



**THE  
DUKE  
DIVINITY SCHOOL  
REVIEW**

**Spring 1975**



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# A New Thing

by JOSEPH B. BETHEA  
Director of Black Church Studies

The emergence of Black Church Studies in theological education in general, and particularly in Duke Divinity School, is a new thing. It is new in the sense that it is now appearing for the first time. It is new also in the sense that it promises to refresh and remake what is not new.

When Stokely Carmichael echoed the precipitous phrase "Black Power," only a few people grasped the vast implications of the phrase. It was an echo. It was an echo of Frederick Douglass, who in an address at the 1857 West India Emancipation Celebration at Canandaigua, New York, said:

The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims, have been born of earnest struggle. . . . If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. . . . Men may not get all they pay for in this world, but they must certainly pay for all they get. If we ever get free from the oppressions and wrongs heaped upon us, we must pay for their removal. We must do this by labor, by suffering, by sacrifice, and if needs be, by our lives and the lives of others.<sup>1</sup>

"Black Power" was an echo of Adam Clayton Powell, who said in the 1966 baccalaureate address at Howard University, "To demand our God-given rights is to seek black power—the power to build black institutions of splendid achievement."<sup>2</sup>

It was the context of the echo that gave it special significance and impetus in June, 1966. Carmichael said it on the James Meredith March between Memphis and Jackson. He said it against the backdrop of serious confrontation in American race relations. When the decade of the sixties began, Black Americans were poised

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1. Lerone Bennett, *Confrontation: Black and White* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965) p. 57.

2. Gayraud Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1972) p. 247.

for what was hoped would be a final march into the promised land of freedom and dignity and unqualified citizenship in this nation. It was assumed that we had been emancipated from the house of American bondage and had wandered long enough in the wilderness of segregation and discrimination. Surely the centennial of our emancipation would find us truly free.

Inspired by the leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr., Black Americans and sympathetic whites launched a series of nonviolent demonstrations that the nation could not ignore. The sit-ins and kneel-ins, the freedom rides and the freedom walks, the March on Washington, and numerous acts of nonviolent protest and civil disobedience across the land pricked the conscience of this nation. In all of these confrontations, the dream and the theme were one.

We shall overcome, we shall overcome,  
 We shall overcome some day;  
 Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe  
 We shall overcome some day.  
 Black and white together, black and white together,  
 Black and white together some day;  
 Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe  
 We shall overcome some day.

Some major victories were won. Congress responded by enacting civil rights legislation that changed the course of race relations in America forever. Some critics of the freedom movement of the sixties might suggest that nothing of real significance was accomplished. But let it be remembered that the "dream" has never died; it is still that for which we labor and impatiently wait.

Victory and defeat, joy and frustration, dreams partly fulfilled and partly denied, were Black America's legacy from the early sixties. The truth of Douglas's statement was coming into focus.

. . . Power concedes nothing without a demand. . . . If we ever get free . . . we must pay . . . by labor, by suffering, by sacrifice . . .

Thus when Carmichael echoed the sentiment, it was a cry and a call around which a frustrated and disillusioned people could rally.

"Black Power!" Black people began to understand that the successes of the early sixties, while they were important, did not really begin to alter the concentration of power and racism in America. Racism is the American heritage and the American tradition. It is supported and sustained by her hallowed institutions. Marches and speeches and congressional action have thus far proven to be inadequate to change the pattern. The poor are yet poor.

Blacks are yet oppressed. Any adequate solution to this nation's racial problems must deal with the question of power. "Black Power!" All of the controversy and negative reaction created by the phrase cannot begin to compare with the positive contributions it brings to race relations in America and around the world today.

To insure a positive articulation of the concept of Black Power, "an informal group of Negro churchmen" met and produced a statement that was published in the New York Times on July 31, 1966. To the leaders of America, the statement said:

When American leaders decide to serve the real welfare of people instead of war and destruction; when American leaders are forced to make the rebuilding of our cities first priority on the nation's agenda; when American leaders are forced by the American people to quit misusing and abusing American power; then will the cry for "black power" become inaudible, for the framework in which all power in America operates would include the power and experience of black men as well as those of white men. . . .

To white churchmen, the statement said:

As black men who were long ago forced out of the white church to create and to wield "black power," we fail to understand the emotional quality of the outcry of some clergy against the use of the term today. . . . So long as white churchmen continue to moralize and misinterpret Christian love, so long will justice continue to be subverted in this land.<sup>3</sup>

The informal group of Negro churchmen became the National Committee of Negro Churchmen, and since then, the National Committee of Black Churchmen. They set themselves to the task of reforming the black church, of rechanneling the strength and power of the black church, making it a politically involved institution for the freedom and liberation of black people. Since theology and the white church had never spoken with relevance to the black experience and condition, it became necessary to raise some different questions and find some different answers. The struggle of black people for freedom and justice and power had to be theologized. The existence of the church as a viable institution in the black community was at stake. A new thing was needed and a new thing was created.

At the first convocation of the National Committee of Negro Churchmen in 1967, "there was unanimous agreement that further theological work needed to be done."<sup>4</sup> In response to this need, a

3. The New York Times, July 31, 1966, p. E 5.

4. Wilmore, *op. cit.*, p. 287.

series of events and publications followed which was to establish black religious studies, or black church studies as an integral part of any theological education that would be relevant in this latter part of the 20th century.

In 1964, Joseph Washington had published *Black Religion*. He described how Negro religion has been created and sustained by the forces of segregation and discrimination in the United States, and challenged white and black Christians to close the gap between creed and deed.

