

## BLACK THEOLOGY REVISITED

Basil Moore<sup>©</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

On an August day in 1972, which remains indelibly etched in my memory, I boarded a plane with my wife and four young children bound for London and exile. Among other things, that I left behind was the fledgling black theology movement and the comrades with whom I had been so closely associated in the movement from its inception some two years previously.

A few months short of twenty years later, I returned to South Africa with my wife. This was made possible by the general relaxation of the strictures on exiles, which followed in the wake of the 2nd February 1990 announcement of President de Klerk. It was made possible also by the University of South Australia granting me study leave to research, among other things, the current state of the black theology movement. This research gave me an opportunity to link up again with comrades and other leading figures in the black theology movement from whom I had become separated in such undignified haste in 1972.

My research methodology was to sit down with people involved in the black theology movement, either as active proponents in it or as critical friends, and to record an unstructured interview (a full list of those whom I interviewed is given at the end of this paper). In these interviews, I usually pursued four major themes:

- 1. How do people in South Africa currently understand what black theology is?*
- 2. What is the current situation with black theology as a movement?*
- 3. What has happened to move black theology from where it was in 1972 to where it is in 1992?*
- 4. Does black theology have a future? and, if so, what must its agenda be?*

I have used these four basic questions to structure this study. I did not pursue questions about the current issues being addressed by black theologians as these were already available to me through

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<sup>©</sup> Basil Moore (1992), Professor, Curriculum Studies, University of South Australia;  
Basil Moore (ed.) (1973): **Black Theology. The South African Voice**. London: C. Hurst & Company. xii+156 pp. (Most of the essays in that collection were delivered as addresses in South Africa in 1971 and first published in the following year in a volume which was almost immediately prohibited and banned by the government of the Apartheid regime).

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published materials. I wanted to use this research opportunity to find out what was not available to me in the literature.

My analysis of the mass of data I collected was not particularly sophisticated. I looked for recurring themes that emerged from the responses to my questions. Coming in as an outsider obviously severely limits my capacity to make informed judgements of my own about the state of black theology and its future as a significant religious movement for change. What I have tried to do as often as possible is let the black theologians and their critical friends speak for themselves. It is thus their analyses rather than my own, which I am presenting in this study. At the same time, I am aware that my own judgements will show through in the particular selections I have made from the interview transcripts, and in the way, I have used them in constructing this study.

### **What is Black Theology?**

Elsewhere I have argued that black theology was understood in the early 1970s to be "black people interpreting the Gospel in the light of black experience and interpreting the black experience in the light of the Gospel" and that "black referred not simply to all the victims of racism inclusively ... but specifically to those ... who were engaged personally and directly in the liberation struggle". As a result I argued that, "black theology had to grow out of the liberation struggle and its subjects were the liberation activists". (Moore, 1991).

Such an understanding of black theology implies its organic connection with the liberation struggle in South Africa. I was particularly interested in finding out how people currently understood what black theology is since, as I will show later, people argued consistently that black theology is no longer a social movement and that it is not organically connected to the liberation struggle. This judgement about black theology, I hasten to add, was made not simply by its critical friends but also by people who regarded themselves as black theologians and who were seen by others as prominent black theologians.

If it is true that what is left of black theology as a movement is not organically connected to the major liberation struggles of black people as they took shape during the 1980s, then has the understanding of what is black theology changed? The simple answer is no, no matter how disconcerting or gratifying this may be. While the understanding has grown and become more complex the essentials remain that it is as Mcebisi Xundu put it, "a theology embedded in the struggle of black people against racism in general and apartheid in particular in South Africa". (MX)

While this basic understanding was widely shared and asserted in a variety of ways people did elaborate on what they saw to be a range of distinctive characteristics of such a theology. These include:

#### **(i) that it is a theology of and for black resistance activists**

It was Frank Chikane who stressed this characteristic of black theology particularly aptly:

I see myself as a black theologian ... You can't have learned your theology and your practical politics together like I have and not be a black theologian at heart. Black theology has always provided me with the tools to reflect on and to direct my practical struggles. And those struggles have always

been with other black people for our liberation.

That, for me, is the most fundamental characteristic of black theology. The black theologians are political activists who reflect on their praxis.... if you theologise without involvement, the people will see through you and you end up delegitimising their struggle.... The struggle of people against oppression and for freedom: that is what black theology is about". (FC) (see also Chikane, 1990).

In similar vein Takatso Mofokeng characterised black theology as:

an instrument of struggle by the victims of society. It has worked to delegitimize racist and racism theology and it has worked to legitimate Christian resistance. Black theology does not even begin until those who engage in it are also engaged in the struggle against racist oppression. They engage in theological reflection in order to move the struggle forward and they engage in the struggle in order to move theology forward. Black theology takes its cues from the very struggle which it enables. (TM)

## **(ii) that it is black people reflecting critically on black experience**

A key characteristic of black theology, which is closely related to this first characteristic, is that it is a theology which "listens to the heart beat of the struggle" as Beyers Naude put it. But this is black people listening to the heart beat of the black struggle. This was emphasised by David Mosoma:

Black theology is a theology in which black theologians take seriously the black experience; the black tradition; black people's questions about God. That is what makes it unique. It is the context of black oppression and resistance....

We must be careful here about what we mean by black ... Given our unfolding political scenario blackness cannot be understood in terms of pigmentation alone. There are many black people in the pigmentation sense who are not only collaborators with the white oppressors but who also actively oppress other black people ... So I define blackness in terms of struggle.... Black theology is a theology of and for the struggle ...

Even here we must be careful if struggle is the sole determinant of blackness. There are other elements of the black experience of oppression and alienation which have to be encompassed by the term 'black'. I think here of the violence which invades the life of every black person, of the squatter camps, of the break down of family life, of the education crisis and so on.

... Black theology is black people who themselves live in the midst of this oppression and struggle who reflect on the Gospel in the light of this experience and on this experience in the light of the Gospel. (DM)

If black theology is a theology of and for the struggle it is also what Frank Chikane called a "theology of listening':

"Black theology has been engaged in a very interesting and important legitimacy struggle: the legitimacy struggle to listen actively to people. Theologians have tended to see themselves as listening to God and then telling the people. Black theology turns that all around. The black theologians have had to learn how to listen to the people with whom they have been engaged in the struggle; trying to discern the word of God in their voice.

