots in the Bible insofar as it is capable of linking the struggles of oppressed people in South Africa today with the struggles of oppressed people in the communities of the Bible. The oppressed people in the Bible did not write the Bible. Their struggles come to us *via* the struggles of their oppressors. Thus Black Theology needs to be firmly and critically rooted in black history and black culture in order for it to possess apposite weapons of struggle that can enable black people to get underneath the biblical text to the struggles of oppressed classes.[422]

This is the methodology with which Takatso Mofokeng approaches a Black Christology. He makes clear how this differs from Black theology's earlier period:

> Structurally, Black Theology became a theology which, having started as a theoretical reflection on praxis in the light of scripture alone quickly and inevitably developed into a theology in which the light of the specific praxis of committed blacks falls on the bible, on the one side, making it comprehensible. On the other side the transforming light of Scripture falls on liberation praxis criticising it when and where criticism is due, affirming it where credit is due to it, making it qualitatively better as well as driving it forward.[423]

So using Marxist tools, Black Theology "analyzes the material situation in

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421. Ibid., p196.

422. Mosala, "Ethics of the Economic Principles: Church and Secular Investments", in *Hammering Swords into Ploughshares*, p120.

423. Mofokeng, in Mosala and Tlhagale, op.cit., p123.

Palestine during the time of Jesus as well as the praxis of this man of Nazareth which is witnessed in Scripture as it unfolded and was radicalized by qualitatively and quantitatively increasing opposition."[424] In the history of Jesus is seen, as Tlhagale has written, "a story of a series of subversions" and related to this a "tradition of subversion modelled on the person of Christ."[425] At the same time the material situation of black people today is analysed "as a source of transformative ideas"[426] and also to guage whether the oppressed community is at a sufficient level of radicality for the struggle to be successful.[427] The two situations can then be engaged "to find an answer to the question whether Jesus is with us in our struggle and we are with him in his struggle for our liberation."[428]

However before we turn to examine Mofokeng's ideas in more detail we wish to enlist the assistance of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Mofokeng's historical Christology is such a radical departure from traditional theology that it is not only profoundly challenging, but also - and this it intends to be - threatening to the theological concerns of the West. It will thus be useful for us to be reminded that Bonhoeffer was also highly critical of the nature of traditional Christology and to see that, as his theology unfolded in response to the crises of the day and his own experiences, he grew to adopt a perspective and develop a practical Christology which is not too

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424. Ibid., p125.

425. Tlhagale, in Mosala and Tlhagale, op.cit., p149 & p150

426. Mofokeng, in Mosala and Tlhagale, op.cit., p125.

427. Ibid., p125.

428. Ibid., p125.

dissimilar from the concerns of Mofokeng and can in fact prepare those trained in traditional Western theology to receive the 'new teaching' of Black Christology.

We shall also apply something of Black Theology's second stage hermeneutic to Bonhoeffer. This means that we will not only look at Bonhoeffer's life as the acting out of his theology, but also that we must recognize that his theology was profoundly influenced and shaped by the political praxis in which he was involved. Thus we shall allow Bonhoeffer's experience to shed light on Christology and ask if a Black Theology in dialogue with Bonhoeffer would not usefully learn from his praxis.

CHAPTER FOUR: BONHOEFFER'S CHRISTOLOGY

4.1 Bonhoeffer on Traditional Christology

Bonhoeffer's approach to the traditional Christological debates was remarkably similar to that of Black Theology. The very ordering of his 1933 lectures on Christology[1] was in itself a critique of the method of much previous Christology. For he did not begin with Christ as he is in eternity and then proceed to describe his entry into history before, finally, arriving at his presence today; such approaches inevitably beg the question '*How* is this possible?' and lead Christology off on unrewarding searches for explanations. Rather Bonhoeffer began with his own central concern, the presence of Jesus Christ today, his form and place in the world and his 'givenness' to humanity and for humanity.

Bonhoeffer's attitude to the actual history of Jesus, we should note, was heavily influenced by his theological background and in particular by the attempts of those involved in the 19th century 'quest for the historical Jesus' to drive a wedge between the 'Jesus of history' and the 'Christ of faith'.[2] Bonhoeffer rejected this distinction. But when he asserted that the "historical approach to the Jesus of history is not binding for the believer"[3] he was not dismissing history and its importance; rather his concern was to protect the present encounter with Jesus from being contingent upon any attempt to derive, *from behind the text*, conclusive

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1. *Christology*, London, Collins, Fount, 1978.
2. Ibid., pp69-74.
3. Ibid., p72.

evidence for the historicity of Jesus and the Church's accounts of his life. It is thus important to note, for the purposes of our present discussion, that Black Theology is not necessarily returning to the old 'quest' when it stresses the actual history of Jesus. So Mofokeng writes:

> There is no attempt here to penetrate behind the gospel accounts of the story about Jesus of Nazareth with the intention of constructing a biography of Jesus that is verifiable by means of the tools of historical criticism.[4]

On the contrary,

> The historical Jesus referred to is the history of Jesus as depicted in the New Testament.[5]

As Bonhoeffer surveyed the history of the Christological debates he classed the bulk of the results as *critical* or *negative* Christology which "determine the boundaries and establish the rules for what may *not* be said about Christ."[6] These limits were fixed in the face of heresies which arose from the attempts at positive Christology by those who were seeking to answer the wrong question, the *How?* question: *How is it possible for Jesus to be both truly God and truly human?* Bonhoeffer traced the Docetic error right from Gnosticism and Apollinarianism through to the liberal theologies of Schleiermacher and Ritschl pointing out that since it began with an abstract, typically Greek idea of God it could not allow a complete incarnation of this God in a person. God remains God, but does not become fully human in Christ; against this Bonhoeffer insisted with the early

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4. Mofokeng, *The Crucified Among the Crossbearers*, op.cit., p69.

5. ibid., p70.

6. *Christology*, op.cit., pp74-5.

7. Ibid., pp76-82.

Church that the unassumed is the unredeemed.[7] On the other hand, Bonhoeffer regarded the typically Jewish, Ebionite heresy, with its adoptionist Christology, as superior to Docetism because it took Jesus seriously as a real, rather than as an ideal, human being, although finally the Ebionites would not allow this Jesus to be the true God.[8]

Bonhoeffer's fundamental belief was that the Docetists and the Ebionites, like the Monophysites and Nestorians and Eutychians after them, all erred by seeking an answer to the *how* question. And the fact that the debate was conducted in terms of the misleading concept of *ousia*(being, substance) meant that it quite understandably became stuck at the point of explaining how two previously defined beings or substances could exist in the one 'God-man.'[9] The limits of this question, Bonhoeffer believed, were reached at Chalcedon which in a purely negative but necessary way, set the boundaries for all talk about the 'two natures' of Christ. The debate about *how* this could be was effectively closed because it could not be answered.

Positive Christology, argued Bonhoeffer, could only proceed when the *How?* question was closed and in its place the *Who?* question accepted as the only legitimate starting point of theological enquiry. Positive Christology begins by asking, *Who is it with whom we have to deal in Jesus Christ?*, and the reply, coming from Chalcedon is that it is none other than God himself, given to us and for us in all his fulness in this human being, Jesus of Nazareth. There is thus no going behind Chalcedon to ask how this is possible and there is no other place to go to do theology than to this

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8. Ibid., pp82-5.

9. Ibid., p101.

'Incarnate One'.

So Bonhoeffer's Christological method has important points of contact with South African Black Theology. We have here a parallel desire to produce a concrete and relevant Christology for the specific situation, a common concern with ethics rather than philosophy, and a shared instinct to centre all theologizing on Jesus Christ.

There is an interesting difference however. Black Theology understands a starting point in the humanity of Christ as *historical*; Christ's presence as a human being in history is seen as the only data available. Bonhoeffer, on the other hand, understood the humanity of Christ as a confessional starting point in the sense that we go to this man's humanity because we already believe that he is God. A Black Christology which, like Mofokeng's, claims to be historical cannot begin with such a confessional statement. Consequently such a Black Theology can provide no a *priori* theological reason for focussing on the human history of Jesus as opposed to the story of any other person. Inevitably the reasons must be historical or traditional, concerning the quality of Jesus' life, his impact on history and the place he has in the lives of black people today. The confession of Christ's divinity, as the starting point of Christology, belongs properly to Black Theology's first stage. In the second stage this confession is, in a sense, suspended until such time as the historical methodology shows a way back to it or to a different understanding of it.

Yet the Christological starting point of both Bonhoeffer and Black Theology is the same and this opens the possibility of dialogue. Bonhoeffer may be able to persuade white theologians of the validity of the historical approach and provide a way for them to learn from Black Theology. His own

praxis and consequent understanding of the history of Jesus may also be able to shed more light on the Christology sought by Black Theology.

4.2 Tension in Bonhoeffer's Christology

John A.Phillips[10] has argued that there are "unreconciled elements in his Christological centre"[11] and he has tried to explain these in terms of a shift by Bonhoeffer away from a restrictive ecclesiology. Here we dispute Phillips' argument by presenting an alternative explanation for the tension which he is right to identify in Bonhoeffer's Christology but which prompts him to a misleading conclusion.

Our contention is that Bonhoeffer's theology is not only intensely and increasingly *Christological* in character but also has a constant *ethical* orientation.[12] In fact we would argue that Bonhoeffer's deep concern for "the profound this-worldliness of Christianity"[13] and his continual wish to 'concretize' faith meant for him, quite simply, *ethics*, or in the language of liberation theology, *praxis*. As Feil writes:

> Practice became more important for Bonhoeffer than theory; as a consequence, ethics was strongly integrated into dogmatics.[14]

The clue to understanding Bonhoeffer's Christology, therefore, is not found in any dialectical tension with ecclesiology, but rather within a framework

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10. Phillips, *The Form of Christ in the World*, London, Collins, 1967.

11. Ibid., p28.

12. Ernst Feil, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1985, pp52-3.

13. *Letters and Papers from Prison*, op.cit., p369.

14. Feil, op.cit., p.xx

that recognizes the essentially *ethical* nature of his Christology.

We shall argue that the tension within Bonhoeffer's Christology and ethics is between the desire for *solidarity* - the wish to locate the Christian life firmly in the midst of the life of the world - and the perceived necessity of the *vicarious* act as the basis of an ethic in the fallen world. Since, as Rasmussen shows, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer's resistance activity was his Christology enacted with utter seriousness"[15], we contend that this tension was heightened as the context of Bonhoeffer's theology moved from the university, to the Church and then to his participation in the conspiracy on Hitler's life. Furthermore we believe that this same tension can be traced to a tension and paradox within the incarnation and the life of Christ himself. Christ came as the Incarnate One, in solidarity with humankind, but died alone and rejected on the Cross, *on behalf of* the very people with whom he sought solidarity.

Thus we see Bonhoeffer's Christology emerging dialectically as an encounter between his own history and that of Jesus, each illuminating and informing the other. In this way we allow Bonhoeffer's own praxis, as reflected in his theology, to shed new light on the Scriptures, something in the manner of the methodology of South African Black Theology's second phase. In the light of this new understanding of the history of Jesus, we can ask whether this tension cannot also be found in the liberation praxis on which Black Theology reflects, a fact to which Bonhoeffer may be able to alert Black Theologians.

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15. Larry L.Rasmussen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance*, Nashville, Abingdon, 1972, p15.

In order to clarify our argument we define our terms as follows. *Solidarity* indicates a *standing alongside and acting in concert with others, not only sharing their life and conditions, interests and aims, but also, in some sense, restricting one's own action to the action of the group. Vicariousness*, on the other hand, refers to *action undertaken on behalf of others, going beyond their limitations, and doing for them what they cannot or will not do for themselves.* These terms are not mutually exclusive and each contains an element of the other. Thus vicarious action presupposes and takes place on the basis of solidarity, while solidarity, in turn, contains an element of altruism which can become an impulse towards vicarious action.