In 1965, George Kelsey published *Racism and the Christian Understanding of Man*, in which he cited racism as an idolatrous faith and described the renewed individual in a racist society.

(Of course the works cited above were not the primordial literature of the black religious experience and racism. Numerous black scholars had dealt with the subject earlier. A few among them are E. Franklin Frazier, Ruby F. Johnston, Martin Luther King, Jr., Eric Lincoln and Benjamin Mays.)

In 1967, the National Committee of Negro Churchmen created a Theological Commission "to determine what might be the ingredients of a basic theological position paper which would clarify the growing interest in "Black Theology."<sup>5</sup> The Commission was instructed to prepare a report for the 1968 convocation of NCNC.

In 1968, Albert Cleage published *The Black Messiah*. In twenty sermons, the pastor of the Shrine of the Black Madonna in Detroit preached Black Power Christianity. He proclaimed the unity which the black church can bring to the black people's struggle for freedom, and "the resurrection of a Black Church with its own Black Messiah."

A brief glance at the flurry of activity of black churchmen between 1968 and 1971 will suffice to document the determination to theologize the black movement. Almost every major religious journal published articles by black churchmen and scholars; books on the black religious experience were written by James Cone, Joseph Johnson, Major Jones, Henry Mitchell, J. Deotis Roberts, Nathan Wright and others; and the Society for the Study of Black Religion was organized.

In October, 1968, 300 black churchmen gathered in St. Louis for the Second Annual Convocation of NCBC. A week later 400 black clergy and seminarians gathered in Boston for a consultation on the black church. Both of these meetings underscored the grow-

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5. *Ibid.*, p. 287.



ing estrangement of blacks from the white church and intensified "the movement toward a new black church and a new black theology."<sup>6</sup>

In April, 1969, the Black Economic Development Conference met in Detroit and adopted the Black Manifesto, which James Forman read a few days later in Riverside Church in New York. In June, 1969, the Theological Commission of the National Committee of Black Churchmen met in Atlanta and issued its first public statement on the nature and meaning of Black Theology.

In February, 1970, the American Association of Theological Schools convened a Conference on the Black Religious Experience and Theological Education. It culminated the work of a committee of black educators which had been created by the Association's Executive Committee in 1968.

I have cited these activities so that we may have some appreciation of the time and effort that have been required to create this new thing called Black Church Studies. Concurrent with these activities and subsequently, black caucuses have been organized, denominationally and ecumenically, and black scholars are publishing an ever-expanding body of literature regarding the black religious experience. Theological education in America will never be the same. Something new has emerged. It is refreshing and will remake what is not new.

Black Church Studies at Duke Divinity School is a new thing. The program was begun less than three years ago, and it promises to refresh and remake what has been traditional at Duke.

When a Director of Black Church Studies was appointed in June, 1972, the position was described as follows.

This man would bring an awareness of the role of the Black Church and of the role of the black minister. He would have primary initiatory responsibility in designing and coordinating the courses, in the responsibility of searching for and recommending prospective black faculty, in continuing education for black ministers in the surrounding areas, in the recruitment of black students, in advising black students in planning their course of study, in supervising them in their Field Work, in handling the financial and adjustmental needs of the Black Seminars.

With this appointment Duke Divinity School began its response to "the movement toward a new black church and a new black theology." The movement is founded upon the faith and commitment of numerous black churchpersons and black scholars who are determined, under God, to right the long years of neglect re-

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6. *Tempo*, December 1, 1968, p. 2.

garding the black religious experience in America. Those who have doubts are invited to examine the works of scholars mentioned in this article; observe the contributions which persons like Herbert Edwards and Philip Cousin of Duke are currently making to theological education. It is quite evident that the movement will not be abandoned until the last trace of racism is eradicated from theological education and from the church which theological education is designed to serve. The warrant for black church studies is white racism, and any theological enterprise that today does not take into account the black religious experience is racist yet, and cannot claim to be Christian.

Concurrent with the "movement toward a new black church and a new black theology" is the emergence of a new black seminary. In most instances black church studies have been initiated only after constant petition and pressure to do so by black students. In February, 1969, some black seminarians at Duke made six major proposals to the administration.

1. Hire black faculty members.
2. Hire black staff members.
3. Offer courses that would treat the black experience and incorporate, when relevant, black content into existing courses.
4. Aid black students academically by hiring an Advisor.
5. Launch a crash program of recruitment.
6. Improve student-faculty relationship.

Negotiations between black seminarians and the administration were begun. When action to implement the proposals was not evident, the Black Seminarians Union was formally organized at Duke. Among the various goals of the Union was the full implementation of the proposals; they were ultimately formulated into a comprehensive proposal for a program in Black Church Studies.

Black Seminarians at Duke had three dimensions in their proposal. The first dimension called for the development and offering of new courses which deal realistically and scholarly with the black religious experience and have the academic purpose of developing a body of knowledge and appropriate methodologies to treat that body of knowledge. The second dimension of the proposal called for the development of a cooperative relationship with black churches and black church leaders in Durham and in North Carolina for relevant and meaningful field education and continuing education experiences. In this way, the Divinity School contributes

to the ongoing life of the black churches in the area. The third dimension of the proposal called for exploration of the possibilities and methods of an exchange of faculty and students between Duke and black theological schools in the region. Such exchange would make available to all the best resources of each.

A new black church, a new black theology, and a new black seminarian; these are the movements to which Duke responded when a program of Black Church Studies was established in 1972. Before that time, the Divinity School had sought to meet the needs of its black students through the use of black faculty members in other departments of the University and other scholarly associates in instruction who were recruited to offer courses and advice. The present status of black church studies at Duke represents a new appreciation of the Black Church—the repository of black culture and the vanguard of the black liberation struggle.