Making the people's struggle an authentic source of theology has been a struggle because it legitimates their struggle as it delegitimizes the forces of oppression. That legitimacy struggle has been won ... That is why the system is collapsing. As the people's struggle has gained legitimacy the system has lost legitimacy.... The temptation is for black theologians to stop listening ... (FC)

**(iii) that it is a theology which gives voice to the most marginalised members of society**

If black theology is a theology of and for the struggle and a theology of listening it is also a theology of voice; specifically it is a theology which gives voice to the voiceless. Continuing the theme of black theology's characteristic as a listening theology Beyers Naude argued:

The priority in black theology has to be to the most alienated, the most powerless and the theological task is to give voice to who they are; what their aspirations are; what they see as the way forward for them.... And our theologians won't get it right until they have lived on those Alexandra streets. We will constantly attempt to come up with a theology for those streets. But it will never be a theology of those streets because they don't live there physically, emotionally, spiritually.

There is always a temptation for black theologians to tell us what they think. This is true even of those black theologians who do listen to Mrs X and her suffering and hope and struggle. So they keep Mrs X and the millions of the others of our people silent. Why must Mrs X be kept silent? This is not a theology which deeply values black life. The role of the professional theologian who does deeply value black life is not only to listen to Mrs X but to use their skills to tell us what Mrs X thinks. When black theologians give Mrs X the voice that has been denied her they authenticate and empower her as a human being, as a participant in the struggle and, yes, as a theologian. (BN)

**(iv) that it is a theology which systematises the struggle and the reflection which is already taking place 'out there' among the people**

If black theology is a theology by and for black activists who actively listen to the "heart beat of the struggle' and give voice to those who have been silenced by oppression, black theologians do this in a specific way. As Takatso Mofokeng put it succinctly: "at a formal level black theology is taking this community talk and making it systematic". (TM)

Arnold Stofile elaborated on this theological process which characterises black theology for him:

A concern of traditional theologians is often with how to get their theological message across to people.... I like to think of the professional black theologian as a kind of Christian anthropologist. They are the ones out there in the community trying to hear what is being said and trying to give voice to the people. But they are not simply transcribers. They have to interrogate these voices to discern the oppression and the resistance that is there in the light of the Bible. And they have also to interrogate the Bible in the light of the experiences and the resistances of the people. The theologian's task, in the end, is to discern ... what is of God in the living, vital experiences and aspirations of black people. The theologian's task is to discern where, among the host of alienating things, is the surge to liberation for that alone is of God. (AS)

**(v) that it is a theology which advances the struggle by empowering people**

The yardstick by which I judge any theology, and thus also black theology, is whether it advances the struggle of the people. And it does this by empowering people; by providing them with the resources they need to engage in the struggle. (FC)

This was how Frank Chikane identified this key characteristic of black theology. For him one crucial resource is emotional:

For me black consciousness and black theology was a conversion experience. It unleashed in me energies and commitments I never knew were there. It enabled me to engage in political action as a Christian in a way I would never have dreamed possible with my conservative Pentecostal background. It brought me into the struggle ... and, do you know, there is a way in which that struggle builds you up to have self-confidence in dealing with issues. (FC) (see also Chikane, 1990).

This empowering at an emotional or spiritual level was stressed also by Mcebisi Xundu:

As black theologians we have to find ways of worship and programs of action which build people's spirit of resistance to oppression. In our liturgies we have to celebrate the work of God in those who have carried the struggle forward. We have to celebrate the work of God in our own action programs. We have to sing and dance our resistance because singing and dancing unites and gives courage, and resistance needs unity and courage. Black theology has to provide us with those symbols and images and songs which fire the emotions and provide us with a resistance spirituality, that sense of being linked with God and each other in a fierce commitment to struggle for freedom.... For me nothing is more important than that resistance spirituality. (MX)

Others like Mokgethi Motlhabi stressed the intellectual aspect of empowerment:

The role of the black theologian ... is to help people think through their resistance. Specifically it is to provide Christian people with the theological tools to link their resistance indissolubly with their Christian faith ... it is to help them accept resistance to their own oppression as their Christian duty ... Black theology teaches us that to accept suffering and oppression is to accept what is sinful and makes accomplices of us in that sin. (MM) (see also Motlhabi, 1984).

For others like Siphon Masemola skills are crucial to empowerment. Thus authentic black theologians are:

engaged in empowering Christian communities to organise for freedom by providing them with the social and organizational skills which are necessary. Schools, we have to recognise, simply do not equip people to function effectively as community activists engaged in struggles against oppression. If they want to empower themselves they have to turn elsewhere and learn from experienced community organisers. It is useless for us to sing the songs of freedom if we don't also equip people with the skills necessary to organise for freedom. (SM)

#### **(vi) that it be a theology of hope**

Black theology, according to Takatso Mofokeng, is emphatically not simply a theology of and for struggle. It is also a theology of hope:

Black theology follows the footsteps of oppressed people to search out symbols of hope. It does this in the contemporary struggles of black people. It searches the Scriptures for biblical communities who were underdogs and celebrates their acts as signs of hope in their faith. It traces the struggles of oppressed people across time and space and finds in their indomitable spirit, their acts and their achievements signs of the hope that history does not always belong to the oppressors. Thus black

theology says to black people, "you are not the only ones. You are brothers and sisters with a vast community of resisters. Oppression does not yield easily, but yield it does. As cross-bearers with the crucified one we can overcome. (TM)

### **(vii) that it is a theology of suspicion**

If black theology is characterised as a theology which enables and legitimates resistance it must also be characterised as a theology which, as Frank Chikane put it "disables and delegitimizes oppression and the forces of evil." (FC). Many characterised it as a "theology of suspicion". According to Takatso Mofokeng:

Black theology has to remain a theology of caution, indeed a theology of suspicion. In relation to traditional Western European theology we cannot take anything for granted. They say to us, "the Bible is the Word of God." In response we have to be on our guard. We have to interrogate the Scripture from the vantage point of our experience of it. We have to ask how it has become an instrument of our oppression? We have to ask whether it legitimates oppression. So Itumeleng Mosala has begun to ask whether the Bible is a ruling class text which functions to legitimate land alienation, slavery, patriarchy and many other forms of oppression. If so, he asks whether we need to develop the concept of the struggle as a hermeneutical tool so that we can locate ourselves as black people in relation to it.

As theologians we also have to acknowledge that all major Christian doctrines have been used to legitimate racist oppression. We have to be suspicious of that. We have to ask whether in their apparent universalisms they are easily appropriated by the oppressors and turned into instruments of oppression. If that is so, then it is not good enough for oppressed people to say "we are also included along with you our oppressors in your universalisms as creatures of God or members of the Body of Christ and so on." We have to challenge those universalising doctrines of the elites until they relate directly to us and make sense of our struggle and make nonsense of oppression. (TM)

All of this makes it abundantly clear that black theology is still understood in a way that makes it organic with the resistance struggle of black people. (see also Goba, 1980). The question is whether black theology, as a movement, is still organic with the resistance struggle?