4.3 The Themes of 'Solidarity' and 'Vicariousness' in Bonhoeffer's Christology

4.3.1 Sanctorum Communio, 1927, and Act and Being, 1930.

Written as academic theses these two treatises represent what some consider to be the most accomplished of Bonhoeffer's works. Yet, predating as they do his conversion "from phraseology to reality"[16], they are less Christological, less concrete, less ethical than his later writings. Nevertheless, we find even here the seeds of the tension between the themes of solidarity and vicariousness. In *Sanctorum Communio* Bonhoeffer attempts to make the revelation of God concrete through the presence of Christ as a 'collective person' - *existing as the church* - and this idea contained a strong sense of the solidarity of God with humanity. Within the Church

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16. *LPP*, op.cit., p275.

17. *The Communion of Saints*, Collins, London, 1963, p129.

persons exist "with one another" and "for one another"[17] bearing one anothers' burdens and sharing each others' sufferings.

However it was the element of vicariousness within the life of the community and at its very foundation that Bonhoeffer chose to emphasise in *Sanctorum Communio* rather than the idea of solidarity. In fact, notwithstanding his discussion of the existence of the new humanity 'in Christ', Bonhoeffer believed that the relation between Christ and humanity is not one of solidarity but one of vicarious action[18], the *'by Christ on our behalf'*. At this stage Bonhoeffer was even reluctant to allow that Christ's relation to humanity was one of solidarity at all:

> Christ, in setting himself within this community, does not declare himself to be at one with it, but vicariously fulfils the law for all men through love.[19]

Rather,

> Not 'solidarity', which is never possible between Christ and man, but vicarious action, is the life-principle of the new mankind. I know, certainly, that I am in a state of solidarity with the other man's guilt, but my dealings with him take place on the basis of the life-principle of vicarious action.[20]

Even the solidarity which Christians have, as human beings, with the rest of humanity, cannot serve as the basis of an ethic, for reality clearly shows that the guilty collective persons of the people, the nation, the community, are as incapable of collective repentance as they are of collective belief. Only vicarious action on behalf of others could serve as the basis of a Christian ethic and this was a principle from which

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18. Ibid., p107.

19. Ibid., p108.

20. Ibid., p107.

Bonhoeffer never departed and which formed the basis of his own later actions in the resistance:

> The 'people' is to repent, but it is not a question of the number who repent, and in practice it will never be the whole people, the whole church, but God can so regard it 'as if' the whole people has repented. 'For the sake of ten I will not destroy it'(Gen.18.32). He can see the whole people in a few individuals, just as he saw and reconciled the whole of mankind in one man.[21]

At this stage it would appear that for the young scholar humanity was less of an experienced reality than a theological construct whose principal relevant characteristics were its undifferentiated nature and its sin. Later, as Bonhoeffer became more involved in the human struggles against the Nazi evil and as his thought became more thoroughly Christological focussing clearly on the incarnation, his practical doctrine of humanity changed. He began to differentiate groups within humanity, and to sympathise with particular groups such as the the Jewish victims and the conspirators, so that the idea of solidarity became more prominent in his actions and in his writings. Yet solidarity always remained in tension with the principle of vicarious action laid down in *Sanctorum Communio* as the foundation of the Christian ethic. However later experience was to make clear that Bonhoeffer's bold assertion, in *Sanctorum Communio*, that "In Christ this tension between being isolated and being bound to others is really abolished"[22] was, in fact, premature.

In *Act and Being* Bonhoeffer's sympathies are seen to lie largely, though not entirely, with theologies, such as that of Barth, which describe the

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21. Ibid., pp83-4.

22. Ibid., p106.

revelation in terms of act, the act of God *on behalf of* humanity. Thus at the root of Christianity lies a vicarious act, of the self-revelation of God.

Yet within this vicarious action the idea of solidarity, grounded in the incarnation, was now strengthened. So while the early Barth wanted to stress the utter freedom and unconditionality of God, Bonhoeffer insisted that in his freedom God had freely bound himself and committed himself to humanity in Christ and in the Church. God's freedom, for Bonhoeffer, had more to do with his "forth-proceeding"[23], his given Word, than with his "eternal isolation and aseity"[24]. In fact "God is not free *of* man but *for* man"[25]. So Bonhoeffer argued that revelation could not be seen exclusively in terms of act, for if the incarnation is taken truly seriously, it can be seen to have ontological, historical aspects, in fact a basis in solidarity which Barth seemed reluctant to allow.

Since "Jesus Christ is now the center from which theology is developed"[26] here was a strengthening of the theme of solidarity in Bonhoeffer's theology.[27] The vicarious action of Christ is now seen more clearly in the context of God's binding himself to humanity, a binding which is a natural emphasis of Bonhoeffer's kenotic, Lutheran Christology. This greatly aided Bonhoeffer to make his theology and ethics concrete.

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23. *Act and Being*, London, Collins, 1962, p90.

24. Ibid., p90.

25. Ibid., p90.

26. Feil, op.cit., p67.

27. Ibid., p112.

Since "God seeks precisely those who are in solidarity with the world"[28] Bonhoeffer turns to the Christ who binds himself in solidarity with humanity, so that the development of this Christology will make clear the basis on which Christians are to turn towards the world.

4.3.2 *Christology, 1933.*

The 1933 lectures on Christology were given against the background of the Nazi assumption of power in 1933 and the certainty of dark days and difficult decisions in the time ahead, not least for the Church, the problem of whose witness was increasingly occupying Bonhoeffer's mind. His previous attempts to answer the question, *Who is Jesus Christ?*, would not allow him to focus on the being of Christ as he is in and for himself - the concern of much traditional Christology - but only on Christ as a 'person', which for Bonhoeffer was essentially a relational concept:

> Christ is Christ not just for himself, but in relation to me. His being Christ is his being for me, *pro me*.[29]

The description of the structure of Christ's presence in the world as *pro me* carries with it the implication that he relates to the new humanity both in solidarity, *with them*, and vicariously, *for them and in their place.* The three-fold 'form' of his presence strongly indicates solidarity, for the scandal of Christ's humiliation is not the incarnation itself but the offence of his *solidarity* with humanity, the self-binding and restriction

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28. Ibid., p112.

29. *Christology*, op.cit., p47.

30. Black Theology would want to stress the *kind* of humanity with whom Christ was in solidarity, that is, poor and oppressed humanity. However in 1933 Bonhoeffer had not yet made this distinction in his theology, although his concern for the Jewish victims of the Nazis was a step in this direction.

of God to the weakness and even the sin of humanity in Word, Sacrament and Church.[30]

However, in the political atmosphere of the early 1930s, with many Germans pinning their hopes on Hitler and the Nazi party, Bonhoeffer went on to describe the *place* of Christ's presence highlighting not only his solidarity but his vicarious role, as the mediator. As the centre of human existence, in its relation to God, "Christ stands where man has failed before the law"[31] and fulfils the law vicariously on our behalf, doing for us what we were obliged to do but could not do for ourselves. As the centre of human history, Christ the Messiah acts for humanity to do what generations of false messiahs failed to do and fulfils the hopes and the promises of humanity in history.[32] And as the centre between God and nature, Christ the new creature on behalf of the new humanity liberates creation from the enslavement it had fallen under through the guilt of humanity.[33]

Thus, deeply aware of the darkness which was gripping Germany in 1933, Bonhoeffer nevertheless felt a strong sense of solidarity with his people and this motif emerges clearly in his Christology. Yet in moving away from the traditional metaphysics to a this-worldly Christology, the essential ethical orientation was expressed in terms of vicariousness, in the history of Christ and in the Christian life. So while he had strengthened the motif of solidarity Christologically, it was the vicarious nature of

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31. *Christology*, op.cit., p61.

32. Ibid., pp61-4.

33. Ibid., pp64-5.

Christ's relation to humanity that controlled the ethical life for "where mankind should stand, he stands as a representative" in their place as "the first fruits, the spearhead, the first-born".[34] This developing Christological tension was not emerging purely through Bonhoeffer's reading of Scripture, but from the situation of his people and his own ethical response to it, in relation to his understanding of Scripture. That is, his own experience was helping Bonhoeffer to understand afresh the life and work of Christ.

4.3.3 *The Cost of Discipleship*, 1937.

It might be thought that *The Cost of Discipleship* represents a retreat into ecclesiological exclusivism in response to the circumstances and demands of the Church struggle. However, the context of this work being the Church rather than the university, we would argue that it rather represented an advance in the direction of making the Christian life, discipleship, more concrete. Now the link between Christology and ethics was formalized, and while the manner of this connection was to change - from unquestioning obedience, to conformation, to deputyship - the formal nature of the link was never to be broken.

In stressing "the mutual relation between grace and discipleship"[35] Bonhoeffer was pointing to the close relationship between Christ's life and ours, and was grounding the Christian life, ethics, Christologically. In this process *sola gratia* leads directly back to the once for all vicarious act of Christ although Bonhoeffer's argument was that this doctrine had

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34. Ibid., p48.

35. *The Cost of Discipleship*, op.cit., p47.

become separated from discipleship, from active following. Grace is not a substance or an idea or a principle but the gift of a person, Christ himself, and the Christian life is one lived in relationship with this person; and the proper response to the gracious gift of this person is obedience.

Given the largely negative view of 'the world' Bonhoeffer had during the Church struggle days[36] it is not surprising that this attempt to connect ethics to its Christological base should emphasise participation in Christ's vicarious action rather than any sharing in his solidarity with the world. The emphasis on "costly grace"[37] tied the vicarious action closely to suffering which is "the badge of true discipleship"[38], a sign of sharing in the vicarious sufferings of Christ. Christ

> suffers vicariously for the world. His is the only suffering which has redemptive efficacy. But the Church knows that the world is still seeking someone to bear its sufferings, and so, as it follows Christ, suffering becomes the Church's lot too and bearing it, it is borne up by Christ. As it follows him beneath the cross, the Church stands before God as the representative of the world.[39]

The vicarious foundation of the Church's mission to humanity is thus stated Christologically so that in prayer, as in everything else, the Church is "doing vicariously for them what they cannot do for themselves"[40]

Yet at the same time as he laid the Christological basis of the principle

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36. Feil, op.cit., p136.

37. *The Cost of Discipleship*, op.cit., pp35ff.

38. Ibid.,p80.

39. Ibid., pp81-2.

40. Ibid., p134.

of vicarious action Bonhoeffer was inevitably drawn towards the kind of solidarity God has with the world in the incarnation and consequently "our solidarity with the whole human race"[41]. As human beings, "we are partakers in the whole humanity which he bore"[42] and so the Church is called to live *with* the world as well as to act *for* the world. Still working with an undifferentiated concept of humanity, Bonhoeffer's whole work at this stage was to prepare the Church for such service in solidarity with the world:

> The aim is not the seclusion of the monastry, but a place of the deepest concentration for service outside.[43]

Still hoping that the Church could act in some kind of corporate way to place itself *with* Christ and *with* the suffering victims of the world's cruelty, Bonhoeffer seemed to long quite naturally for a Christian ethic which had a basis in solidarity, believers acting with one another as a body, with the world and for the sake of the world. Thus *The Cost of Discipleship* was written out of and directed towards the community of believers. However, when "the visible church could no longer sustain the trust Bonhoeffer put in it"[44] he was thrown back once again on his earliest instinct, that the fundamental principle of Christian ethics is vicarious action.

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41. Ibid., p272.

42. Ibid., p272.

43. From a report on Finkenwalde delivered to the Confessing Church in 1935; *The Way to Freedom*, London, Collins, Fontana, 1972, p31.

44. H.G.Aveling, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christology", in *Colloquium*, Vol.16, No.1, Oct.1983, p30.

4.3.4 *Life Together*, 1938.