With the appointment of an Associate Professor of Black Church Studies (Dr. Herbert Edwards joined the faculty in September, 1974) and the increase in black student enrollment (almost ten per cent of the total enrollment) Duke Divinity School has moved a bit further in its commitment to the Black Church and its ministry. In November, 1974, the Black Church Studies Center was authorized by the Dean and faculty. The preamble of the authorizing document states:

Black Church Studies at Duke Divinity School is an engagement of the Divinity School with the black church, black theology, and the black community; and represents an appreciation for study of and involvement in black religious experiences. The Black Church Studies Center exists to illuminate the several dimensions of these experiences, to investigate and expose the contributions which the black church has made and can make to both the black community and American culture, and to actualize the potential for service to the Church through its special concerns for ministry and mission to black people in both church and community. The Center is a concrete expression of the role of Black Church Studies in theological education which undertakes faithfully to serve Christ and his Church.

Black Church Studies is a new thing at Duke Divinity School. It is new in its chronology. It is also new in the sense that, as we embrace it, there is possibility for the reconstruction of the total theological enterprise. At every point in history when the Lord would do a new thing among his people, the temptation is to accommodate the new to what is old. It may fit; it may not. It is new.

The far-reaching implications of Black Church Studies for the wholeness of theological education at Duke cannot now be mea-

sured. But we are sure that we have embarked upon a course with tremendous potential for what we do here and for the church we serve. We have begun a new thing. We will continue until the hope of freedom and liberation and justice is a reality for all people, and is reflected in the church of Jesus Christ and in the education of his ministers.

Thus says the LORD,  
who opened a way in the sea  
and a path through mighty waters,  
who drew on chariot and horse to their destruction,  
a whole army, men of valour;  
there they lay, never to rise again;  
they were crushed, snuffed out like a wick:  
Cease to dwell on days gone by  
and to brood over past history.  
Here and now I will do a new thing;  
this moment it will break from the bud.  
Can you not perceive it? (Isaiah 43:16-19)

# Black Theology: Past, Present and Future

by A. ROGER WILLIAMS  
Pastor, Union Baptist Church, Hartford, Conn.

## *Background*

Since the middle sixties, the word black has been one of the most controversial adjectives in the English language. Stokely Carmichael's courageous battle cry, "Black Power," uttered in avowedly racist Mississippi, disturbed the white power structure, North as well as South.

Moreover, it disturbed a host of integrationist-oriented blacks. Among them are men of integrity and achievement—Roy Wilkins of the N.A.A.C.P., Whitney Young of the Urban League and Martin L. King, Jr., whose monumental efforts for the blacks, the poor and the oppressed enshrines him unforgettably in myriad hearts.

Now comes black theology! While the name is new, the actuality delves far back into American slavery. Yet there are eminently recognized and respected theologians and New Testament Scholars, black and white, who question and scorn such a concept. On the other hand, it is gaining increasing acceptance in the U. S. as well as in Continental Europe.

In the *Christian Century*, Frederick Herzog of Duke Divinity School has written an article on "Political Theology." Theology, he states, is always a mixture of the gospel's eternal message and a particular situation in time.<sup>1</sup>

I once saw a large poster in a young man's bedroom. It pictured the determined yet anxious face of a young black. The right side of his cap rested almost on his ear. Resting higher on the left side, it revealed part of an Afro. The young man wore a leather coat. His arms were folded across his chest. The print read, "the toughest job in America—being black."

So, James H. Cone, Albert Cleage, William Jones of Yale Divinity School, Gayraud Wilmore, late of Boston University

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1. *Christian Century*, July 23, 1969, p. 975.

School of Theology, Herbert O. Edwards of Duke Divinity School, are a few black scholars who are rendering incalculable service to American Theology by applying the "gospel's eternal message" to twenty-five million blacks about whose condition no white theologian, until very recent times, has seriously concerned himself. They with others agree with Herzog's succinctly expressed truth in the Preface to his recently published book, *Liberation Theology*, "The WASP mind that controls everything—including religion—has to be changed."<sup>2</sup>

### *The Past*

To consider the future of black theology in the black church one does well to share thinking on the past and present. Let us remind ourselves once more that black theology, unlike a ship christened for its maiden voyage, has been here as long as this nation, but has been belatedly named.

In the early twentieth century, Dr. Robert Russa Moton, Booker T. Washington's successor at Tuskegee Institute, wrote a book entitled, *What The Negro Thinks*. The Negro's thinking was not half so well known to the white man as the white man's thinking was to the Negro. Since the Negro was only a fraction of a man, the employer acted as though he was non-existent. So, the black was his waiter, his porter, his bell boy, his valet, his cook, his chauffeur, his general factotum. The black dressed the master in the morning, served him at the breakfast table, absorbed his thoughts as he cut his hair or shined his shoes. Hence he knew the white man by smiling when it was to his advantage economically, and saying what the "cap'n" wanted to hear.

But the white never really knew "George." Isn't it strange, how so many blacks years ago were "George" or "boy" or "uncle"! It was not known that they were men of dignity in their homes and churches and lodges. The overlord was not aware that they scraped and saved to send their offspring to college. Their nickels and dimes and quarters bought homes and insurance and churches. They wrought better than they knew.

So it was during oppressive slavery. Gayraud S. Wilmore in *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* points this out:

In the first place, little is known about the actual content of slave preaching when whites were not in the congregation.

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2. Frederick Herzog, *Liberation Theology*, p. ix.