### **What is the current situation?**

Many people with long-standing and deep involvement in black theology and the black theology movement have become intensely disillusioned with it as a relevant contemporary movement and sometimes were scathing in their criticisms of the current leading black theologians. One such was Buti Tlhagale who claimed that:

Black Theology now is not generated from serving the interests of the struggle or of black society. It is generated by the job descriptions of the academic institutions which require the black theologians to teach black theology, to do research and to write academic articles. (BT)

In Barney Pitso's judgement:

Black theologians have betrayed the revolution. They have not sustained or created a movement which has reached into the grassroots. In fact they have retreated into their ivory academic and ecclesiastical towers from direct involvement in the struggles on the streets. They have criticised

those struggles and exposed their shortcomings from their positions of safety. This is hardly a sensitive listening to the struggles of the people as they stood up to the tanks and guns with their stones. Nor is it a representation of that struggle in ways that energise it and empower the people. They marginalised themselves just at a time when the struggle was at its fiercest. (BP)

For Mokgethi Motlhabi:

Black theology could not now be described as a movement. There are just individuals and ideas; an inner core of perhaps ten people who write articles in the *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa*. Beyond that black theology has no organised or public face. There is no movement being shaped and given direction by those ideas. Even Mosala's talk of 'black' as 'worker' has more to do with Marxist analysis than with black theology having any connection with organised labour. (MM)

These three short extracts reveal some of the critical assessments of black theology which were recurring themes wherever I went. These include:

*(i) That a seemingly unbridgeable gap has opened up between an intensely academic black theology and the grassroots black Christian communities;*

*(ii) That black theology is simply no longer organic with the resistance struggles of people which emerged during the 1980s and in which Church leaders such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Rev. Allan Boesak played a pivotal role;*

*(iii) That black theology is seen to be in an ideological and organisational alliance with the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) and thus in ideological and institutional conflict with the African National Congress (ANC);*

*(iv) That black theology is trapped in an exclusively oppositional mode.*

I will deal with these issues in turn.

### **(i) The academic/grassroots gap in Black Theology**

One of the most common and recurring criticisms of contemporary black theology was that it has become so academic that it has lost any real contact with grassroots Christian communities who simply have no access to the ideas being generated let alone any possibility of being energised by them. In the words of Sabelo Ntwasa the current black theologians have become:

an exclusive club, unable to build an organization which is not composed solely of intellectuals. They communicate a sense that they own black theology and must defend it rigorously against corruption by less gifted or insightful people. (SN)

Charles Villa-Vicencio offered this analysis of contemporary black theology, which though couched in his inimitable style, is representative of a widespread and fundamental criticism.

Black theology is now an intellectual think shop. It is being done almost exclusively by very articulate professional theologians. At another level, I have to say, that the old symbols of black theology are still obviously enormously emotive and appealing for the proletariat on the ground. My God, they

can understand those symbols ... and they are moved by them ... Black theology in this sense is still there. But it is latent. It's just waiting to be galvanised. It needs someone who is capable of working that ground and bringing it into life.

... But these guys are not out there working that ground. There is no question about it, they have brilliant ideas. They are brilliant analysts. But people on the ground can't understand the stuff they are talking about. They seem to have no idea how to build a movement. Perhaps in their struggles with their complex ideas they have lost sight of the need to sustain an energising movement which captures the imagination of the people....

The symbols are there and they are remembered.... These are what Metz calls dangerous symbols. The ideas of Exodus and liberation, of God being on the side of the oppressed, of everyone being equal in God's sight and of the Bible speaking throughout of freedom. Tutu and Boesak worked these symbols during the dark and dangerous days of the '80s. With them they brought thousands of people out onto the streets offering themselves to be jailed or shot; powerfully defiant in the face of extreme danger.

Now the black theologian Itumaleng Mosala gets up and says that the Bible is a ruling class document. Now where do you start? It cuts the ground from under the feet of so many people who risked so much because of this text. They can't understand his complicated hermeneutics. That is not the way you go about mobilising the Christians of Guguletu ... Certainly it is not the way you mobilise people on the Cape Flats.

I agree with Mosala's Biblical analysis. But that is only part of the issue. If it remains at this intellectual level it is harmless. The issue is how do you communicate that to people so that they will continue to take the risks necessary to achieve freedom from this monster which grinds them? To do that you have to find symbols and images which connect with people and which energise their struggle. It is this inability to connect genuine insight with real people in their context which has caused black theology to wither as a movement. (CV-V)

## **(ii) Black theology as non-organic with the actual resistance struggles of black people**

In a whole variety of rich images people argued that black theology is no longer organic with the actual resistance struggles of black people. Buti Tlhagale accused black theologians of "attempting to conduct the liberation struggle from the library" (BT), Beyers Naude that "they listen to each other rather than to the heartbeat of the struggle" (BN) and Syd Lockett that they "intimidate with their criticisms rather than nurture with their affirmations those who find the courage to resist." (SL) How black theology lost its integral place within the black resistance movement during the 1980s I will pursue a little more fully in the next section on the history of black theology between 1972 and 1992. In anticipation of that Buti Tlhagale's analysis is particularly helpful:

In the early days black theology was organic with the resistance struggles of black people. From its very beginning it was intimately linked at the level of ideas with the black consciousness movement. It was also organisationally linked through the University Christian Movement (UCM) with the South African Student Organisation (SASO) and the whole alliance of black organisations that grew up as the black consciousness movement (BCM) achieved virtual hegemony in the black community.

The banning of all black consciousness organisations in 1977 and the emergence of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983 changed all that as charterist politics rapidly assumed hegemony over BC politics. This marginalised black theology. The Institute of Contextual Theology (ICT) moved

into the vacuum as it became linked to the UDF. Quickly liberation theology and contextual theology became organically linked with the mass resistance movements in the 1980s through the UDF and the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM).

So as the UDF crushed the BCM and moved it to the margins of South African politics so also did contextual theology push black theology to the margins of the religious and theological influences at work with the mass resistance movements.... Nothing has changed for black theology as the ANC has moved to the centre stage of black politics of resistance. If anything it has got worse. Black theology is even further removed from the actual resistance struggles of black people. (BT)

Mokgethi Motlhabi argued that black theology has not simply been passively marginalised by larger and more powerful political forces. Rather black theologians have:

Actively alienated themselves from the mass struggle by their ongoing criticism of the UDF, the MDM, the ANC, the ICT and of individuals who moved to join these organisations from the black consciousness movement (BCM). (MM)

### **(iii) Black theology's perceived links with AZAPO**

There is no doubt that black theology is widely seen, in the colourful idiom of Ernie Messina, as "AZAPO at prayer" (EM) (though Charles Villa-Vicencio conceded that it is equally possible to say of the ICT and the South African Council of Churches (SACC) that they are the "ANC at prayer"). Buti Tlhagale argued that while there is enough evidence to confirm in the popular imagination an intimate link between black theology and AZAPO, that is an unfortunate misconception:

It is true that some of the leading black theologians are very closely linked to AZAPO and Itumeleng Mosala's position as president of AZAPO confirms the perception, unfortunately. It is also true that many who once presented themselves as black theologians ceased to use that label as they moved into the ICT, the SACC or the ANC.