Our argument so far indicates that it would be unfair to label Bonhoeffer's theology, even at this stage, as 'sectarian'. His ideas on prayer, meditation, community and the ministry of humble service were not directed towards the bolstering of a cloistered ideal but towards the theological and spiritual strengthening of the Confessing Church in an environment that was both hostile and riddled with temptations to weakness and compromise. Thus the whole Finkenwalde experiment - out of which *Life Together* emerged - represents an attempt to encourage a sense of solidarity within the Church by protesting against the traditional individualistic understanding of parish ministry[45] and Protestantism's long neglect of community[46]. But the Finkenwalde period also represents a preparation for vicarious action as the Christian is forced constantly outwards to the active life of the world[47]. Thus in a significant section of *Life Together* in which Bonhoeffer prepares the Christian for 'The Day Alone', he writes that "the test of true meditation and true Christian community" will be the extent to which it enables the Christian to live as a Christian alone in an unChristian environment.[48]

Yet the centre of Christian community is clearly recognized as the God who expresses solidarity with humanity in the incarnation:

> Where he is, there we are too, in the incarnation, on the

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45. Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: Exile and Martyr*, London, Collins, 1975, p53

46. Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, Collins, Fount, London, 1970, p388.

47. Phillips, op.cit., p120

48. *Life Together*, London, SCM, 1954, p78.

Cross, and in his resurrection.[49]

Bonhoeffer's Christology had fuelled in him a powerful longing to be in *solidarity* with what he called 'the world', the world into which Christ had come as the Son of Man. However in the course of the 1930s Bonhoeffer experienced the failure of those groups with which he had sought solidarity - the nation, his class, the Church and by now even the Confessing Church - to act decisively and effectively against the evil of Nazism. While never letting go of the Christological principle of, and his own desire for, solidarity with 'the world', Bonhoeffer was increasingly forced to interpret solidarity in terms of vicariousness, as solidarity with that section of the world, that group of responsible people, who were engaging in 'righteous action' on behalf of their weak and guilty people. Ultimately for Bonhoeffer this meant involvement even with the secular men of the conspiracy on Hitler's life.

Bonhoeffer recognized that solidarity with the blind and misled Germany of the late 1930s would furnish no effective Christian ethic, and *Life Together* should not be seen as a sectarian move away from solidarity with 'the world' but rather as a last desperate - and as it turned out in those circumstances, vain - attempt to provide a structure for *Christian* solidarity as a basis for the Church's vicarious acts in and for a 'world' which had gone astray.

4.3.5 Ethics, 1939-42.

The beginning of the war was certainly a significant event for Bonhoeffer's theology but not, as Phillips argued, because it signalled the release of

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49. Ibid., p14.

his Christology from ecclesiological restrictions.[50] Rather it represented his own personal decision to return to Germany from the United States to stand in guilty solidarity with his nation[51] and the beginning of his involvement with the 'worldly men' of the resistance. It was this which acted, as Rasmussen notes, as a catalyst for the development of Bonhoeffer's Christology and especially its ethic.[52]

Bonhoeffer now understood solidarity as solidarity-in-guilt, and he interpreted his resistance activity as vicarious action out of this solidarity-in-guilt with the whole people rather than simply as solidarity with the resistors. The very strength of the radical evil which had taken hold of Germany highlighted the inadequacy of traditional approaches to ethics which had become "rusty swords"[53]. Bonhoeffer was no longer content even with his own earlier desire to ground the Christian ethic in single-minded, literal obedience to the commandments of Christ. No norm-ethic could adequately deal with a situation where Bonhoeffer's heightened awareness of solidarity with his guilty people led him to see all his ethical choices as guilty ones.

So Bonhoeffer entered upon another approach to ethics which he located more firmly in the person of the Incarnate One. God's solidarity with humanity in the incarnation is the basis of the Christian life and ethic:

> God secures His love against any suggestion that it is not genuine or that it is doubtful or uncertain, for He Himself

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50. Phillips, op.cit., pp74-5.

51. Bethge, *Biography*, op.cit., pp557-9.

52. Rasmussen, op.cit., p92.

53. *Ethics*, London, SCM, 1983, p50.

> enters into the life of man as man and takes upon Himself and carries in the flesh the nature, the character, and the guilt and suffering of man.[54]

Since "Only the form of Jesus Christ confronts the world and defeats it"[55] the Christian ethic is not based on principles or ideals but on "conformation"[56] to the likeness of Christ. Now that Christian Germany had fallen into line with the Nazis and had followed Hitler into an aggressive war, the single-minded obedience of 'Christians' in a 'pagan' world was no longer an adequate ethic for Germany. Conformation, then, became a strong expression of the call to enter and share God's solidarity with the world, but now Bonhoeffer's 'world' was most clearly a guilty one and the call to conformation was with the Christ who is numbered among the transgressors.

This emphasis on God's solidarity with the world enabled Bonhoeffer, in his essay on *Inheritance and Decay*[57], to affirm, as humanizing, vital elements of the West's historical inheritance which the Church had not always felt able to affirm: the emancipation of reason and the search for truth, the discovery of human rights and technology. But God's solidarity with the world carries with it a measure of judgement against all that denies Christ and is dehumanizing and it was in these terms that Bonhoeffer described the decay of the West. Out of his own experience of social evil

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54. Ibid., p53.

55. Ibid., p60.

56. The German word is *Gleichgestaltung* which would appear to be a critical allusion to the Nazi policy of *Gleichschaltung*, the 'bringing into line' of all aspects of national life and thinking with the National Socialist *Weltanschauung*.

57. *Ethics*, op.cit., pp69-89.

Bonhoeffer saw that the Church must work together with the secular forces of order while preserving "the essential distinction between herself and these forces, even though she unreservedly allies herself with them"[58]. Thus there exists within the life of the Church a tension between its unreserved solidarity with the world and the distinctive, vicarious role it has to play within and for the world. So the Christian faith prevents itself from becoming absorbed by an ideology not by holding itself back from the political programme of secular movements but by going further than them, doing vicariously for others that which political movements cannot do because they are restricted by the demands of solidarity and consensus.

Bonhoeffer's third start on the basis of a Christian ethic departed briefly from his understanding of solidarity as solidarity with the whole world. Here solidarity was more narrowly and concretely understood in Bonhoeffer's mind as solidarity with the 'responsible men' of the conspiracy. Through the incarnation, as Phillips puts it, "The penultimate is validated Christologically as the encounter of Christ with the world"[59] and Bonhoeffer, by now fully involved in the plot on Hitler's life, was able to find a strong incarnational foundation for his experience in solidarity with his secular co-conspirators:

> Whatever humanity and goodness is found in this fallen world must be on the side of Christ.[60]

The theme of solidarity in Bonhoeffer's theology was now at its strongest and at its narrowest, a solidarity not with the whole human race but rather

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58. Ibid., pp88-9.

59. Phillips, op.cit., p139.

60. *Ethics*, op.cit., p119.

with those who are in ethical solidarity with Christ, the responsible ones.

Yet in Bonhoeffer's final approach to ethics he returned to the principle of vicariousness as the basis of involvement in the conspiracy and other ethical actions. This he did through the concept of *deputyship* by which a person is obliged to act, *in the place of* other people and *on their behalf*, as, for example, a parent for children, a teacher for pupils or a political leader for the people, within the structure of the four divine mandates: the Church, the family, culture and government. "Deputyship, and therefore also responsibility, lies only in the complete surrender of one's own life to the other man."[61] Rasmussen, in a footnote, underlined the sense of vicariousness attached to the word *Stellvertretung* which is translated as "deputyship":

> Normal German usage may mean either acting for another or taking his place or both...Bonhoeffer makes use of the strongest possible *German* overtones and intends this full substitution. When he speaks of "deputyship" the reader should understand *vicarious being and vicarious action.* The importance of exact meaning is underlined by the fact that Bonhoeffer uses *Stellvertretung* to describe the very essence of Christ's being, man's, and the Church's.[62]

With this approach Bonhoeffer now had an ethic that was both flexible and Christological. The deputy is free to act responsibly, with Christ as his conscience[63], in situations which no law can control and where there is no law for the responsible person to hide behind. The ethical key is Christ himself:

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61. Ibid., pp195-6.

62. Rasmussen, op.cit., p38, n33.

63. *Ethics*, op.cit., pp212-3.

> As one who acts responsibly in the historical existence of men Jesus becomes guilty...In this Jesus Christ, who is guilty without sin, lies the origin of every action of responsible deputyship...Jesus took upon Himself the guilt of all men, and for that reason every man who acts responsibly becomes guilty.[64]

The incarnation has destroyed the knowledge of good and evil as the basis for ethical choice; such an ethic leads too easily to self-righteousness and self-concern. Now, with the plot to kill Hitler at the front of his mind, Bonhoeffer saw the necessary ethical decision emerging from the tension between solidarity with the sin and guilt of the human situation, and the guilty choice made freely and vicariously on behalf of others by guilt-bearing responsible people.

Thus, as Rasmussen has rightly pointed out, vicariousness retained the vital role in Bonhoeffer's ethic that it had occupied since *Sanctorum Communio*.[65] In spite of the desire to live and act in concerted solidarity with others, "the willingness to act vicariously for others" remained "the law of life for all men; it is the mark of what it means to become human."[66]

4.3.6 *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 1943-5.

The strong sense of solidarity with all that is human, which had developed in Bonhoeffer's life and theology since the beginning of the war, never left him. And when he was beginning to think theologically about "the

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64. Ibid., p210.

65. Rasmussen, op.cit., p39.

66. Ibid., p39.

67. *LPP*, op.cit., p327.

world that has come of age"[67] he was concerned that Christ should become "Lord of the religionless as well."[68] But since God had been pushed "out of the spheres of our knowledge and life"[69] and had "become superfluous as a *deus ex machina*"[70], if there was to be any talk of God at all he had to be located in complete solidarity with human life:

> I should like to speak of God not on the boundaries but at the centre, not in weakness but in strength; and therefore not in death and guilt but in man's life and goodness.[71]

The way Bonhoeffer expressed this solidarity was not by a radically new theology, as some have suggested, but through an extension of his long-held Lutheran condescension Christology, a non-religious interpretation which is "in a full sense, Christological interpretation."[72] Now Bonhoeffer emphasised "God's powerlessness and suffering; only the suffering God can help"[73], which Bethge describes as "a theology of God's solidarity with the world."[74]

This has perhaps been Bonhoeffer's most lasting contribution to post-war theology for it was taken up and developed by Jurgen Moltmann[75] and has inspired or been echoed by theological reflection in other situations of

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68. Ibid., p280.

69. Ibid., p341.

70. Ibid., p282

71. Ibid., p282.

72. Bethge, *Biography*, op.cit., p782.

73. *LPP*, op.cit., p361.

74. Bethge, *Biography*, op.cit., p757.

75. See especially *The Crucified God*, London, SCM, 1974.

extreme suffering throughout the world. The omnipotence of God is of no comfort or assistance to a world that is mature enough to admit to itself that it is not experiencing the benefit of that power. Neither the incarnation nor the horrific sufferings of humanity in the 20th Century bear witness to any such God. Therefore,

> Before God and with God we live without God. God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us.[76]

Thus Christians should give up the 'religious' quest to escape from the things of this world and instead, in Christ-like powerlessness, "participate in the sufferings of God in the secular life."[77]

The nature of the Christology out of which Bonhoeffer's presentation of the ethical life of Christians and the Church now emerged was one that brought together the motifs of solidarity and vicariousness, without dissolving the tension between them. The powerlessness of Christ required of the Church complete solidarity:

> The church stands, not at the boundaries where human powers give out, but in the middle of the village.[78]

And this involved, as a first step, the renouncing of "the dangerously privileged character of the Christian religion"[79]:

> The church is the church only when it exists for others. To make a start, it should give away all its property to those in need. The clergy must live solely on the free-will offerings

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76. *LPP*, op.cit., p360.