Secondly, what writers like Olmstead and other early historians have given us about the conservatism and other-worldliness of the black preacher and the slave church they received from the Negroes themselves, who were not about to tell white people all they knew about the complicity of their preachers in revolutionary activity.<sup>3</sup>

To be sure, here and there a house slave would occasionally curry the oppressor's favor by divulging plots of his more militant freedom-loving fellow slaves.

Nat Turner, Virginia insurrectionist, refused to internalize oppression. He fasted, prayed, studied the Bible. As he studied the Old Testament martyrs, he felt divinely led to liberate his colleagues. Nothing deterred him from his mission. *Pioneers in Protest*, authored by Lerone Bennett, Jr., describes Turner's experience:

All his life he had been preparing for this task, and now, in the year of 1828, he was almost ready. On May 12 of that year, Nat said, He heard a loud noise in the heavens, and the spirit instantly said the serpent was loosened, and Christ had laid down the yoke he had borne for the sins of men, and that I should take it on and fight against the serpent, for the time was fast approaching when the first should be last and the last should be first.<sup>4</sup>

Who knows what his startling revolt August 21, 1831, did for the morale of his crushed brethren and against the morale of insensitive slave holders?

Henry H. Garnett escaped slavery in Maryland. Later he secured an education and became a pastor in Troy, N. Y. Though less than thirty, he fought tirelessly for black liberation. Bennett depicts him declaiming against servitude at the 1843 Negro Convention in Buffalo, New York. In stentorian voice he bids slaves settle for nothing less than liberation:

Your condition does not absolve you from your moral obligation. The diabolical injustice by which your liberties are cloven down, neither God, nor angels, or just men, command you to suffer for a single moment. Therefore it is your solemn and imperative duty to use every means, both moral, intellectual and physical that promise success.<sup>5</sup>

Not all black churchmen of the pre-Civil War era acted with the revolutionary ardor of Turner or blazed with the incandescent indignation of Garnett. Nevertheless, they never let the black man forget he was God's image in ebony. Their means were different, but their ends were the same.

3. G. S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, p. 45.

4. Lerone Bennett, *Pioneers in Protest*, pp. 91-92.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

They protested injustice with all their power. Like the unknown soldier, some are "known but to God." Others are coming increasingly to light. Bishop Richard Allen of the A.M.E. Church; Bishop James Varick of the A.M.E.Z. Church; Prince Hall, whose clerical labors in late eighteenth-century Boston improved the lot of the despised freedmen; Absalom Jones, founder of the first Black Episcopal Church in Philadelphia; and Thomas Paul, founder of the African Baptist Church in Boston in 1805, progenitor of historic Twelfth Baptist Church and People's Baptist Church. This number could be multiplied.

A second stage of the black church is what G. S. Wilmore designates as its "deradicalization." The pristine joys of an illusory emancipation blunted its militancy. Post-Reconstruction political backlash stymied gains. The accommodationist policy of Booker T. Washington became representative of black institutions. A rising middle class imitated and aped the decadent white churches. Bishop Henry N. Turner of heroic mold, who died in 1915, could not stem this tide almost singlehanded.

### *Black Theology Today*

What is the status of black theology currently in the black church? There is neither an easy answer nor a single answer to that query. One is reminded of the testimony a brother gave at Prayer Meeting:

We ain't what we ought to be;  
 We ain't what we want to be;  
 We ain't what we gonna' be;  
 But thank God, We ain't what we was.

Albert Cleage in *Black Christian Nationalism* points out:

Black people have come a long way since 1954. We have come by many paths from many different directions. Today in most churches there is a feeling that we would like our church to be a part of the black liberation struggle.<sup>6</sup>

Is it not encouraging to see our choirs in black churches joyfully and unashamedly singing the haunting spirituals? They were wrought out of the suffering and anguish of slaves, but blacks were ashamed of them. Since it is now recognized as the only original musical art form America can boast, as well as an important part of Afro-American heritage, can blacks do less than embrace it?

Here and there churches and Sunday Schools and black caucuses demand more literature that depicts the black experience. At a

6. Albert B. Cleage, Jr., *Black Christian Nationalism*, p. 233.



youth conference in Springfield, Massachusetts, some time ago, it was a pleasant surprise to see painted on the wall behind the pulpit the Black Christ by a baptismal pool.

In the fall of 1974 the Greater Hartford Ministerial Alliance, composed of black clergy of all denominations, adjourned to go downtown as a body to sit and speak on behalf of a black businessman whose request to drive his one bus interstate was bitterly opposed by a bevy of lawyers representing lines that selfishly sought to keep him out. He came to thank the Alliance on February 4, 1975, that the petition was finally granted. That is an incarnation of black theology in contemporary form. A critic might rightly state these things are not much. None can deny that. It is significant that movement is in the right direction, not how far we have gone or how much has been done.

Who has been more guilty than the evangelical, conservative and fundamentalist churches of white racism and civil religion? Through the years this gospel has had a vertical but not a horizontal dimension. Orthodox doctrine counted more than orthodox living.

Through black evangelicals like Tom Skinner, William Pannell and maybe others, changes are taking place. Richard Tuebedeaux tells of it in the rewarding book, *The Young Evangelicals*. He writes:

But probably his most powerful statement on the necessity of a non-racist Christian message was Skinner's speech to the Young Evangelicals at Urbana '70, for which he received a standing ovation. In it he blasts without apology the hypocrisy of evangelical churches.<sup>7</sup>

To a great extent the evangelical church in America supported the status quo. It supported slavery; it supported segregation; it preached against any attempt of the black man to stand on his own two feet. And those who sought to communicate the gospel to black people did it in a way to make sure they stayed cool. "We will preach the gospel to those folks so they won't riot, we will preach the gospel to them so we can keep the lid on the garbage pail." And so they were careful to point out such scriptures as "Obey your masters"; "Love your enemy"; "Do good to them that hurt you." But no one ever talked about a message that would also speak to the oppressor.