But the relations between BC, AZAPO and the ANC are complex. Undoubtedly it is with BC that black theology is associated. But while AZAPO is the organisational manifestation of a tenacious BC there are many, many people who learned their politics in and were deeply influenced by the BCM who have moved into the ANC. These people who are now in the ANC see it as the appropriate home for and extension of BC. Certainly the ANC would not be where it is today without the BC people who are in it. It is thus not surprising that people like Barney Pityana and Bonganjalo Goba see no contradiction between their espousal of black theology and their ANC affiliation. The image, however, of black theology being the religion desk of AZAPO has certainly helped marginalise it and make people suspicious of it. (BT)

### **(iv) Black theology as trapped in an oppositional mode**

A constant theme in Buti Tlhagale's critical analysis of black theology's irrelevance and impotence is that it is "locked in yesterday's politics. It is as if it has slept through the revolution which swept through the country in the 1980s and into the new realities of the 1990s." (BT) Charles Villa-Vicencio argued that it is "still trapped in that period of resistance and refuses to engage with reconstruction." (CV-V) Buti Tlhagale's analysis was, I found, widely shared:

Black theology is stuck in an oppositional mould to the apartheid system ... They have still got white people firmly up there on the pedestal of power and spend far too much of their energy trying to knock them off ... In the process in their dealings with white people or with institutions and processes in which white people are involved they have simply become obstructionist. In the current context with white people involved in the ANC and almost every other resistance alliance their oppositional mould means that they simply play no creative role in influencing the policy directions which are emerging.

... At the same time this fascination with racism understood simply as white power means that they spend no time reflecting on the Gospel in the light of black experience. One crucial aspect of that black experience is racism. But now there are other dimensions to the black experience which have to be addressed; violence, the rejection of schools, the destruction of clinics, the collapse of family life, the Homelands, the struggles between the various black political parties, the ideology of non-racialism, the abuse of women and children, our need to build a nation, our need to restore social infrastructure, our need for a sense of hope.

These are the things that touch black lives daily. But black theology is not facing that. Nor is it facing the extent of the collapse of a moral order in the black community as young people burn people alive ... These are the things that black theology should be looking at, but it is not .... Black theology must move from its obsessive focus on white people. It is trapped in yesterday's outrage which it seems unable to re-direct. (BT)

In a moment we will move on from this bleak assessment of the current parlous state of black theology to see how people understand the historical processes which have brought it here from its hey-day in the early 1970s. Before doing so it is important to record people's assessment of its achievements.

Beyers Naude analysed the impact of black theology as:

Black consciousness (BC) and black theology were indispensable ingredients in bringing the struggle in South Africa to a head. While it is true that people see AZAPO today as the organisational manifestation of BC, it is a mistake to identify the two. BC is diffused throughout the whole black community and makes its presence felt throughout the resistance alliance.

Black theology, which grew and flourished in the context of the BCM, is equally deeply rooted and wide-spread in the Christian community. It may not always be identified as black theology, but that is what it is.... It is because of black theology that such a large sector of the church has been directly involved in the active struggle. Often, of course, it was only individual Church leaders who were involved in the struggle on behalf of the people. But at least in the minds of millions of our people it was the church in those dark days which carried and led and inspired the struggle. And the church leaders like Tutu and Boesak did so because of the impact of black theology on them. Often even they were pushed by Christian political activists who carried through the imperatives of black theology for Christians to be active in the struggle.

Today the spirit of black theology lives on as millions of Christians in most churches now freely and openly discuss political engagements and resistance strategies in church. (BN)

Frank Chikane analysed the impact of black theology on the SACC as:

I believe that you could claim that the SACC is today a black theology organisation. Certainly it is the way it is today because of black theology. My thesis and that of David Thomas shows that in the SACC there was an intense struggle in the SACC between 1970 and 1975. This was the result of intense

pressure on the SACC-related churches from black consciousness and black theology until in 1975 when the SACC accepted it formally as a reality and basis for organization and policy making.

The effect was that the whole leadership became more black than white. That changed the dynamics. The leadership was not only black people, their thinking was black as well, because it was their thinking that put them there as leaders. Before they had been excluded.... Since then you see a dramatic change in the resolutions of the SACC. There is a complete shift from 1975 onwards--a shift which is unintelligible without the general background of black consciousness and the specific background of black theology....

The traditional issues of the 1960s and 1970s are simply not debated any more ... The issues now are about strategies, not about whether to engage actively and directly in the struggle.... The debates are on how to get rid of the system. That is why you end up with sanctions. You end up with delegitimising the government and with the Standing for Truth campaign.... All of that is the direct fruit of black theology, of that I have no doubt. And it is still alive because the debates still use the tools provided by black theology.

... You have to remember, however, that the organised black theology movement was crushed. It is the spirit which has remained alive over the years. (FC)

For Mcebisi Xundu:

Every black Christian who today is directly engaged in the struggle as a Christian is the product of black theology. Of course there were black Christians who did engage in the struggle before black theology. They did so, however, without being able to hold their political activism and their Christian commitment together. And they were often roundly condemned in their churches for being political activists. Today we act as Christian political activists, holding it all together and even our Church leaders are out there on the streets with us. I don't think that the young people of today who have not had to live in a South Africa without black theology will ever appreciate how draining that schizophrenia was for us. As we moved to engage the system we always had to do battle with our Christian conscience which told us this was against the will of God. (MX)

So the judgement appears to be that black theology is alive and widely distributed through the black Christian community but it is not being fed by the prominent and identified black theologians who, it is argued, are out of touch with it, often critical of it and unwilling or unable to give it energising form as a movement.

### **The black theology movement on the slippery slope - 1972-1992 (see also Villa-Vicencio, 1990)**

Simon Maimela (SM) argued that the history of black theology can be divided into four periods organised around three watershed years. The first period ended in 1977 with the banning of all black consciousness organizations and the Christian Institute. These were the years that marked the hey-day of both the black consciousness and the black theology movements.

The second period ended in 1983, the year in which resistance politics came to life again with the formation of the UDF and the National Democratic Forum. These were years in which there was a hiatus in black resistance politics and in which black theology became almost invisible. They were the years also during which the ICT was formed.

The third period ended in 1990, the year in which President de Klerk signalled an official acceptance of the end of apartheid and unbanned the major Liberation movements, the ANC and PAC. These

were years in which charterist politics triumphed over black consciousness politics and black theology split from the ICT and re-emerged as an independent movement.