77. Ibid., p361.

78. Ibid., p282.

79. Bethge, *Biography*, p780.

of their congregations or possibly engage in some secular calling.[80]

And it would be out of this solidarity that the Church would learn to *limit* its words and *restrict* itself to "prayer and righteous action among men."[81]

Now that Bonhoeffer had become a victim himself, and was in true solidarity and not merely in sympathy with the Jews, he was seeing the world from below. Standing by God in his hour of grieving did not mean solidarity with all that is *human*, but rather solidarity with the victims, represented by the *lonely, crucified God*. And more than this it meant a participation in the lonely, vicarious act of the Crucified One. That "Christians stand by God in his hour of grieving" not only binds Christians in solidarity to the suffering ones but also "distinguishes Christians from pagans."[82] As in the incarnation so in the ethical life of Christians today, solidarity with the sinful and the guilty is a necessary prerequisite of vicarious action on their behalf.

Yet ultimately the participation in the sufferings of God is a vicarious act, although one which can be seen to carry with it a sense of solidarity not with the whole world, as a human being, nor even with other Christians in the Church as fellow ethical agents, but only with the suffering, powerless ones, as a fellow victim. There is room however for Christians to act together, in solidarity with each other, in the practice of "the

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80. *LPP*, pp382.

81. Ibid., p300.

82. Ibid., p361.

83. Ibid., p281.

secret discipline"[83] as long as this does not become a place of refuge from the world but one where prayer, confession, meditation and worship take place on behalf of the world. Thus Bonhoeffer never repudiated *The Cost of Discipleship* and *Life Together* because he saw that the inner life of the Church could be, and had to be, entirely vicarious.

4.4 Bonhoeffer's Christological Ethic: Guilt-bearing

Bonhoeffer's experience thus informed his Christology. He had learned that in a world of conflict Christians could not as a matter of practical ethics operate on the basis of vague declarations of solidarity with an ill-defined 'world'. Nor could they seek to be in solidarity with only a holy, sacred part of the world, but had to stand in solidarity with the guilt of the sinful world, and ultimately with the victims of the world's sin. This gave a double meaning to the concept of solidarity in Bonhoeffer's thought and experience: there was on the one hand the idea of solidarity-in-guilt with the sin of one's people, and on the other hand the commitment involved in identification with the victims of the world's sin. Bonhoeffer's praxis led him to understand Christ's activity in terms of this two-fold solidarity, bearing guilt with the guilty and sharing suffering with the crossbearers.

Yet at the same time, the death of Christ went beyond solidarity; it was a lonely, solitary affair. Just as the conspirators died bearing a guilt which, at that time at least, their nation had not accepted, Christ bore alone the guilt of a people who were 'yet sinners'. This guilt-bearing was, in Rasmussen's words, "full, vicarious action."[84] The sharing of

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84. Rasmussen, op.cit., p53.

the sufferings of the victims also has a vicarious aspect but we shall return to this in Chapter Six. For the value of Bonhoeffer to our discussion is that he can speak both to the theology of the black victims - which we discuss in Chapter Six - and to those whites who are concerned to learn from Black Theology. Here we focus briefly on the lessons that Bonhoeffer's Christological ethic holds for white theologians.

Our argument is that Bonhoeffer addresses white theology through the Christological motif of guilt-bearing which, as we have seen, carries with it a sense of both solidarity and vicariousness. Thus the "free confession of guilt" which Bonhoeffer wrote for the Church[85], so that the nation could experience "a healing of the wound"[86], was a vicarious act which at the same time arose out of the Church's solidarity and shared guilt with the nation. Rasmussen's description of the ethic of guilt-bearing brings out this dual sense:

> Acceptance of guilt meant taking on this collective guilt as one's own even when it was not directly resultant from one's own actions, even when one vehemently opposed the very causes that gave rise to it. Acceptance of guilt was not passive but was rather a dimension of vicarious action; it was deputyship among sinners. In Bonhoeffer's particular case it included exercising solidarity with those who were constrained to do evil, who were constrained to break not only state law but divine law...[87]

Guilt-bearing was central to Bonhoeffer's own ethical practice, especially in his entry, for Germany's sake, into the resistance.[88] This was deeply

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85. *Ethics*, op.cit., pp92-4.

86. Ibid., p96.

87. Rasmussen, op.cit., p58.

88. Ibid., p171.

rooted in his Christology for, in de Gruchy's words, this ethic was,

> in fact the affirmation of the reality of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. It is an expression of what it means to exist for others, for the victims of society, for future generations, and for the community of faith.[89]

Just as Christ was guilty without sin, and out of selfless love entered into the guilt of others and took this guilt upon himself, so too all who seek to act responsibly will do the same. In these terms Bonhoeffer saw the conspirators taking upon themselves the guilt of nation, church and class, the difference being that responsible people today, like the conspirators, are truly guilty themselves.[90]

However Rasmussen is unhappy with the Christological basis that Bonhoeffer provides for this ethic of guilt-bearing. He argues that Bonhoeffer fails to distinguish, and consequently confuses, "true guilt" and "forensic guilt".[91] Since the guilt Christ bore, he goes on, was forensic and not true, Bonhoeffer's ethic only justifies Christologically the acceptance by responsible Christians of the forensic, or legal, guilt of others and of society but not of true guilt.

This, Rasmussen believes, constitutes an unresolved Christological problem in Bonhoeffer's theology for the Christology cannot support the ethic. Yet Rasmussen knows that Bonhoeffer and the other conspirators regarded themselves as sharing, truly and personally, in the guilt of the German

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89. de Gruchy, op.cit., pp85-6.

90. Bethge, *Exile and Martyr*, op.cit., p155, quoting a 1932 sermon of Bonhoeffer's in which, even then, he referred to the guilt of modern martyrs.

91. Rasmussen, op.cit., p172.

people which they confessed and bore. This sense of real solidarity in guilt, and vicarious acceptance of real rather than simply forensic guilt, has been echoed by some white South Africans. As de Gruchy wrote in the early 1970s:

> The Church in South Africa needs to acknowledge clearly and honestly that it is guilty and responsible for a great deal that is wrong, and that it shares deeply in the total guilt of the nation.[92]

Rasmussen is not looking for a solution to this problem because he knows that in Bonhoeffer's theology as we have it there is no solution. But we would suggest that, if Bonhoeffer's Christology is seen to have developed in constant interaction with his own praxis, as we have described it, allowing, in the manner of Black Theology's second stage, present praxis to inform Christology, then Rasmussen has stated the problem the wrong way round. Bonhoeffer did not have a Christology which had to justify or sustain an ethic. His Christology was in dynamic dialogue with the ethical demands being made on him in his opposition and resistance to the Nazis. Knowing himself part of the nation, class and Church which had allowed this evil to arise, he finally had no ethical choice but to but to bear true guilt. The problem is not whether this ethic is 'justified' by Bonhoeffer's Christology. The problem rather concerns the implications of this ethic for Christology.

Bonhoeffer never dealt with this issue. He had begun his Christology with the humanity of Jesus and with the confession that in this man we have to do with God. Bonhoeffer's own ethical praxis taught him that the bearing of guilt, not only vicariously but also in real solidarity with the guilty, is

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92. In Bethge, *Exile and Martyr*, op.cit., p32.

unavoidable. If Christ's humanity is the same as ours, did he not share in this guilt and bear this real guilt? What are the implications of this for our understanding of the divinity of Christ? How then do we understand Christ's sinlessness? These are the questions raised by Bonhoeffer's Christological ethic and they are directed against the confessional starting point he professed.

As far as Black Theology is concerned these questions are only a by-product of its endeavours so far. That is, these questions only arise insofar as the second stage methodology is applied to the call to whites to confess and bear the guilt of their people. Black Theology has not yet considered the effects of this approach on the Church's traditional understanding of Christ's divinity. When Black Theologians, or whites in sympathy with them, come to do so the experience of Bonhoeffer could contribute useful comparative data for theological reflection. At this stage, however, the ethical demands made by both Bonhoeffer and Black Theology on whites are the same: that white Christians must confess their guilt in solidarity with their fellow-whites and bear it, vicariously, on their behalf. The Christological implications of this are yet to be worked through.

We turn now to the victims. In the next chapter we shall see how Mofokeng develops a Christology from the perspective of the poor and in relation to their experience and praxis. Then we shall consider, in the final chapter, whether Mofokeng could not usefully engage with Bonhoeffer's theology in order to learn from a Christology which, not unlike Black Christology, emerges from a solidarity with the victims and an engaged praxis of liberation.

CHAPTER FIVE: MOFOKENG'S CHRISTOLOGY

5.1 The Concerns of Black Christology

Belonging as it does to Black Theology's second stage, Mofokeng's attempt to construct a Black Christology goes beyond the interpretation of biblical and theological concepts, to reflect theologically "on the black praxis of liberation in the situation of racist oppression and exploitation."[1] This Christology unfolds as it tries to answer both the anthropological question of Black Consciousness - *Who are we as black people in South Africa?* - and the Christological question - *Who do you, the black oppressed, say I am?* - which are brought together to ask:

> how can faith in Jesus Christ empower black people who are involved in the struggle for their liberation?[2]

This is not an attempt to turn theology into anthropology. Rather it arises from the concern to take seriously the incarnation as the place where both God and authentic humanity, the humanity he has assumed, can be found.

Mofokeng sees Jesus as pertinent to the question of black identity because of an identification between his suffering and the suffering of the black oppressed."[3] Furthermore this identification is recognized as not merely incidental but as a deliberate act of solidarity by Jesus on their

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1. Mofokeng, *The Crucified Among the Crossbearers*, op.cit., p20.
2. Ibid., p(x)
3. Ibid., p28.
4. Ibid., p32.

behalf.[4] For this reason the conviction of Black Theologians is that

> the God who raised Jesus is at work in their period of hanging on the cross, affirming black humanity and raising a new humanity and a new world in which human life will be possible for all.[5]

Thus Black theology sees in the history of Jesus, as in the Exodus story, not only an event of liberation but also an act of creation. Liberation from oppression and alienation leads to the creation of new active subjects who are freed to create their own culture and history and to be creative on their own land.[6]

The creation of the acting black subject is central to Mofokeng's Christology for he sees black humanity as integrally involved in the Christ event as the poor who are empowered to participate actively in their own liberation. Yet the black struggle for liberation, like that of Jesus, has a dialectical history[7] meaning that it "does not move or evolve harmoniously and evolutionarily"[8] but knows moments of both harmony and disruption in the face of continually escalating opposition and confrontation.[9] The new black acting subject can only be forged through participation in this struggle. Thus Mofokeng operates on the basis of a close connection between Christological reflection and reflection on the unfolding project of black liberation:

> The history of Jesus as the history of incarnation coincides as

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5. Ibid., pp41-2.
6. ibid., pp34-5.
7. Ibid., pp31-2.
8. Ibid., pp31-2.
9. Ibid., p37.

> living history with the history of the creation of the black subjectivity and the end of alienation from the black self and black subjectivity. In other words the history of incarnation serves as a paradigm for liberation and as a source of dynamization for the unfolding project of liberation which is also the actualization of the gift of black subjectivity.[10]

Black Theology can draw two methodological conclusions from this emphasis on the history of Jesus and the particularity of the incarnation. Now humanity, and in particular, poor, oppressed humanity, is recognized as the locale of the presence of God so that, firstly, the true theologian must share this historical location and, like Jesus, participate in the struggle against this condition.[11] And, secondly, this new history, the liberative praxis of the conscientized, or faithful poor, must be recognized as the work of the Holy Spirit and be included as such in the theological hermeneutic as "a pneumatological obligation."[12] Christology then becomes a reflection on two, interrelated histories, the history of Jesus of Nazareth and the history of the contemporary Christian community.[13] Thus Mofokeng formally integrates present-day praxis into his Christology so that the black experience can be allowed to shed light on the life, history and acts of Jesus.

5.2 Sobrino's Historical Christology

Mofokeng believes that it is natural and legitimate for black Christians to turn, for Christological assistance, to "fellow Christians who are also

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10. Ibid., pp34-5.