Again Tuebedeaux presents Black Evangelist William Pannell, an associate of Tom Skinner and a trustee of Fuller Theological

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7. Richard Tuebedeaux, *The Young Evangelicals*, p. 117.

Seminary. Pannell demands that Evangelicals repudiate the Christ of white, suburban America and its civil religion in favor of the universal risen Lord Jesus Christ, who liberates and reconciles an oppressed humanity:

Here we clearly need to preach a Christ who moves alongside of contemporary man, helping him to affirm his individuality and personal worth. Unfortunately, He often comes through as Anglo-Saxon, Protestant suburban, Republican. Black young people simply cannot identify with that kind of Christ in a racist society. . . . The sin of Evangelicalism is not that we are un-American. It is rather that we are more American than Christian.<sup>8</sup>

The Skinners and the Pannells are saying something to us. First, that Black Theology is reaching young black men of conservative stance. Also that these prophetic young black preachers are trumpeting this message to young believers from churches which gave no more thought to the daily dehumanization of black people than it did to holding service next Sunday.

Those who attended the funeral of Adam C. Powell, colorful pastor of Harlem's historic Abyssinian Baptist Church, may recall Dr. Samuel Proctor's memorable words in eulogy, "He roared like a lion and snapped like a dragon in defense of all those who were being snuffed out slowly by steady oppression." Alas, this is atypical! One listens almost in vain for such a forthright diction in the pulpits, conventions and conferences of black churches.

In his *Politics of God* Joseph R. Washington is not too happy with today's black church. He states:

Heretofore, the function of the Negro church has been that of a leaven. In effect, it has served as a cut-rate social outlet, selling itself for quantity rather than quality, offering cheap white medicine in colored doses of several hours of relief for a week.<sup>9</sup>

Interviewed by Newsweek in the Spring of 1963, Dr. J. H. Jackson, longtime president of the National Baptist Convention, is recorded as having said:

There is a danger that we may become so anxious to win an immediate victory for the race, that we will make secondary the winning of spiritual victory for the nation and for the advancement of the Kingdom of God among the children of men. The Negro Church must at any cost add the salt of love and goodwill to the struggle for better human relations, so we can contend without being contentious and struggle for the right without becoming selfish or bitter.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

9. Joseph R. Washington, Jr., *The Politics of God*, p. 209.

There is little reason to believe President Jackson's thinking has changed materially in the last decade. Gayraud S. Wilmore puts us on notice, lest one think that other black denominations are presently more progressive than black Baptists. In his informative, absorbing *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* he declares:

Moreover the historic Black Methodist denominations and the three major Black Baptist Conventions followed King in taking no notice of the National Committee of Negro Churchmen. Indeed one or two of the Black denominations came perilously close to repudiating Black Power.<sup>10</sup>

Albert B. Cleage writes in his book *Black Christian Nationalism*:

The Black Church is out of it. Black preachers are out of it, and a number of young Black seminarians are out of it, because they are out of touch with the Black Community. They still wonder how much money they are going to make and who must die before they can get a big church.<sup>11</sup>

Unapologetically abrasive, Cleage nevertheless tries to confront pastors and some divinity students with unpalatable veracity. Clergy ride their cars and no longer meet people. Many blacks feel ill at ease coming into churches composed primarily of blacks who have internalized white middle class values. Eyes look daggers at the person who may be dressed shabbily, who lacks smug gentility, whose English needs refining. In too many of our black churches respectability is compulsory while regeneration is an elective!

Dr. Cone, frank but less harsh than Cleage, sees black theology given minimal consideration, if any, in black churches. *Black Theology and Black Power* expresses his disenchantment:

So far the Black Church has remained conspicuously silent, continuing its business as usual. The holding of conferences, the election of bishops, the fund-raising drive for a new building or air-conditioner seems to be more important than the Blacks who are shot because they want to be men. The Black church, though spatially located in the community of the oppressed, has not responded to the needs of its people. It has, rather, drained the community, seeking to be more and more like the white church. Its ministers have condemned the helpless and have mimicked the values of whites. For this reason most Black Power people bypass the churches as irrelevant to their objectives.<sup>12</sup>

Ebony's February, 1975, issue tells a bit of the story of a venerable A.M.E.Z. prelate, William J. Walls. It is entitled "50 Years a Bishop" by Carlyle C. Douglas.

10. *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, p. 270.

11. *Black Christian Nationalism*, p. 237.

12. *Black Theology and Black Power*, p. 114.

Last year Walls wrote a prodigious 700-page book, *The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church: Reality of the Black Church*. Bishop Walls says of this monumental contribution to black religion:

I did it to try and preserve Zion, but I ended up with a history of the race.<sup>13</sup>

Because of his illustrious achievements, his wide travel and reading, his activist stance against racist attempts to deny him privileges accorded white Americans, one must honor Bishop Walls. I was particularly interested in his oblique comment on Black Theology. The bishop stated: 'The less we try to reduce Jesus Christ to a segregated level or try to color Him, the better off we'll be.'<sup>14</sup>

Does not this venerable churchman conclude, after some seventy years observing and participating in American religion, that segregation may be practiced here and there in a black church, but has been institutionalized in the white church as in every other American organization? As for "coloring the Christ," the European artist has been doing this for centuries. How often would one find in the Palestine of Christ's day a native with blue eyes, fair skin and flaxen hair?