The final period is 1990-1992 which is the period described in the previous section in which black theology is seen to have become an exclusive club of black intellectuals with little or no organic connection with grassroots Christian groups.

I have used Simon Maimela's scheme as a way of organising the mass of not always consistent historical information and analyses I collected from those who were directly involved in the movement.

### **(i) 1972-1977--Hey-day and bannings**

1972 itself was a crisis year for the black theology movement. It was the year in which the University Christian Movement (UCM), which had been the organizational home for the black theology movement, was disbanded and subjected to the Schlebusch enquiry. It was also the year when Sabelo Ntwasa and I were banned. Sabelo Ntwasa, at the time, was Director of the Black Theology Project in the UCM and I was UCM's theology director. Mokgethi Motlhabi moved in to take over the black theology portfolio from Sabelo Ntwasa and continued to organise the black theology seminars and edited the first ever collection of black theology essays by South Africans. (Motlhabi, 1972).

When the UCM disbanded an immediate question that had to be faced was whether the black theology project would continue as an independent body or fall under the oversight of Aubrey Mokoena and the Black Community Project (BCP). This issue was resolved when Mokgethi Motlhabi received a scholarship to pursue doctoral studies in the United States. So black theology moved, organizationally, into the black consciousness movement, with which it had always been closely associated. It became the theological wing in the large spread of organisations which made up the black consciousness movement.

It was this organic connection between black theology and the black consciousness movement which accounted for its rapid spread through the black Christian communities. This was because of the dominance of black consciousness throughout the black community. And it was the black consciousness movement which was "linked directly or indirectly with almost all manifestations of the struggle in those years and this includes the student uprisings of 1976. The student rebellions were the clearest evidence of the extent to which the philosophy of black consciousness had penetrated into the black community--way beyond its institutional formations." (Smangaliso Mkhathshwa). It was black theologians like Smangaliso Mkhathshwa himself who were closely associated with the student uprisings and their aftermath as members of parents' and crisis committees and who suffered bannings and imprisonment for their efforts.

In this general environment the black theology movement flourished. It took institutional shape in most of the mainstream churches with the formation of black caucuses. It "penetrated into many black pulpits and gave shape to the ministry of many black clergy" according to Takatso Mofokeng (TM). It also became the focus of higher degree study of many young black academics in overseas universities. Notable examples here include Alan Boesak (Boesak, 1976), Mokgethi Motlhabi (Motlhabi, 1985), Takatso Mofokeng (1983) and Mosala (1989).

The axe fell on this period in 1977 when, in the aftermath of the student uprisings all black organizations connected with the BCM were banned. At the same time the Christian Institute (CI) was banned as were many of its leaders, including Beyers Naude. This is significant as Beyers Naude

put it "the CI had moved, over the years, closer and closer to the black theology movement. Many of us had been deeply influenced by the philosophy of black consciousness." (BN) (see also Ryan, 1990). The banning of the CI opened the way for the formation of the ICT in the next period.

## **(ii) 1977-1983: The rise of charterist politics and its alliance with black consciousness**

These were "crucial years in the history of South African politics and theology" (Simon Maimela). A number of threads run through them, all of which have a direct impact on black theology.

The first is that the government itself became increasingly repressive. As Eddie Webster put it "there is more and more evidence to suggest a shift in the government's policy of containment from State surveillance to State terror." (EW) Alongside this repressive terror and in the wake of the banning of black organisations and the flight into exile of many black activists, who had escaped death, imprisonment or bannings, there was a lull in black resistance.

The second thread is the gradual rise of charterist politics in an alliance, however informal, with black consciousness politics. A number of factors combined to produce this perceptible shift to charterism which was to pave the way for the return and dominance of the ANC after February 2, 1990. One was the shift away from racism as a category of radical social analysis among young academics towards class (Simon Maimela). Another was the growth of the ideology of 'non-racialism' as an organising principle in the Trade Union Advisory Co-ordinating Council (TUACC) in its "struggle against the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA) with its notion of creative parallel unions structured on parallel lines ... the unions rejected this ... for the practical reason that ... these racial policies ... were causing workers to be weak.... In the process 'black versus white' language got replaced with 'boss versus worker' language, which possibly strengthened the hand of the academic class analysts." (PH)

A third factor was stressed by Lebamang Sebidi who argued that the young BCM activists, who went into exile in the wake of the 1976 student uprisings, found that outside the country it was the ANC in alliance with the South African Communist Party (SACP) which was best placed to provide them with food, shelter, clothing, health care, education and military training. Here they learned also to de-emphasise racism, which had been a central characteristic of black consciousness politics, in favour of the ANC's non-racialism and the SACP's class analysis. This was the message they brought back into the country as ANC cadres as the ANC in exile increasingly began to initiate and direct the active resistance struggle inside South Africa. The bombings that took place were attributed to Communist country support of the ANC. As the ANC gained in stature and influence inside the country it was able at the end of this period to initiate the policy of making the townships ungovernable which was to dominate township politics from 1983 onwards. (LS)

As all of this is happening there is no deeply rooted split between charterist and black consciousness politics. People do move relatively easily and without much sense of betrayal between the two. Lebamang Sebidi did stress, however, that there was increasing talk about 'ideology', 'ideological differences' and even 'ideological splits.' 1983 is for him, however, the watershed year in which this "ideological conflict became organizationally formalised. In June 1983 there was the formation at Hammanskraal of the National Forum Committee, which was supposed to be an umbrella body of BC organizations ... August 1983 at Mitchell's Plains is where Alan Boesak and many others formed the UDF with its focus on the Freedom Charter." (LS) Many key figures, including Archbishop Desmond Tutu, were present at both occasions.

Alongside this shift to non-racialism, class analysis and charterist politics which was taking organisational form in the organised labour movement and the UDF, significant shifts were also

taking place in the Christian resistance movements. The key player in this was the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT). And the key players behind its formation were activists from the banned Christian Institute like Jim Cochrane and Cedric Mason, with vigorous support and pressure coming from the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT).

According to Jim Cochrane, once the constitution of what was to become the ICT was drawn up negotiations were entered into with the University of Cape Town to locate it there to give it some protection from government repression. Talks broke down when the University insisted on appointing the Director.

Thus the initiative passed to Johannesburg and the ICT was born with Elia Thema as its first part-time director. Strenuous efforts were made to appoint the prominent black theologian, Bonganjalo Goba, as full-time director. He had completed doctoral studies in the United States and was about to return to South Africa. He, however, accepted a post at the University of South Africa (UNISA), but became a member of the Steering Committee of the ICT whose foundational chair was the black theologian Simon Maimela.