11. Ibid., p55.

12. Ibid., p67.

13. Ibid., pp67-8.

14. Ibid., p46.

engaged in related struggles for liberation in almost similar situations."[14] And so he selects the Latin American theologian Jon Sobrino[15] as his partner in dialogue because, firstly, Sobrino's work is set in the context of the theology of liberation and, secondly, Sobrino seeks an historical Christology, both of which vital concerns are shared by Black Theology.

The theology of liberation begins with an analysis of its own social context from below, by those who have made an option for the poor. From this perspective a situation of oppression and exploitation, polarity and conflict, is not only perceived but experienced, and using Marxist analytical tools[16],

> the poor exercise their right to think by breaking with the dominant analysis of their situation and the solution that is being offered by those who do not share their suffering, who in fact benefit from it.[17]

This situation is experienced as a sinful one and a denial of God's desire for his people to be active subjects of their own history rather than the victims of the history of the rich and powerful. The total transformation of such a society is seen not only as the longing of the oppressed but as the will of God who perceives the situation, and feels its pain, from the same perspective.

A "critical consciousness and attitude towards the present political and

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15. Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, Orbis, New York, 1978.

16. Mofokeng, *The Crucified Among the Crossbearers*, op.cit., p47.

17. Ibid., p48.

18. Ibid., p56.

economic status quo"[18] is created by the firm confidence about the coming of the new society. But for Latin Americans this assurance did not come, as it did for Jurgen Moltmann, through the eschatological categories of hope or promise for these are too remote from their concrete historical experience to be able to provide real motivation.[19] While eschatology may rightly perform a critical and relativizing function in developed countries where historical projects - say, for example, the building of a centrally planned economy, or the perpetuation of 'the American way of life' - run the risk of being absolutized, there was a danger that in underdeveloped countries it could be misused to discourage participation in concrete projects of liberation.[20] Neither, as Gustavo Gutierrez has stressed, could Latin Americans easily share J.B.Metz's concern to mould the Church into an institution of social criticism and practitioner of liberation, for his "optimism in relation to the church is not reconcilable with the present position and role of the church."[21] Latin American liberation theology insisted that the Church had to abandon its "ecclesiocentric perspective."[22] Recognizing that it has its centre outside of itself where Christ is at work beyond its boundaries among the poor[23], the Church had to accept poverty as an act of solidarity and as an act of protest against it.

So for Latin American liberation theology, it was the concept of the coming

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19. Ibid., pp56-7.

20. Ibid., p87.

21. Ibid., p57.

22. Ibid., p58.

23. Ibid., pp58-9.

Kingdom of God which had become subversive of the present structures and a driving force of the creation of a new society.[24] The new society is seen as a gift of God, subsequent to and dependent on his liberative invasion of history[25], while at the same time time human projects of liberation are embraced by, and given value as historical mediations of, the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is not built by purely human activism but is recognized by faith as the work of the God who is present in Christ among the poor, and who by faith commit themselves to participate with him in its realization.[26]

Traditional Christologies are seen by Latin American theologians to respond to needs arising from situations very different than those of the poor and oppressed.[27] Jesus has been abstracted from the historical struggles of his time to form the basis of vague and distant Christologies which do not take seriously those he befriended, those who were his enemies or the conflicts and developments in his life.[28] So over the centuries a shift in emphasis in the Church's theological thinking has taken place away from the cross and towards the resurrection. But while Sobrino seeks reasons for this at the level of ideas, in particular in Greek patterns of thought, Mofokeng suggests a more fundamental, material reason in the "real abandonment of the poor in the Christian community by the theologians of

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24. Ibid., p57.

25. Ibid., pp81-2.

26. Ibid., pp85-6.

27. Ibid., p64.

28. Ibid., p65.

29. ibid., p94.

the periods in question."[29]

The domination of theology by, and the orientation of the Church towards, those who are not victims or sufferers led, in Sobrino's view, to the simultaneous removal of Jesus from the cross and "a betrayal of those people in the world who are hanging on the cross and crying out for liberation."[30] However, the present situation in Latin America, as in South Africa, is forcing theology back to its proper focus on the crucified God and restoring the oppressed in their rightful place at the centre of theological reflection and Christian communal action.[31]

Sobrino's Christology, then, can be pictured as an ellipse with two foci. The first is the history of Jesus and his praxis, and the second is the present-day sitation of the oppressed and their efforts, or wish, to transform it. These two contexts are seen to have both objective similarities, in terms of the material situations in Latin America and the Palestine of Jesus'day, and also subjective parallels in that both are experienced as sinful contradictions of the Kingdom of God.[32] But, like the Black Theologians, Sobrino is not looking for the 'historical Jesus' who was the subject of the 'quest' by nineteenth century European liberal theology, the Jesus behind the texts whose biography could be verified by the tools of historical criticism, in order to satisfy the intellectual demands of a mature humanity.[33] Sobrino is simply saying that Latin

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30. Ibid., p93.

31. Ibid., p94.

32. Ibid.,p68.

33. Ibid., pp68-9.

American Christology cannot start at a confessional point which effectively abstracts a Christology from a frozen history of Jesus[34], but must take seriously the whole history of Jesus as depicted in the New Testament, especially in the Gospels.[35] Sobrino does not merely seek knowledge about Jesus but an "effective collaboration"[36] with him which will empower the black oppressed in their struggle for freedom.

So Christology is historicized in order that the development of Jesus' life can be recognized, examined and opened up, like the contemporary Latin American situation, using Marxist tools of analysis to expose the conflicts and oppressive forces at work in society. The two situations are then brought into correspondence so that the questions arising from the praxis of the present community become the point of entry into Christology in the search for the significance of Jesus here today.[37]

Sobrino's own point of entry into Christological reflection is determined by his belief that Christian praxis in Latin America reached a point of crisis when it was confronted by the total and concerted violence of the defenders and benefactors of the status quo and all who opposed the liberation of the poor; at this point major decisions had to be made.[38] So Sobrino first engages with the story of Jesus at the point of the 'Galilean crisis' which then becomes the major pivot around which his

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34. Ibid., p72.

35. Ibid., p70.

36. Ibid., p70.

37. Ibid., p72.

38. Ibid., p75, n.62.

Christology evolves.[39] This was the moment when Jesus left Galilee, where his ministry had until then been concentrated, and went into temporary exile in order to re-evaluate his thinking and praxis prior to his decision to go to Jerusalem to confront the authorities directly. This crisis, like each crisis in the life of Jesus, was a challenge to his trust in and obedience to God, engendered by an ever increasing opposition which tried to force or tempt him to compromise or collaborate. In the process of this struggle both the consciousness and praxis of Jesus were radicalized and he became 'more' the Son.[40] The crises in Jesus life were essentially political and concerned the nature and use of power[41], but Jesus would not deviate from his conviction and praxis that the Kingdom of God demanded and could only be brought about by the use of power not to dominate and exploit but to promote life for all and humanization.[42] But this presented such a challenge to religion, as the ideological superstructure of the political and economic order, offering a contradictory access to God through doing justice for the poor and oppressed, that Jesus inevitably felt the full weight of the opposition of the status quo.

The Christological significance of the Galilean crisis is that "he does not give in when confronted by situations and forces that attempt to force capitulation on him and instead deepens and intensifies his identification

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39. Ibid., p76.

40. Ibid., p76.

41. Ibid., p77.

42. Ibid., p85.

43. Ibid., p80.

with the world that is suffering."[43] From the depths of this suffering solidarity, where Jesus held on to his belief in the coming Kingdom and his trust in the power and justice of God in the face of their blatent negation, "he won by vicarious suffering and assassination."[44] That God has not in fact abandoned the oppressed but is with Jesus on their side and not, as historical circumstances suggest, on the side of the oppressors, is known from the perspective of the resurrection.[45] While not yet experienced by the oppressed it is their conviction, deriving from their identification with Jesus, that God raises the crucified ones; this gives hope and militance to the historical struggle.[46]

5.3 Mofokeng's Use of Sobrino

There are two major areas in which Mofokeng is able to use Sobrino's insights to strengthen Black Christology. The first concerns the attempt to historicize ontological concepts. Sobrino declares that he is not trying to replace the dogmatic formulations of Chalcedon[47] but believing that they only make sense in the context of the events and debates of the time, he argues that the philosophical framework in which they are cast makes them impenetratable and alienating to the poor and oppressed who are in need of a concrete solution.[48] He also identifies two possible problems with Chalcedon. The first is that it begins with what are now seen as

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44. Ibid., p78.

45. Ibid., p96.

46. Ibid., pp98-9.

47. Ibid., p72.

48. Ibid., p101.

questionable *a priori* conceptions of humanity and divinity which are not firmly based on the incarnation; at the risk of being accused of adoptionism, Sobrino wants to do justice to the historical and social process by which Jesus 'became a person' and 'became the Son'.[49] The second is that Chalcedon deviates from the teaching of the Synoptic Gospels by failing to recognize the Kingdom of God as the concept through which Jesus relates, indirectly, to the Father.[50] So Sobrino wishes to open up the old formulae, which, he believes, have now lost their power to motivate Christian praxis and reflection, by returning to the historical basis in order to make them comprehensible, effective and more accurate.[51] Mofokeng does not set out his own attitude to Chalcedon quite so explicitly but he is in close sympathy with Sobrino's concern to take seriously the history of Jesus as presented in the New Testament.[52]

Mofokeng's second area of agreement with Sobrino concerns the incorporation of current Christian liberative praxis into Christological reflection.[53] With the theologian acting not as a spectator but as an engaged participant in the struggle for liberation, Christian praxis today, as the work of the Holy Spirit, is taken up into the process of theologizing.[54] This localizing of theological reflection to the praxis of liberation means that the theological issues dealt with are limited to those arising in the

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49. Ibid., pp106-7.

50. Ibid., pp105-6.

51. Ibid., p72.

52. Ibid., p218.

53. Ibid., p111, point 5.

54. Ibid., pp188-9.

struggle so that there is no systematic theology in the classical sense. While this means that it is difficult to draw on the rich sources of tradition, the advantage is a relevant theology with a sharp cutting edge.[55] Mofokeng finds this a useful approach for Black Theology for it presents Christology not as a constant or static body of knowledge to be applied or worked through but as a process of knowing which unfolds dialectically as black Christians learn about Jesus Christ through active engagement with his history in the process of their own struggle for liberation.[56]

However Mofokeng also finds Sobrino's Christology inadequate at several points. First, while Sobrino is rightly concerned with the activation and radicalization of the poor as the acting subject in the whole process of liberation, he does not deal with the fact of the dehumanization of the poor. He deals only with the radicalization of an already existing and acting subject. So Mofokeng questions "whether Sobrino realizes the radical and deep effects of oppression and exploitation on the poor"[57], and the need for the humanization of the poor as recognized by Black Theology.[58]

Mofokeng's second difficulty is that Sobrino does not locate either Jesus or the poor within a history and culture which sustains, informs, activates

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55. Ibid., pp189-90.

56. Ibid., p217.

57. Ibid., p109.

58. Ibid., p43.

59. Ibid., p110.

or restrains them.[59] Black Theology seeks to take seriously the poor as a people with a history and culture, even though it has been negativized, and a land, even though expropriated. Jesus liberates through accepting, and eventually negating, these negatives as the poor reappropriate their history, culture and land.

A third problem concerns Sobrino's critical attitude towards a Christology of the resurrection. Concerned as he is to stop any "mental flight towards the resurrection event" he "places the cross in the way as it is in fact in the way in actual life."[60] Mofokeng has no problem with this attempt to ensure that theology corresponds to the facts of life but he is very aware that ultimately Sobrino offers no answer to the problem of a situation where "life is a long Good Friday."(Buthelezi)[61] We have already learnt of Mofokeng's dissatisfaction with the category of hope as an effective inspiration of liberative praxis and the tendency of Sobrino is to place resurrection in the realm of hope. Mofokeng, however, wishes for a less remote verification of the resurrection. So with these problems and unsolved questions in mind, Mofokeng turns for further assistance to Karl Barth.