As a pastor of a black church I sadly admit that, for the most part, the presidents of our conventions, the pastors of our churches, the laity therein in positions of power, think in the vein of white theology. When the New England Baptist Missionary Convention met at Shiloh Baptist Church in Washington, D. C. in June, 1962, one ministerial delegate made a motion "that we remain as we are." It has been ours too long to meet, greet, confer gratuitous doctorates on one another and pass innocuous resolutions that would not disturb the incumbent administration whether it be Democratic or Republican, Conservative or Moderate.

### *The Future*

An assessment of black theology in mainline black churches is disappointing, to put it mildly. A cursory presentation reveals that it is supported minimally. One needs but to go to a ghetto black church of any denomination. The American flag will be prominently displayed at the altar. Where is the red, black and green flag symbolic of new black consciousness? If seen at all, it is as rare as a heat wave in Greenland. Don't anticipate pictures of saints with pigmentation in most black churches.

13. *Ebony*, February, 1975, "50 Years a Bishop," p. 108.

14. *Ibid.*

The Ethiopian Christian Church, older than any in America and most in Europe, depicts all saints as black and all the devils as white. One's mind quickly pictures the fiery puritanical Black Muslims in modern America doing likewise.

Notwithstanding this pessimistic reality, I am sanguine about the future of black theology in the black church. Why do I feel this way?

First, it is the writer's conviction that black theology is of God. A person does not necessarily agree with every aspect of the fiery Cleage and incandescent Cone. There are black theologies by other men more acceptable to the present theological perspective of our black churchman. Major J. Jones, J. Deotis Roberts, Gayraud S. Wilmore write with varying emphases. Priscilla Mossie has edited the invaluable *Black Faith and Black Solidarity* even more recently.

A sterling scholar and theologian, Dr. William R. Jones of Yale, in turn, turns the light on inadequacies he perspicaciously detects in the militant theologies of Cleage and Jones as well as the more moderate irenic writings of Joseph Washington, J. D. Roberts and M. J. Jones. This is found in his mentally stimulating work, *Is God a White Racist?*

What has that to do with black theology being of God? Just this! From the most militant to the most moderate, all black theologians address themselves to justice, liberation and the infinite worth of the black man as a creation of God.

James H. Cone in *A Black Theology of Liberation* writes:

The task of Christian theology is to analyze the meaning of hope in God in such a way that the oppressed community of a given society will risk all for earthly freedom, a freedom made possible in the resurrection of Christ. The language of theology challenges the societal structures because it is inseparable from the suffering community. . . . Whatever theology says about God and the world must arise out of its sole reason for existence as a discipline to assist the oppressed in their liberation.<sup>15</sup>

Judicious counsel from respected Gamaliel saved the burgeoning Christian movement from persecution. He advised, referring to zealous Peter and John:

Refrain from these men and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.—Acts 5:38-39.

It will be a long time before black theology will be accepted in most black churches. Nevertheless, there are some factors that will

15. James H. Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, pp. 21, 22.



crack monolithic opposition. Not the least of these is the interest by Continental theologians in the subject.

So many black artists have received increasing acclaim in America after acceptance in Europe. Among these are Roland Hayes, early twentieth-century concert tenor; Marian Anderson, whose rich contralto voice thrilled thousands; and Dean Dixon, who achieved fame as a symphonic conductor in Germany and Australia.

Only after her soulful renditions won her an enviable niche among European royalty and aristocracy did Americans of her own racial group give Mahalia Jackson considerable notice and appreciation. Could it be that this is the roundabout road to justifiable recognition for the small but doughty group of black religious leaders who pioneer in modern-day black theology?

By the same token, white American theologians will be hard pressed to dismiss, as of no consequence, what English, Dutch, German and Scandinavian theologians see merit in. This is bound to affect our leading seminaries—black and white. What established Continental religious scholars say is of major significance to their American colleagues.

As one black generation dies and another comes into being, the climate of black theology and liberation should be more favorable. Hopefully our black pulpits will recapture the mantle of a Nat Turner, a Martin Delany, a Henry H. Garnett, a Henry M. Turner, a Vernon Johns, a Mordecai Johnson and others. Major J. Jones suggests this likelihood in the dedication of his *Christian Ethics for Black Theology*:

To the memory of my late parents, who gave me a deep sense of black religion and of the ethical. To my daughter, Chandra, sixteen, and to her dear friend, Muriel, fifteen, who will in the future live a fully recognized hope—a liberation and freedom for which black people of my generation can only hope and yearn.

Factors external to but impinging upon the black church force a more acceptable posture as relates to black theology. No less an authority than Gayraud S. Wilmore observes:

It was the black folks of Watts, Newark, Detroit and hundreds of other communities across the nation and the young black radicals of the S.N.C.C. and the northern black nationalist groups—including the Nation of Islam—who convinced black preachers that the church was expendable if it was unwilling to immerse itself in the vortex of the Black Power movement. The Black Power motif was pregnant with moral and religious meaning,

and the black churchmen could not evade its magnetic force once the people took the cause of liberation into their own hands.<sup>16</sup>

So movements, individuals, youth and others are snapping at the heels of the black church, compelling the black church of tomorrow to a deeper consciousness of race and a more daring commitment to praying for the Kingdom to come, but also being co-workers with God in bringing the New Jerusalem to the ghetto.

To see a neatly dressed Muslim youth selling his papers or to see the attractive Crescent Stores dotting the areas where blacks are most densely concentrated, says something to the black church. Apartment houses freshly renovated speak a message of black pride and dignity and worth.