Other black theologians who were intimately involved with the establishment and running of the ICT were Mokgethi Motlhabi and Smangaliso Mkhathshwa. In 1980 Frank Chikane was appointed as the first full-time director, "who was fully credible with the BCM because he was part of it. His role was crucial to the growth and success of the ICT because he was also fully credible with the UDF when it formed because he became a Senior Transvaal officer." (JC)

Despite the involvement of such prominent black theologians, the ICT did not label its theological approach 'Black Theology.' At first it used the term liberation theology to broaden its approach to look at issues beyond racism and to open itself up to white participation. Soon, however, the concept of 'contextual theology' took over as it seemed the appropriately flexible concept to use to respond theologically to the rapidly changing social and political environment in South Africa.

It is in this general context that we need to see what was happening to black theology as a movement in this period. In the early years of the period its only visible form was as the black caucuses within the various Christian churches, though as Daryl Balia suggested:

These did not always promote and develop black theology. Certainly they did not hold conferences or publish papers or develop new forms of worship to celebrate and promote black resistance. Quickly most, in fact, became lobby groups concerned with the internal organisational politics of the churches. (DB) (see also Balia, 1991).

In 1980, however, a number of black theologians in the Transvaal formed a Black Theology Reflection Group. "We started coming together occasionally - giving each other assignments on various topics and then discussing them together. But it didn't last ... Some of those involved in this with me were Buti Tlhagale, Itumeleng Mosala, Takatso Mofokeng and Simon Maimela." (Mokgethi Motlhabi).

With the formation of the ICT in 1981 black theology assumed a new organisational form as a 'task force' within it. As Mokgethi Motlhabi reflected on this he suggested, "that may have been an error of judgement on our part at that time. Black theology is not just one branch of theology. It is a way of approaching all theological issues; to examine their impact on black people and align them with the liberation of black people. We didn't do that. Black theology became a desk alongside other desks in the ICT. And we were grateful. It rescued us from our disorganisation." (MM)

According to Frank Chikane his approach as director of the ICT was to keep it small and, basically, not to have any projects of its own, but to support with financial and skill resources projects which were developing 'on the ground'. If that is so it seems that black theology was an exception to this rule.

Here Frank Chikane used the resources and expertise of the ICT, according to Buti Tlhagale, "to kick start the black theology movement back into life". (BT) This took the form of two black theology conferences, one at Wilgespruit in 1983 and one in Cape Town in 1984. Out of these conferences emerged the first South African publication on black theology since 1970. (Mosala & Tlhagale [eds], 1986).

According to Albert Nolan "it is important to remember that in its self-critique, which was published by the ICT as *Black Theology and the Black Struggle* (Conference Report 1984), the conference participants warned that black theologians should be aware that while black theology as a public movement was connected with the black consciousness movement, its more fundamental connection is with the black struggle which pre-dates the BCM." (AN) In this warning Albert Nolan signals the tensions which were to grow with escalating intensity between charterist and black consciousness politics in general and between contextual and black theology in particular in the years after 1983.

### **(iii) 1983-1990: The triumph of charterist politics and the marginalisation of black consciousness**

Lebamang Sebidi characterised this period as "years in which black theology is caught up in the same withering away as black consciousness as a popular basis of the struggle." (LS) In his analysis, the years immediately following the formation of the UDF were a time, on the one hand, of a rapid and unprecedented growth of the UDF as a mass movement in which the active struggle against apartheid took on a whole new lease of life. On the other hand it was also a time of often bloody conflict between AZAPO, as the organisational manifestation of black consciousness and UDF supporters.

Many factors, in Lebamang Sebidi's analysis, contributed to the growth of the UDF and its focus on the Freedom Charter which unquestionably linked it with the ANC if not in fact then in the popular perception. One was the continuing rise of the non-racial trade union movement which in 1985 became the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and which, with its now very large membership, became part of the UDF. Another was the implementation of the ANC policy of making the townships ungovernable which saw the collapse of government administration and the emergence of the energetic and powerful civics who joined forces with the UDF. Another was the fact that the UDF was able to attract many outstanding, charismatic and famous black leaders like Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Allan Boesak and Albertina Sisulu. These people drew all sorts of church groups, cultural groups, and sporting groups into membership of or alliance with the UDF.

As a loose alliance of hundreds of organisations and millions of members and associates the UDF became associated with the plethora of resistance actions which were taking place around a vast array of issues. Because of its organisational character little changed when the UDF was banned. It was not feasible to ban all the organisations which were connected through it. Thus the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) was able to form and take over where the UDF left off. The philosophy of black consciousness was not able to hold this assortment of resisters together. The charterist ideology of unity, democracy, non-racialism and non-sexism was able to do so.

People involved in the struggles of those years "actually experienced at a very practical level the power of those concepts" as Charles Villa-Vicencio put it (CV-V). This meant that "in those bitter and intense years of popular struggles on the streets as state terror intensified, black consciousness faded as a principle energising the struggle.... Add to that an increasing awareness of the direct involvement of the ANC through its army, and the stage is set for the ANC to inherit the popular support generated by the decade of struggle through the 1980s." (LS)

The intense and often bloody inter-institutional conflict between AZAPO and UDF, especially in Natal, the Northern Transvaal and the Eastern Cape, soured relations between charterism and black consciousness. While Eddie Webster argued that there was evidence (as in the Trustfeed massacre) that implicated government forces in this blood letting between the two groups opposed to the government, he also argued that "it effectively put an end to the easy movement between black consciousness and charterism which had been there before the violence started". (EW) This, Lebamang Sebidi argued, when it is taken together with the growth of the UDF and the MDM, effectively marginalised AZAPO and made "black consciousness non-viable as a foundation for mass resistance." (LS)

It is against this background that the history of black theology must be set in this period. As the period begins black theology was nested in the ICT, which also sponsored its conferences. The ICT did not join the UDF but its director, Frank Chikane, did become a senior officer of the UDF in the Transvaal. Since most of the black theologians who were involved in the ICT were themselves members of AZAPO, this brought the tensions between charterism and black consciousness into the ICT itself. Coupled with this, according to Simon Maimela, was the fact that many white people were heavily involved in the ICT and it in fact appointed Albert Nolan as its director after Frank Chikane left [Nolan's appointment was temporary until a new Director could be found; this was Mkatshwa--editor]. This flew in the face of a fundamental tenet of black consciousness, "black man, you are on your own", and was seen and experienced as "liberal whites taking over the agenda." (SM) According to Sabelo Ntwasa, "it was the black theology conferences which the ICT sponsored in 1983 and 1984 which made us realise how inappropriate it was for black theology to continue to function in a so-called non-racial organisation." (SN)

As a result the black theologians sought and received a three-year grant from the Ford Foundation and were able to withdraw the black theology project from the ICT in 1986 and establish it as an independent project under a committee made up of Takatso Mofokeng, Buti Tlhagale, Simon Maimela, Lebamang Sebidi, Itumaleng Mosala and Mokgethi Motlhabi. This was not a totally amicable separation, nor was it a totally successful one. Three co-ordinators were appointed. According to Mokgethi Motlhabi and Buti Tlhagale the first and third were administratively inept and facilitated no conferences or any other significant activities.