5.4 Barth's Christology

Mofokeng does not fully explain why he uses Karl Barth as a second partner in dialogue with Black Christology. Neither does he explain his concern to place his own Christology in a trinitarian framework. In fact, this approach would even seem to conflict with the historical method he has

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60. Ibid., p111.

61. Ibid., p111.

declared himself to be following. However we shall return to this point below and in the meantime the engagement with Barth does serve to bring out many of the issues in Mofokeng's Christology.

Mofokeng begins by placing Barth's theology very firmly in the context of his own life story and in particular, following F.W.Marquardt, G.Hunsinger and H.Gollwitzer, in his "socialist political existence."[62] Barth's experience as a pastor in the working-class parish of Safenwil and his involvement in the trade union movement gave him a practical solidarity with the poor and a socialist perspective that he integrated into his theology as "a very important and necessary application of the Gospel."[63] From this perspective, his break with the dominant liberal theology of his day was occasioned, as is now well known, by the public support given by his theological teachers to the Kaiser's war effort. For Barth, this ethical failure had to be a sign of a more fundamental malady in their theological basis.[64] Yet the European socialist parties also failed in the same respect and this formed part of the crisis in his theology. Still believing that socialism was a visible sign of God's activity in the world[65], Barth was equally convinced of the utter inadequacy of humanity - signified by the failure of European bourgeois humanity and its highly developed culture - to act as agents in the creation of a just and peaceful

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62. Ibid., p113.

63. Barth, as quoted by his biographer, Eberhard Busch, in *Karl Barth: His life from letters and biographical texts*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1976, p80; referred to by Mofokeng, p116.

64. Mofokeng, *The Crucified Among the Crossbearers*, op.cit., p115.

65. Ibid., 119.

66. Ibid., p116.

society.[66] And so he was led away from a liberal reliance on humanity and towards a Christological concentration; what humanity had failed to do, Christ did for them. Similarly he adopted an eschatological perspective which placed the building of the new world firmly in the hands of God, with human projects distinguished from, and relating only parabolically or analogically to, the coming Kingdom of God.[67]

The immediate political context within which Barth developed his doctrine of reconciliation - *Church Dogmatics* IV,1 and IV,2, upon which Mofokeng concentrates - was the reconstruction of Europe after the intense suffering of the Second World War. It was a time when decisions had to be made, about the kind of Germany, the kind of Europe that was going to be rebuilt and Barth became actively involved in these issues both in the Church and in politics.[68] He saw his contribution as theological and it was based on the decision God had already made for Germany and the whole of humanity in Jesus Christ, the risen Jew. Having shared in human suffering from below, not in bourgeois flesh but in Jewish flesh, God himself had begun the reconstruction with the creation of the new person in the resurrection of Jesus the victim.

The emergence of the new person, the one who would participate in the reconstruction, Barth placed in trinitarian perspective. No human or historical inevitability, not even the innate meaningfulness of Jesus' life, brings about the alteration of the human situation. Rather it is the deep involvement of the trinitarian God in the human story, his presence in

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67. Ibid., p118.

68. Ibid., pp119-20.

the Christ event, that brings about the great change: the sending Father, the identifying Son, and the re-creating Holy Spirit. The history of humanity, as represented by the history of Israel, was seen by Barth as a history of suffering. But God had entered this history and made it his own, ending at Golgotha the old history of self-destruction and beginning the history of the new creation. Yet the new creature, Barth emphasised, is not autonomous humanity - which humanity had in fact led the world to catastrophe and could no longer be trusted to bring about the new order - but Christ himself, as the archetype of the new humanity, raised in an unique event, as a new act of God on behalf of all people. The Kingdom of God would be built by such as these, humanized and liberated victims, raised from below through the decision and act of God.

So the resurrection became Barth's point of entry into the story of Jesus and it is the period between Easter and the Ascension, when the risen Christ appeared to the disciples as Lord, that for him is the crucial moment. It is at that point, after God has acted decisively, that a decision has to be made, to accept or reject the reality of what God has done.[69] At this point the Christian community is created as the new acting subject which participates, in Christ, in the work of reconstruction.[70], summoned and empowered to make the life of the resurrection a visible, tangible and enjoyable reality for all people.[71] This new creation in Christ is a central concern of Barth's theology, and he associates this emergence and existence of the Christian community

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69. Ibid., p133.

70. Ibid., p126.

71. Ibid., p141.

closely with the life of God and the work of the Spirit. God in Christ is present and active in the life and practice of the community that is created, moved and enlightened by his Holy Spirit. As Mofokeng describes Barth's position:

> This eternal life of the trinitarian God in love and freedom is itself the basis of human search for life in justice and freedom that occurs as a free gift of God as and when the Holy Spirit creates a Christian community and activity.[72]

The community is thus freed to participate in the world's reaching forward to its own alteration, knowing that this better future is certain not because of any Marxian or Hegelian dialectic of history, but because Christ must come into his fulness.[73] In anticipation of the coming of Christ the community acts but in the knowledge that its own structures and activities are transient. The achievements and activities of the present are not ignored but neither are they overvalued.[74] They are sporadic and isolated demonstrations of the presence of Christ and of true humanity.[75]

Yet such break-throughs, Barth believed, are difficult in a world dominated by modern - by which he meant bourgeois - humanity which avoids the cross which Christ has instituted as the way to a new world and a new humanity.[76] Such humanity fails to see that the history of Jesus is the normative existence for all, that his resurrection is a vindication of his

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72. Ibid., p161.

73. Ibid., p144.

74. Ibid., p144.

75. Ibid., p148.

76. Ibid., p149.

life of obedience, his service for others and an act of justice towards the victim.[77] Liberative existence only comes through solidarity with those who suffer.[78] The "eternal Son who is present in all time "[79] does not now have a formless, spiritualized, internalized existence cut loose from solidarity with the oppressed.[80] Rather, Barth insisted, he is our representative and advocate before God with that same earthly history he had between Bethlehem and Golgotha. This history links the past, the present and the future of Jesus, and he is linked through this history to the history of other people. That particular history tells us where and how Christ is today in the world, and what he is bringing about in the future. And this history of Jesus "forms the basis, core and critique of world history."[81] So the resurrection must send bourgeois humanity and the whole Christian community back to the cross for that is where the Christian life is lived, though in the light of the resurrection. Jesus has changed the world by way of the situation of the poor and oppressed and has turned their condition into a privileged locus for the transformation of the world. There, among the poor, is Jesus to be sought and recognized.[82] From the perspective of those who suffer, Jesus' activities cast light on the entire human situation, revealing its sick state, but also point beyond themselves, as parables, to the Kingdom of

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77. Ibid., p137.

78. Ibid., p151.

79. Ibid., p139

80. Ibid., p137.

81. Ibid., p139.

82. Ibid., p168.

God. From this position of solidarity with the oppressed, the preaching of a transcendent Kingdom and insistence on God as the sole acting subject in its realization, Barth believed that Jesus opposed structural oppression and injustice[83], rejecting the bourgeois moralistic approach which left the structures intact and unchallenged.[84]

However Barth set God's justice in opposition to all human justice without distinction. While Jesus does justice by means of a deep solidarity with the wretched of the earth, and judges and condemns the oppressors by becoming the oppressed One[85], all classes of people, in different ways, are revealed as doers of injustice, as enemies of God.[86] The powerful define and determine the limits of justice in such a way that it is injustice to the weak, while the poor give up or compromise in the struggle against unjust structures.[87] And so Barth focusses on Christ as the doer of justice in the place of all. On the cross God himself, as the oppressed one, stands up to oppression, suffers injustice and sees that justice is done.[88] The honour of God is restored by the restoration of dignity and justice to his creature[89] and a new acting subject is created to live in a new order.[90] For this reason the community which witnesses to God's

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83. Ibid., pp168-9.

84. Ibid., p172.

85. Ibid., p180.

86. Ibid., p181.

87. Ibid., pp177-8.

88. Ibid., p182.

89. Ibid., p184.

90. Ibid., p184.

universalized.[95] Consequently, since this humanity had proved wholly unreliable, Barth introduced a radical separation between God and (this) humanity and a Christological concentration that effectively cut Jesus loose from his intimate identification with the poor who were then lumped together with the whole of humanity in its refusal to respond positively to God's justice. The privileged position of the poor, it seemed, was only important when they were the passive hosts of the incarnation[96], and not when they were the ones who followed Jesus and accepted his teachings. This refusal to make any distinction between people and poor people is, for Mofokeng, a major weakness of Barth's theology and with Cone he insists that it is not appropriate to speak to the oppressed the same words that Barth speaks to bourgeois humanity.[97]

The Christological concentration, arising from his view of humanity, Barth carried right through his theology. Thus he identified the work of the Spirit, not with the work of the community, but with Christ for he wished to maintain a radical distinction between the work of God and all human effort. However, Mofokeng believes, if Barth had been able to identify the work of the Spirit with the praxis of the Christian community, mediated by the history of Jesus in which he was close to the poor and the poor were close to him, Barth would have been able to open up his hermeneutical circle in the manner of Sobrino and have presented the privileged position and condition of the poor as a hermeneutical key in his Christology.[98] He

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96. Ibid., p195.

97. Ibid., p194.

98. Ibid., p196-7.

99. Ibid., p206.

would then have been able to honour Christologically the efforts of the poor[99] and not totally dismiss human agency, for his task was not to discourage the poor from attempting to liberate themselves from oppression but rather to counter the arrogance of the autonomous European who had usurped God's activity in the world and had created chaos and misery.[100]

His undifferentited view of humanity having led to a radical separation between God and humankind, Barth then laid strong emphasis on the privileged position of the Church, as the believing community which recognizes the Kingdom as a gift and accepts the exclusive agency of God in its realization. The actual history of Jesus, though, leads Mofokeng to add to this the privileged locale of the poor as the vantage point from which the story of the cross is dynamic and fertile in the world and for the world.[101] The legal verdict which the resurrection represents gives "an approval and acknowledgement to the life and death of Jesus Christ for justice and freedom for the victims in the world."[102] The existence and condition of the crossbearers is dynamized and fertilized as they are "instigated, incited and moved to some positive action for justice and liberation."[103] For Mofokeng, it is the poor, in a special way, who are decriminalized and empowered to liberative Christian activity in the world.[104] But Barth does not give the poor this privileged position.

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100. Ibid., pp153-4.

101. Ibid., p222.

102. Ibid., p223.

103. Ibid., p223.

104. Ibid., p223.

Nevertheless Mofokeng asserts that the actions of the poor "continuously stand under the critique of the cross of Jesus Christ who dies for all people."[105] They are not given a free hand to do what they want or justified in everything they do towards their own liberation.[106] Mofokeng describes his own view of the critical nature of the Christological relationship between God's act of salvation and the human struggle for liberation using the words of Cone:

> When oppressed people are feeling proud of their success in the struggle of freedom, and thus begin to think that *any* action is justifiable, as if their ethical judgement is infallible, then theologians, preachers, and others *in* the oppressed community must remind the people of the utter distinction between their words and God's Word. But when the oppressed are passive and afraid of the struggle of freedom, then they must be reminded that the gospel is identical with their liberation from political bondage.[107]

Where Barth's strength lies, in terms of his usefulness for Mofokeng's Christology, is his concern with the creation of the Christian subject, associated with the resurrection of Christ.[108] The event of liberation in Christ is also an act of creation for the "Christian subject is created to be an acting and creative subject."[109] This creation is therefore at the same time, a gift from God, from him alone, complete and never to be repeated or supplemented[110], and also a task to which the created

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105. Ibid., p224.