There is, I am sure, a remnant of blacks who are not concerned about who is with them as long as they believe themselves to be with God. Someone has said, "He is in the right who is most in league with the future." It is of such that James Cone writes in the closing chapter of *A Black Theology of Liberation*:

Black Theology does not scorn Christian hope; it affirms it. It believes that when people really believe in the resurrection of Christ and take seriously the promise revealed through Him, they cannot be satisfied with the present world as it is. The past reality of the resurrection and the future of God disclosed through it make persons dissatisfied with the imperfection of the present. It is not possible to know what the world can and ought to be and still be content with excuses for the destruction of human beings. Christians must fight against evil, for not to fight, not to do everything they can for their brother's pain, is to deny the resurrection.<sup>17</sup>

There is hope for black theology in the black church where such a young person or older appears on the scene. Like Paul of old they have their heavenly vision and are restless until they execute it. They are people whom the world can not move. Consequently they alone are qualified to move their time and beyond.

Liberation theology, while not ubiquitous, will be spreading into more areas in the next decade. The January issue of the American Baptist Magazine focuses on the priorities of Asiatics in its readable article called "New Movements of Liberation." Dr. Ray Sano, Mills College Chaplain and head of the Asian Center for Theology and Strategies (ACTS), reminds us:

America means salvation to our economic needs, but here we discover we are enslaved people and we need to set loose a liberation movement.<sup>18</sup>

16. G. S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, p. 272.

17. James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, p. 248.

18. American Baptist Magazine, p. 10, January, 1975.

Not only the oppressed Asiatics but Africans are taking a look at theology. Says G. S. Wilmore in his brief narration of the consultation held in Ghana last December:

A new beginning was being made for the black church in Africa and in America, and out of that new beginning there is certain to come in Desmond Tutus' words "a valuable contribution to the rich Christian heritage which belongs to all of us."<sup>19</sup>

So much for Asian, African and black theology of the U.S. The Latins of South America demand a new and better day, as is cogently expressed in Gustavo Gutierrez's well written book, *A Theology of Liberation*.

He does for Peru and Ruben Alves does for Brazil what black theologies are doing and will continue to do in the U. S. Black theologians have allies on different continents. Invincible indeed is an idea whose time has come. National consciousness comes to its own in Africa's elimination of class distinction, and centuries of oppression and poverty in South America provoke the quest and demand of theologians and Christian activists. In our own land, black theology frees the black man from self-hatred and dehumanization.

The black church in America wrought better than it realized in the years preceding the so-called emancipation under Lincoln. It kept hope alive. It never ceased to remind the slave that God had something better in the here and now. Might it not be called the one authentic Christian theology in this land, as Cone so often reminds us?

The voice was muted but not stilled in Reconstruction and well into the twentieth century. Social and political factors reduced the black to a pitiable status. At times "it was darker than a hundred midnights in a cypress swamp."

So many things have stirred something long dormant. African nations threw off the shackles of centuries-long inhumane colonialism, Martin L. King infused new dignity, manliness and spirit in the blacks of America; through him and like-minded martyrs they rediscovered a sense of worth.

The black church will have to make way for black theology. Its progress will not be uniform. It will encounter obstacles. Black and white foes will oppose it. As the Crusaders cried out centuries ago, "God wills it"; human agents must see it as the "heavenly vision" demanding their life commitment.

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19. Christian Century, February 19, 1975, p. 169.



# Black Theology: Providence and Evil

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Is God active in the black man's quest for freedom and liberation? If so, then, in what sense? And, how can God's activity in black liberation speak, meaningfully, to the problem of black suffering? Traditionally black religionists have attempted to answer these questions from the perspective of divine coercion and omnipotence. The first task here is to show some of the difficulties and inadequacies with this model in attempting to answer these questions. The second task is to develop the model of divine persuasion as an alternative to divine coercion and omnipotence, and as a more viable theological model for speaking meaningfully about God's activity in black liberation and black suffering.

Providence refers to God's purpose and goal for man. It concerns itself with the way in which God attempts to accomplish His purpose in history. Because God traditionally is perceived as being intrinsically good and just, history has been interpreted as directed toward the good. The ultimate triumph of the good becomes assured because of divine omnipotence and coercion. This means that ultimately God breaks into history and coerces His purpose and goal into actualization. And, consequently, good becomes ultimately victorious over evil. In one sense, speaking from this traditional model, evil as an immediate tragedy becomes necessary in accomplishing God's final purpose and goal in history.

This theory of providence and evil, in large measure, comes from the Hegelian philosophical tradition. Hegel interpreted history as the unfolding of the Absolute Spirit (God). Thus, all history becomes the autobiography of God, and therefore all manifestations of God in history become necessary. Everything that occurs in history is a result of the direct plan of God. When evil occurs, from the human perspective it appears as bad, but from the divine perspective it works toward the ultimate plan of history and consequently becomes good. The Absolute Spirit of God, in His omni-

potence, governs or controls all history, making both good and bad acts of men necessary for the fulfillment of history. Hegel sees sin and moral evil as originally resulting from man's self-assertion of his freedom and independence. The Fall of man, therefore, becomes necessary due to his finitude. "Since this view explains sin as a necessity of man's nature which was created by God, it makes God responsible for it and absolves man himself from responsibility and guilt."<sup>1</sup>

Black theology must stand in opposition to the Hegelian idea of providence and evil because the latter can be used to justify and perpetuate oppression, slavery and man's inhumanity to man. It is in violation of the notion of free will that is so much a part of the Biblical tradition. From a Biblical perspective, man's Fall "was due not to a necessity of his nature but to a misuse of his freedom."<sup>2</sup> And to say that sin or moral evil is the result of man's misuse of his freedom makes him both guilty and responsible for his actions as opposed to making God responsible. Black theology, at this point, should stand with the Biblical tradition rather than the Hegelian tradition because to say that man is both guilty and responsible for his sins allows the black theologian to challenge the sin of oppression, slavery and man's inhumanity to man.