The second was quite good and we thought that the project was beginning to move. He organised the Black Theology Reflection Group. He was a theologian ... and had administrative skills as well. He left as a rift opened up between himself and some members of the committee. He argued that black theology had to be generated from below ... He saw the academics from UNISA as having a top down view of theology and that their theology was far too esoteric and abstract.... I think he prompted what could have been a very useful debate about the relationship between academic and grassroots theology. Unfortunately he saw the debate as a criticism of himself and he left. (MM)

Some of the funds were used to launch the *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa*, which was produced by the UNISA academics. By 1988 that was all that was left of the black theology project which moved to UNISA, and in the process became "an intellectual think shop" (CV-V) seen to have no organic connection with anything else except a continuing association with AZAPO through some leading individuals.

#### **(iv)1990-1992: Reconstruction begins**

This period is dominated by the official abandonment of Apartheid and repudiation of racism by the government in the unexpected policy speech of President F W de Klerk on 2nd of February, 1990, the

unbanning of all the liberation movements, the freeing of Nelson Mandela, the return of exiles, the re-organisation of the ANC and its rapid rise to political dominance, the beginning of a process of negotiation and reconstruction and the escalating violence in which all parties are involved and which they seem powerless to stop. It is also a period in which the aftermath of the decade of struggle through the 1980s is beginning to become apparent in what Buti Tlhagale described as "the collapse of social infrastructures, the collapse of a working system of values as evidenced in the wanton killings, the education crisis, the collapse of family structures and the abuse of women and children." (BT) As Beyers Naude put it "it seems as if everybody now believes what the government has been trying to teach us for years: that black life is cheap. It seems as if we are all determined to outdo each other in proving just how cheap it is." (BN)

In this period all the problems which confronted black theology in the previous periods continue; only now added to that is the problem which Arnold Stofile identified as its being

a resistance theology with no clear idea of what or who is being resisted. de Klerk's announcement in 1990 and the crisis that erupted with it came on us so unexpectedly that we were unprepared for it. Suddenly the most urgent need is for reconstruction and development. But we have not had enough time to develop a popular groundswell of commitment to it. That is made worse by the fact that the government still sits there in power.

We are caught between struggle and reconstruction, and we don't know how to handle it. Certainly we have no richly developed theology of development which is organically connected to any grassroots movements. So what we might say doesn't get anywhere. And I don't see that black theologians have helped to link resistance and development by seeing development as a form of resistance. Even if it did, it is so weak as a movement that I can't see how it would be able to mobilise anything. (AS)

As we have seen in the previous section, the wide-spread charge against black theology in the contemporary South African situation is that it is so trapped in an oppositional mode to apartheid and white power that it is unwilling or unable to provide a meaningful theology of development in relation to the plethora of crises which constantly threatens the whole negotiation and reconstruction process. It is also seen to be impotent because its perceived association with the marginalised AZAPO makes it unable to mobilise grassroots activism.

At the same time a rapprochement with the ICT seems to have begun. The Black Theology Project and the ICT are co-organising the 1993 International Conference on black theology which is sponsored by EATWOT. This joint venture may not only build bridges, it also has the potential of breathing a new lease of life into the black theology movement and provide the black theologians in South Africa with an urgently needed sense of solidarity and support.

### **Does Black Theology have a future?**

I find the portrait I have painted of South African black theology intensely distressing. It was no less painful as I spoke with comrades and friends I trusted and respected in South Africa. So, whenever I could, I pressed the question of whether black theology is a spent force or whether it is capable of lifting itself off the ground and becoming an energising force in the struggle for the freedom and dignity of black people in South Africa.

If it is to have a future then clearly there has to be a felt interest in and felt need for it at the popular level. So many people had told me that black theology no longer had any impact among ordinary

black Christians that I was totally unprepared for the very large numbers of people who attended seminars or lectures I was invited to give in Pietermaritzburg, Grahamstown, Alice, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town. Not only were the audiences large and lively, I found constantly that when people made statements, challenged me or asked questions they did so in ways in which they identified themselves as black theologians. Its hard to generalise from this anecdotal evidence, but I have little hesitation in saying that there are a very large number of black South Africans who do, in that seminar environment, identify themselves as black theologians. There were many many people who confirmed this impression though I suspect that they had about as much evidence as I did to support it.

Buti Tlhagale was the only person to whom I spoke who seriously and consistently questioned the need for black theology. He thought that there is no way that black theology is able to move out of the oppositional mode in which it is trapped, to come down from its academic ivory tower and make real contact (as distinct from analytical contact) with ordinary black people, to become a vital part of a larger movement and so become organic with it, or to deal with the whole range of crises within the black community without turning that into an attack on the racist system.

There were many who saw the need for a theology which had all the characteristics of black theology but which did not use the term 'black' or which modified the label in some significant way. Mcebisi Xundu, for example, argued that the word 'black' should no longer be used:

When we used the term 'black' in the beginning it was to affirm ourselves and to reject the government's label of us as 'non-whites'. It was also a term we used to unite in a positive way all those whom the government lumped together negatively as 'non-whites'.

Now the government itself has appropriated the word 'black' but turned it into a divisive term. Now we are told that there are coloureds, Indians and blacks. And it has stuck. Most people now do understand 'black' to refer to Africans.... Of course we also used 'black' as a symbol of struggle and resistance and we ourselves used 'non-white' to refer to collaborators. But, after over 20 years of black theology and black consciousness 'black' does not carry that symbolic force in the popular imagination. How much longer can we afford to go on trying to beat life into it? ... I believe we should be talking about an anti-oppression theology. (MX)

By way of contrast Arnold Stofile argued:

I am unapologetic about using the word black. We all know that black theology is a theology of and for black resistance. But what we need today is also a theology of black development. Perhaps a label like Black Development Theology would help us link the ongoing need for resistance with the emerging need for development. It is a possibility. (AS)

In these suggested changes to the label are implied changes to the basic agenda of black theology. In effect many people claimed that there is a desperate need for a black theology, but a black theology with an expanded agenda. For some this expanded agenda was to pick up items which had somehow dropped off its agenda. I refer to three in particular.

The first is racism. Bonganjalo Goba argued:

Black theology has always focused on racism. It has been a central category. But we have done little more than use the term and assumed that everybody knew what we were talking about. We even assumed that we knew what we were talking about. So we never got down and did some hard research and critical thinking so that we could made it as clear as possible what racism is and how it works.