106. Ibid., p224.

107. Ibid., p199.

108. Ibid., p201.

109. Ibid., p202.

110. Ibid., p221.

111. Ibid., p202.

subjects are called and to which they must give themselves entirely.[111] From this is drawn the conclusion that Christ's life is continuous, that, in Barth's words, "Jesus Christ lives today and is concretely effective."[112] So while a superficial view of history might reveal a largely negative picture of the state of humanity, with the rich and powerful exploiting and oppressing the poor and the weak, Barth went deeper to read history Christologically.[113] Thus he saw, on the one hand, the presence of the crucified Christ amidst the suffering ones and the oppressed, while on the other, he saw insight into God's reign in "the rising of the suffering and crucified victims in the world, the emergence of Christian solidarity with the oppressed, the destruction of inhuman structures and efforts for the establishment of a state in which justice and freedom prevail."[114] As evidence of this, as signs of the 'Great Revolution' that has happened in Christ's death and resurrection, Barth pointed to the prevalence of freedom in Western Europe and social justice in Eastern Europe[115], signs which are inevitable because Jesus Christ is the living Lord of the world.[116] For Barth these realities have a Christological basis.[117]

But the fact that there was freedom without social justice in the West and social justice without freedom in the East led Barth to the conviction that

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112. Ibid., p203.

113. Ibid., p211.

114. Ibid., p212.

115. Ibid., p202.

116. Ibid., p204.

117. Ibid., p204.

these realities are unreliable and paradoxical manifestations of the Kingdom of God. Emphasising their imperfection and incompleteness, he saw them as further evidence of the world's opposition to the fulness of the grace of God. Therefore these human achievements could not be given any Christological or hermeneutical significance, as revealing the direction and nature as the work of Christ through his Spirit in the world today.[118]

For Mofokeng, Barth placed too great an emphasis on the unitary or universal character of history and culture at the expense of differentiating between the dominant history and culture of the powerful and the oppressors and that of those they oppress.[119] Mofokeng wants to see Christ "affirmatively, creatively and critically there in this history, culture and land of the oppressed."[120] He is not satisfied with the description of African history as having only 'pre-Christian' significance', as if Christ then substituted for their history, culture and land. Christ was there in it, though critically so for Mofokeng does not advocate a sacralization of the entire history and culture of the oppressed.[121]

Furthermore, Barth's view of the history of Jesus is defective in Mofokeng's opinion, for while Barth saw that history in terms of a dialectic, moving from high point to high point, no qualitative growth

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118. Ibid., p204.

119. Ibid., pp212-3.

120. Ibid., p209.

121. Ibid., pp208-9.

resulted from this dialectic. Barth concentrated so much on the cross in present history that he gave no hermeneutical significance to the activity of the poor who by the resurrection are created as acting subjects in history. For Barth the presence of Christ in history is to be sought in the history of suffering rather than in the history of resurrection. So in the history of Jesus, while he recognizes that the poor followed Jesus and the rich rejected him, Barth places his Christological focus on the cross where all abandoned him.[122] The positive response of the poor in the first part of Jesus' ministry loses all theological significance, and the rich and the poor are not differentiated. Mofokeng wants to give theological significance to both parts of Jesus' story so that at times the efforts of the poor could be identified with God's work, reflecting the early obedience of the Galilean poor, while at other times, mindful of their later abandonment of Jesus on the cross, a clear distinction would have to be made between the works of the poor and the works of God.[123]

To Mofokeng, Barth's post-war theology just does not present a coherent picture of an historical project going through a dialectical process, by which he means he does not see evidence of any relationship between Barth's theology and a political praxis which could lead to a dynamic engagement with an unfolding understanding of the history of Jesus.[124] Barth tends to understand Christology as a give body of knowledge while Sobrino, more satisfactorily, sees knowledge of Christ unfolding dialectically in the present struggle for liberation and in engagement with the history of

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122. Ibid., p214.

123. Ibid., pp214-5.

124. Ibid., p197.

Jesus. "We will know as we learn to know," as Mofokeng puts it.[125] One result of this is that Barth sees the history of the cross unfolding exclusively under the irresistible power of the Holy Spirit, while Sobrino and Mofokeng recognize opposition, decision and temptation as important elements in Christology arising from their own experience of their own liberation struggles.[126]

What Barth does not do, in Mofokeng's view, is provide an answer to those whose life seems like a long Good Friday. Mofokeng is looking for concrete indications of the truth of the resurrection and of the operation of the Holy Spirit in the existence of the oppressed. He asks, "Does the Spirit make a trail in the world of the poor and the oppressed?"[127] Barth's belief that there are only isolated and paradoxical pointers to the Kingdom of God is not satisfactory. Cannot more be said about the liberative efforts of the poor who heard Jesus' message in his day and who share his sufferings and are created as acting subjects by him today? Does not the solidarity of Jesus with the poor and oppressed give to their liberative activities a significance which must be recognized and honoured Christologically?

5.6 Black Christology

Having drawn on the Christologies of Sobrino and Barth, Mofokeng goes on to construct his own framework for Christological reflection in South Africa. From Sobrino, he has taken the basic historical approach to Christology and

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125. Ibid., p217.

126. Ibid., p220.

127. Ibid.,p225.

the manner of incorporating present Christian praxis into the hermeneutics of Christology. In Barth he has discovered a concern with the creation of the new Christian subject which is not dealt with adequately by Sobrino. However Mofokeng's whole approach is so much closer to that of Sobrino than to Barth's that the value of such a detailed engagement with Barth's Christology is not clear. We shall return to this matter in Chapter Six where it will be suggested that Bonhoeffer may prove a more fruitful partner in dialogue, as one closer to Black Theology's central concerns.

With his "double grounded hermeneutic of praxis"[128] Mofokeng is able to give a theological, Christological, significance to the black struggle. Christ is connected to the black oppressed by his solidarity with the poor and his commitment to their liberation. Through his life, death and resurrection he has restored to black people their humanity, creating them to be acting subjects and giving birth to their uprising.[129] The risen Lord is present in the oppressed community, sharing their suffering and awakening them to the knowledge that the powers that dehumanize and oppress them have been exposed and vanquished on the cross, so that they are freed from their fear of them to engage in the struggle for historical liberation.[130] Thus the struggle of the poor for true humanity, as initiated by Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, is taken up into God's work of salvation and is given a universal significance.[131]

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128. Ibid., p21.

129. Ibid., p233.

130. Ibid., p235.

131. Ibid., p235.

For Mofokeng this means that not only the present struggle, but its entire history, is taken up into this work of salvation. The history from which black people have been cut off, a history which remains incomplete and unfulfilled, is taken up into the present struggle and its contribution to the project of liberation honoured.[132] Furthermore the Christological significance of the liberative efforts of past communities, leaders and martyrs is recognized:

> There is thus no way in which we can talk about the present creative work of God in Jesus Christ without tracing his work and footprints in the green savannahs of our African history.[133]

Mofokeng emphasizes that he is not suggesting the wholesale and uncritical appropriation of the ancestral acts and traditions, simply that the liberative undercurrent of black history is freed to strengthen, inform and inspire the present struggle.[134] The fact that God is present in this history means that liberation and humanization of the poor and oppressed is not left to chance but is grounded Christologically in the history of Jesus.[135] But for Mofokeng - and here he disagrees with Barth - the consequent insurrections in black history are not seen as merely sporadic and paradoxical, but as the inevitable manifestations of an historical process which is progressively, though dialectically, unfolding towards a liberation which is getting closer.

This, for Mofokeng, is an answer to the problem of the long Good Friday.

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132. Ibid., pp235-7.

133. Ibid., p237.

134. Ibid., p236.

135. Ibid., p243.

Convinced that a "liberative existence is a dialectical existence"[136], Mofokeng sees signs of the resurrection in the insurrections of the black oppressed. As the struggle encounters opposition from the forces of oppression, the resultant crises force decisions on the oppressed community. It is Mofokeng's belief that these crises lead to a greater determination and radicalization among the oppressed and a qualitative growth in their liberative efforts, not least in the form of stronger internal solidarity.[137] The more brutal and repressive the system becomes, the more determined and 'free' the committed black community becomes, and the struggle not only continues but progresses in the direction of a new society.[138] When this experience of the dialectical nature of the present struggle is given hermeneutical significance, Black Theology is then able to recognize that the praxis of Jesus went through a similar dialectical process, starting with his birth and building up to a climax in his crucifixion.[139]

By virtue of the particular circumstances in which black people find themselves in South Africa, Mofokeng chooses a different point of entry into the history of Jesus than those chosen by Sobrino and Barth. In the search for an identification with the story of Jesus, he goes right back to his birth in poor and humble circumstances, away from home, like black migrant workers,[140] with a future determined by the circumstances and

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136. Ibid., p239.

137. Ibid., pp240-1.

138. Ibid., pp239-40.

139. Ibid., p242.

140. Ibid., p243.

place of his birth. It was this man in such unpromising and hostile circumstances who emerged as the acting subject of his own history. Thus it is necessary to do a real historical Christology which understands Jesus' life in relation to these circumstances and the theological ideas that emerged from it:

> we have to understand Jesus as 'very man' in the deepest materialist sense in order to understand him as 'very God' amongst us in the most spiritualist sense.[141]

There can then be no choice between a Christology from above or from below since for Black Christology the choice has already been made both by the event of the incarnation and by the historical location of the theologizers in the oppressed black community.[142]

Here we can pause to note that Mofokeng's point of entry into the history of Jesus seems close to that of Bonhoeffer, as we have described it. Both Bonhoeffer and Mofokeng lay considerable emphasis on Christ's total and unavoidable solidarity with his people, deriving from the condition and place of his birth, a solidarity which was the root and basis of his ethical responsibility, and out of which he acted and spoke. In a situation of conflict Jesus was, through birth and through active commitment, on a particular side in that conflict. So both Bonhoeffer and Mofokeng begin their engagement with the history of Jesus at the same point.

With this historical approach, certain elements of the history of Jesus stand out in the elaboration of Black Christology. Jesus adopts the

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141. Ibid., p244.

142. Ibid., p244.

perspective of the Old Testament prophetic tradition, choosing the side of the poor "in a world of divisions, confrontations and conflicts between the powerful and the weak, the rich and the poor."[143] By entering the situation Jesus not only knows but experiences the need for liberation of the poor from passive resignation and their mobilisation in the struggle for justice.[144] Thus Jesus "compassionately undertakes actions of liberative service to them, empowering and actually raising them up to be human subjects by acting as the human subject among them."[145]

As a result Jesus suffers the fierce reaction of the benefactors of the situation. The world in which Jesus acts is in the grip of sin.

> It is the world in which external imperialist and internal religious, politico-economic and social institutions and power-structures collude to and actually use power to oppress, exploit, dispossess the poor and discriminate against them.[146]

Power was misused by those at the top in the various levels of the social hierarchy, not least by the religious leaders since religion had become central element of the ideological superstructure of this exploitative system, and God was presented as the head of the 'empire'.[147] By talking of God from the underside rather than from the perspective of the ruling classes, by subverting the entire purity law system[148], and by denouncing

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143. Ibid., p245.

144. Ibid.,p245.

145. Ibid.,, pp245-6.

146. Ibid., p246.

147. Ibid., pp246-7.

148. Ibid., p248.

the Pharisees and scribes who neglected the commandment of concrete love[149] Jesus confronted the forces of oppression and incurred their wrath.

However this opposition was not simply brushed aside as the path of Jesus' ministry went smoothly and unswervingly on its way. There were times of crisis when Jesus was faced with choices and he was tempted to withdraw from his mission. If God was involved in Jesus' struggle with temptation, it was not through the effortless agency of a transcendent Spirit, but in the context of his praxis, the Spirit of God strengthening him and pulling him through, as he struggled with each crisis and dilemma, fighting the temptations to compromise or give up and searching to know the will of a God who often seemed so absent from these struggles.[150]

In the process of these struggles, crises and dilemmas the mission of Jesus did not continue unchangingly on its way to victory. It underwent changes. In the face of increasing opposition Jesus changed his strategy, was more careful about his movements and moved the location of his work and teaching.[151] Not only his praxis but also his knowledge changed as his ministry progressed, as he grew in wisdom, learned obedience and as the inevitability of suffering deepened in his consciousness.[152] Thus his praxis conditioned his thinking and his spirituality, which in turn informed his praxis.

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149. Ibid., p249.