Because we didn't do that the class analysts were able to pick us off with ease. This was a disservice to the struggle. We need a black theology which is willing to sit down and examine this beast more closely. And it is even more urgent now that we can't deal with racism simply by attacking the government as racist. As whites become less and less powerful and possibly less and less personally racist will we still have racism without racists? We need answers to questions like that. (BG)

The second is spirituality. Martin Prozesky put it this way:

In the heat of the resistance struggle I think a lot of us lost sight of the whole other side; of people's need for religion or spirituality. This neglect made so many people easy targets for the evangelicals. People needed more out of religion than urgings to resist. The evangelicals provided that 'something more'. It was a respite from the struggle ...

The black theology movement provided that in the beginning. It was non-theistic but still found powerful ways of worshipping and celebrating life cycles. It also generated a spirituality connected with the struggle as it found ways of celebrating the struggle in song and dance. Black theology was a powerful institutional home for this to develop. When it re-emerged in its current intellectual form all of this was lost. We need black theology if it will allow this kind of spirituality to grow and develop again. (MP) (see also Worsnip and van der Water, 1991)

The third is sexism. For Sister Bernard Ncube:

Black theology will take us nowhere until it begins to incorporate into itself and work with some of the foundational principles and methodologies of feminist theology and feminist hermeneutics. That means that it also needs to be very careful that when it talks about 'blacks' it is self-evident that it really does include black women. And when it talks about black resistance it takes very seriously the realities of the resistance struggles of black women.... We don't need papers on black women. We need a black theology which is also a feminist theology. (Sr BN) (see also Conference Report, 1984,p. 141f and Walker, 1982)

In addition to these items from the agenda of black theology in its early days others believed that a black theology was needed which could also respond meaningfully and creatively to:

*violence (Buti Tlhagale, Frank Chikane, Beyers Naude, David Mosoma, Klippias Kritzingler)*

*the education crisis (Buti Tlhagale, Simon Maimela, David Mosoma, William Saayman)*

*the crisis in black family life (Lindy Myeza, Sr Bernard Ncube, Joe Seoka, William Saayman, David Mosoma, Klippias Kritzingler)*

*the struggles between the predominantly black political formations (Buti Tlhagale, Beyers Naude) development (Beyers Naude, Arnold Stofile, David Bosch)*

*the issue of 'culture' and 'ethnicity' (Bonganjalo Goba, Frank Chikane) democracy (Mcebisi Xundu, Buti Tlhagale) land (Simon Maimela, Takatso Mofokeng) the economy (Mcebisi Xundu, Takatso Mofokeng, Buti Tlhagale)*

*hermeneutics (Simon Maimela, David Mosoma) (see also Mosala, 1989 & West, 1991) the hegemony of fundamentalist evangelicalism (Albert Nolan)*

Even if all these issues were added to the agenda, however, so that felt needs could be addressed by using and extending the tools of black theology, it clearly has no chance of becoming a movement unless some way is found of tapping into the interest and felt needs which exist in the black community. Will such a way be found? When I asked Sabelo Ntwasa this question he replied, "I hope

so, but I don't think that anybody is really looking for it." (SN) Perhaps the 1993 international conference on black theology will be the catalyst that is needed.

## CONCLUSIONS

At the end of four months of talking with people over very many hours it is legitimate that I attempt to say what I believe about the future of black theology. I see it poised on the brink of three possibilities.

The first is that it will become locked into internal debates about whether or not it is relevant any longer. If this happens and those who believe it is not relevant start pulling out it will become not only irrelevant, but also boringly irrelevant.

The second is that it will simply accept itself as an intellectual think-shop and academic discipline. If this happens it will be stimulating and challenging to other academic theologians and have an impact on some theological students. On this scenario it will continue to be seen by many as esoteric and by a handful as exciting.

The third possibility is that someone with vision and with great organisational and people skills will move in and really begin making living connections between the professional black theologians, the latent interest in the black community in black theology and community groups in which resistance, restoration and development work is going on. I have no idea, however, whether such a person or group of persons is waiting in the wings ready to jump at an opportunity to realise this possibility. I have even less of an idea of how such an undertaking would be funded.

In my judgement, for what it is worth, black theology at the moment in South Africa has a sound head and needy feet. The sad thing is that it has nothing in the middle connecting the two. That doesn't make it an especially fit body to meet the challenges which confront it. If it is to become a fit body it needs, I believe, committed community liaison officers and community organisers to build effective two-way links between the community groups and the intellectuals. I have no doubt of the need for a black theology which, as Sabelo Ntwasa put it, "theologises around the black experience towards true humanity." (SN)

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## **Interviewees**

- Balia, Darryl (2/3/92) DB
- Boraine, Alec (29/4/92) AB
- Bosch, David (11/2/92) DB
- Chidester, David (9/4/92) DC
- Chikane, Frank (19/2/92) FC
- Cochrane, Jim (26/2/92) JC
- de Bruyn, Trevor (22/3/92) TdeB
- de Gruchy, John (22/4/92) JdeG
- Gnanadason, Aruna (WCC) (26/6/92) AG
- Goba, Bonganjalo (25/2/92,12/3/92) BG
- Kekane, Frans (25/2/92) FK
- Kritzinger, Klippies (10/2/92,12/5/92) KK
- Luckett, Syd (25/2/92) SL

Mabalane, Pusetso (17/2/92) PM  
Maimela, Simon (10/2/92) SM  
Messina, Ernie (24/4/92) EM  
Mitchell, Gordon (9/4/92) GM  
Mkatshwa, Smangaliso (7/5/92) SM  
Mofokeng, Takatso (11/2/92,22/4/92) TM  
Mosoma, David (11/2/92) DM  
Motlhabi, Mokgethi (6/2/92,13/5/92) MM  
Mutambirwa, James (WCC) (26/6/92) JM  
Myeza, Lyndy (17/2/92) LM  
Naude, Beyers (19/2/92) BN  
Ncube, Bernard (Sr) (20/2/92) BN  
Nolan, Albert (14/2/92,7/5/92) AN  
Ntwasa, Sabelo (15/4/92) SN  
Pityana, Barney (10/4/92,25/6/92) BP  
Prozesky, Martin (24/2/92) MP  
Saayman, Willem (12/2/92) WS  
Scott, Bob (WCC) (25/6/92) BS  
Sebidi, Lebamang (8/5/92) LS  
Seoka, Joe (17/2/92,11/5/92) JS  
Stofile, Arnold (25/3/92) AS  
Tlhagale, Buti (7/2/92,7/5/92) BT  
Tshelane, Siphon (20/2/92) ST  
Tutu, Desmond (14/9/92) DT  
Villa-Vicencio, Charles (9/4/92) CV-V  
Webster, Eddie (6/5/92) EW  
White, Dale (17/2/92) DW  
Xundu, Mcebisi (30/3/92) MX

(WCC) = World Council of Churches, Geneva