150. Ibid., pp250-2.

151. Ibid., p252.

152. Ibid., pp252-3.

The hope of Black Christology emerges from the conviction of the involvement of God in the history of this Jesus, allowing the love he has for his Son to overflow to his creation in the incarnation.[153] The solidarity of the Son with the wretched of the earth and his commitment to justice with them, and on their behalf, takes the history of the liberation of the oppressed up into the history of God himself. Thus theological reflection is focussed on two interrelated histories of the cross: the suffering condition of the black oppressed which Christ has made the instrument for the liberation of humanity[154], and Christ's own history which shows that a life of committed liberative praxis unavoidably arouses opposition and incurs suffering.[155] Since, in Christ, the trinitarian God is present in both these histories, hope is given a solid basis in the knowledge that the fellow-suffering and activating God is also the resurrecting God, without in any way muffling the cry of deriliction which continues to be uttered by the crossbearers and whose suffering condition remains the vital context of Black Theology.

So Christ does more than suffer with the black oppressed and give them hope for the eventual gift of resurrection. He also radicalizes them and inspires their insurrections, for their struggle for justice and freedom is God's struggle for the Kingdom. He frees them from a negative view of themselves and their abilities, ends their toleration of injustice and their "passive resignation and inactivity."[156] These poor constitute the

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153. Ibid., p256.

154. Ibid., p258.

155. Ibid., pp260-1.

156. Ibid., p258.

'humanity' of Black Theology, whose efforts are not to be minimized theologically as if they shared the arrogance and presumption of Barth's bourgeois Europeans. These are the poor who followed Jesus around Galilee and accepted his teaching, whom he chose to be his disciples and whom, even though in their fear they abandoned him on the cross, he raised to be active subjects in the struggle for justice and freedom. And so,

> He also calls his followers who had abandoned him at his decisive hour, the poor, the sick and the sinners and the disciples who had distanced themselves from him or fled from him to follow him to the very end, even the end of the cross.[157]

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157. Ibíd, p263.

CHAPTER SIX: BONHOEFFER AND MOFOKENG: SOME CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

We have now traced the theological context out of which Mofokeng's Christology has emerged. From the powerhouse of a new anthropology awakened by Black Consciousness, Black Theologians began to give relatively more weight than in traditional Western theology to the human experience of oppressed black humanity, an experience which was not seen by them to share the arrogance or 'total depravity' of the humanity referred to in white theology.

The validity of giving more weight to the black experience was strengthened by the work of African Theologians. They argued for more account to be taken of African culture and religion even if, as some held, this proved to be critical of traditional - or even biblical - Christianity. As we have seen, their Christological concerns supported, in general, the emphasis given by Black Theologians to the history and humanity of Jesus.

In Black Theology's first phase the condition of the poor was generally seen as a privileged position from which to interpret the Bible as the sole norm of theology, as the Scriptures of the God who shared the condition and perspective of the oppressed. However by the second phase the black experience was being given more hermeneutical significance as active involvement in Christ's work of liberation, an involvement which even has a revelational value since revelation is now seen less as a direct gift from above and more as a discovery in engaged praxis.

One development during this second phase has been for some Black Theologians, notably Itumeleng Mosala, to allow black experience to critique the social location and political commitment of the biblical

writings themselves. But many of those involved in Black Theology's first phase have not taken the step into the second phase and, for instance, Mofokeng recognizes that Boesak would dispute the legitimacy of a critical relationship between Scripture and praxis.[1]

It is doubtful, too, whether anything in Bonhoeffer's writings could be used to support such a critique of the Scriptures. But we should note that the Christology developed by Mofokeng does not *necessarily* involve the critique of the biblical texts. He has, as we have seen, declared that the Jesus in whom he is interested is the Jesus of the Gospel accounts, and in his work Mofokeng gives considerably less indication of questioning the manner in which the Gospel writers portray Jesus than many modern European New Testament scholars.

Mofokeng enters into dialogue with Barth because he believes that "Christology has to be rooted in the trinitarian life of God."[2] This leads him into fairly detailed discussion of the nature of the involvement of Father, Son and Spirit in the event of the incarnation. But he never seems to question whether this essentially confessional starting point is consistent with an historical Christology. If Christology is to be Christology then it certainly must be more than information about the life of a first century Jew and his importance in history; it must concern itself with the nature of this man's relationship to God and therefore deal with his *theological* significance. But there is a difference between starting with a particular Christological belief - which is the direction

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1. Mofokeng, in Mosala and Tlhagale, op.cit., p123.

2. Ibid., p242.

in which Barth's theology takes Mofokeng - and arriving at such a belief after approaching the life of this man *historically*, which is what Sobrino does. Sobrino seeks first to take full account of the circumstances of Jesus' life and the 'movement' and progress of his history before concluding that Jesus underwent a process of 'becoming' the Son at the same time as 'becoming' a person. This he offers as a new perspective for understanding the Chalcedonian formulae. But since he is presenting an historical Christology he arrives at this position and does not start from it.

Barth, on the other hand, starts from this position. His point of entry into the story of Jesus is the resurrection and, seeing in this the act of the trinitarian God he then interprets Christology in a trinitarian way from the beginning, that is, in the light of the resurrection. But Mofokeng has already declared that resurrection "falls outside the sphere of life experience of the average black Christian"[3] so it is not surprising that Barth's Christology should prove to be of only limited use to Black Theology. Barth's heavy trinitarian framework derives from and relates to the experience of Easter Sunday and does not adequately relate to the situation of a long Good Friday. In short, Barth makes too many confessional demands on an historical Christology.

Our contention is that the perspective of Barth's theology is too different from the situation of the black oppressed to be of more than limited use to an historical black Christology. The clue to this is recognized by Mofokeng himself when he agrees with Gollwitzer that a distance arose between

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3. Ibid., p29.

Barth's social praxis and his theology when he became a university professor.[4] The socialist commitment out of which he lived and thought during his days as a pastor at Safenwil could not be maintained in his theological work once he became removed from that situation.

Bonhoeffer, on the other hand, moved in the opposite direction. As his life progressed and his thought developed he became ever more deeply engaged in a definite political praxis. Thus he never lost or abandoned the 'view from below' which was the perspective of his approach to Christology. And perhaps for this reason his starting point was not the highly developed trinitarian theology of Barth but the simple Christological conviction that in the man Jesus we have to do with God himself. Thus, we contend, Bonhoeffer can be a more appropriate and useful partner in dialogue for an historical Black Christology than Barth has proved to be. Not only is there a shared and consistent 'view from below' but Bonhoeffer's basic Christological confession should be enough to satisfy Mofokeng's initial conviction that "Jesus is the Son who is sent by the father"[5] without so specifying the nature of the divine relationship as to be inconsistent with the historical method drawn from Sobrino.

So what Mofokeng does is to lay the basis of an approach which allows present liberative praxis to open up and shed new light on the history of Jesus, and it is this approach which we have, in effect, applied to Bonhoeffer's Christology. Accepting the validity of incorporating Christian praxis today into the Christological hermeneutic, we have seen how

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4. Ibid., p192.

5. Ibid., p242.

Bonhoeffer's activity in resistance to the Nazi evil involved a tension between the desire for solidarity and the knowledge that the Christian ethic is essentially vicarious, a tension which we can then see to have been present in the history of Jesus also. We have already seen how Bonhoeffer's Christological ethic can be used to strengthen Black Theology's message to whites. If we now turn to the black oppressed themselves, we find that, in the light of our interpretation of Bonhoeffer's praxis, we must question some of Black Theology's emphases.

Our main point derives both from Bonhoeffer and the reality of the black situation in South Africa. This is that Black Theology seems to overstress black solidarity and not take sufficient account of divisions in the black community. There is, for instance, an inadequate treatment of collaborators who are too easily defined outside of the black group as 'colourless white lackeys'. And this in spite of Black Theology's seeming acceptance of Bonhoeffer's view of the impossibility of exempting oneself from the guilt of one's people when it would not allow whites, even liberals, to dissociate themselves from the white group and its culpability. We are not suggesting that black solidarity demands the acceptance of the political commitments of 'collaborators' as equally valid praxes which must be incorporated into the process of theologizing, as some white commentators have suggested.[6] Mofokeng's method does not require this. The present praxis which he seeks to incorporate into his hermeneutic is that which relates to, is influenced by and can be seen to be a continuation of the liberative work of Jesus; it is not any praxis but

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6. e.g. Michael Maasdorp, *Pro Veritate*, Vol.13, No.10, Feb.1975, pp20-1; see also Vol.13, No.12, April 1975, pp24-5.

only uncompromised and uncompromising liberative praxis that is taken up into the theological process. But still Mofokeng tends so to focus on those oppressed who are radicalized, committed and involved that he does not deal properly with those who are not, with the sin of collaboration and the weakness of fear and apathy. Thus Black Theology has not heeded the warning issued by Alphaeus Zulu in 1973, that the fact that God is on the side of the oppressed does not necessarily mean that the oppressed are on the side of God.[7] There is, in fact, a tinge of idealism in Black Theology at this point in spite of its claims to the contrary, for there is a tendency to theologize on the basis of how things should be - with a conscientized poor - rather than on the basis of the actual history of a struggle in which many do not participate.

In the light of this lack of uniform radicalization and commitment to the struggle, Bonhoeffer can be of some assistance to Black Theology by providing the basis for an ethic which goes beyond solidarity and can motivate Christian action when solidarity breaks down. This is the Christological principle of vicarious action. In fact, this idea may already be there in Mofokeng's Christology with several references in the final chapter to the 'revolutionary vanguard' who are presumably those who go before the people performing liberatory acts on their behalf. However the unfolding of Bonhoeffer's Christology more clearly reveals what we believe to be this central dialectic of Christian praxis, that is, the tension between the desire for solidarity and the need for vicarious action. That the tension is not apparent in Mofokeng's Christology arises from an over-emphasis on black solidarity and the failure to deal

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7. Zulu, "Whither Black Theology?", *Pro Veritate*, March 1973, p13.

theologically with the fact that it is not realized.

We must also question whether Mofokeng is sufficiently rigorous in the application of his own methodology, that is, whether he takes the history of Jesus seriously enough. While he is right to criticize Barth for ignoring the theological significance of the fact that the poor, and not the rich, followed Jesus for the first half of his ministry, Mofokeng does not deal sufficiently with the poor's abandonment of Jesus on the cross. Mofokeng takes no account of something that Bonhoeffer experienced in his life, and which we have identified as an experience within the history of Jesus, that solidarity can and often does break down as the ethical demands of a particular situation become heavier and more costly. It is not that Jesus abandoned the poor in any way, but that they failed to remain in solidarity with him as he moved into confrontation with the authorities, thus forcing him, if he was to act ethically, to go out on a limb alone and do vicariously for the people, the poor included, what they could not do for themselves. If Mofokeng is to derive an ethic from his historical Christology he must surely take account of *both* the poor's solidarity with Jesus *and* their later abandonment of him on the cross. If Bonhoeffer has any thing to contribute to Black Christology, it is that an ethic of solidarity does not go far enough and ultimately the Christian may be required to go beyond solidarity to undertake vicarious actions on behalf the poor and oppressed.

There is one final matter concerning Mofokeng's application of his own historical methodology. Not all of Jesus' poor followers abandoned him in his final hours. All four Gospel accounts testify to the presence of a group of faithful women at the foot of the cross, in courageous solidarity

with Jesus, while his closest male followers had fled into hiding. Mofokeng, like the majority of Black Theologians, most of whom are men, seems not to have noticed this fact from the history of Jesus, still less has he attributed any theological significance to it. However the black experience in the struggle for liberation in South Africa, in which women have played a dynamic and prominent part, would seem to suggest that the faithfulness and commitment of women, viz a viz men, should be given serious consideration in the process of theologizing. There were a group of women standing at the foot of the cross while Jesus suffered and died. They remain there today as a witness to the failure of Black Theology to give proper recognition to their presence.

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