Theologically speaking though, the black community must be very careful about its theory of providence and evil, so as not to subscribe to a theory of providence and evil that both justifies and perpetuates the evil of oppression and slavery. During slavery, white slave masters attempted to indoctrinate the slaves in believing that the institution of slavery was ordained by God, and to fight against or oppose it was to go against the will of God. They used such scriptures as Romans 13:1-2:

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

The Bible was a very convenient tool for perpetuating the institution of slavery because of its many anti-black scriptural passages.<sup>3</sup>

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1. George F. Thomas, *Religious Philosophies of the West* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), p. 284.

2. *Ibid.*

3. For a further elaboration of this see Charles B. Copher, "The Black Man in the Biblical World," *The Journal of The Interdenominational Theological Center* Vol. I, No. I, 1974, pp. 7-16 and Eulalia P. Baltazar, *The Dark Center: A Process Theology of Blackness* (New York: Paulist Press, 1973).

Unfortunately some of the slaves took this indoctrination that came from the oppressors very seriously and actually believed that their physical bondage was the result of God's providence. Frederick Douglas found this view of providence among many slaves. He speaks to it in the following manner:

I have met many religious colored people, at the South, who are under the delusion that God requires them to submit to slavery, and to wear their chains with meekness and humility. I could entertain no such nonsense as this; and I almost lost my patience when I found any colored man weak enough to believe such stuff.<sup>4</sup>

It is clear that Frederick Douglas was opposed to the belief that slavery was the result of God's providence. And evidence seemed to support the view that most black Americans, both pre- and post-civil war, felt that slavery was not the result of God's providence, but rather, the result of the white man's cruelty, sin, injustice and inhumanity.

Believing that they were created in the image of God, the slaves felt that they were God's children. And, as I said earlier, although some succumbed to the slave masters' indoctrination that slavery was ordained by God, the dominant belief was to the contrary. This contrary belief was that God made of one blood all men and that it is not God's will that any man should keep another in bondage and captivity. This belief was grounded in the view that God's desire is that all men should be free. The same Bible which the slave masters used to validate slavery, once in the hands of the slaves, was used to condone their fight for freedom. They understood Christianity in light of this sense of freedom and liberty. With this new freedom consciousness the slaves felt that wilfully to submit to slavery meant to go against God's will, which was analogous to being non-Christian.

The slaves developed a theology of liberation and perceived God as being on their side. They believed that God was just and therefore on the side with justice, righteousness, freedom and good. They could no longer accept slavery because of its moral opposition to the law of God. Since they no longer accepted the white myth that God condoned slavery, disobedience and preservation through escape became prevalent. This becomes clear in the following words of an ex-slave:

You charged me that in escaping I disobeyed God's law. NO indeed: that law which God wrote upon the table of my heart inspiring me to love

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4. Quoted from Benjamin E. Mays, *The Negro's God* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), p. 123.

freedom, and impelling me to seek it at every hazard, I obeyed and, by the good hand of my God upon me, I walked out of the house of bondage.<sup>5</sup>

This theology of liberation emerges from the realization that slavery and injustice are diametrically opposed to the will of God. Thus it becomes clear at this point that the slaves' view of providence was not one of submission, but rather one of protest and rejection of slavery.

Along with this sense of protest and rejection was the belief, on the slaves' part, that God is a revengeful God. Because they were forced to conform to the conditions of slavery, the slaves believed that God was going to fight the oppressors for them. The slaves realized that they were powerless and the oppressors were powerful; the way in which they dealt with this problem was to say that God would fight their battles.

Along with this belief that God would fight their battles, the slaves held the view that slavery and oppression will be ultimately eradicated by God in history. This belief finds its grounding in divine omnipotence and sovereignty. It views God as being all-powerful and in complete control of history. It contends that good will ultimately triumph over evil because of God's plan and purpose for man. Black Americans have always used this sense of God's all-powerfulness to sustain them in the midst of their powerlessness. J. Deotis Roberts feels that this sense of the all-powerfulness of God is needed to inspire faith in the oppressed as he finds himself constantly under the sustained domination of the oppressor. He goes further to argue that this God is significant because He "is able to promise the ultimate vindication of the good and the defeat of evil and injustice."<sup>6</sup> Black Americans both historically and in present times have used the omnipotence of God as a means of protest against slavery, oppression, evil and man's inhumanity to man. Because of this belief in divine omnipotence, black Americans have contended that freedom is inevitable.

This optimistic sense of the inevitability of freedom comes out in the spiritual, "A Balm In Gilead," and it goes like this:

There is a balm in Gilead  
To make the spirit whole;  
There is a balm in Gilead  
To heal the sin-sick soul.

5. August Meier, ed., *The Making of Black America* (New York: Atheneum, 1969), p. 195.

6. J. Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), p. 87.

Sometimes I feel discouraged  
 And think my prayer is vain,  
 But then the Holy Spirit  
 Revives my soul again.

The basic insight of this spiritual is taken from the book of Jeremiah. It was the prophet Jeremiah who originally raised the question, "Is there no balm in Gilead?" Jeremiah, at this point, is spiritually depressed, frustrated and discouraged. He has a spiritual dilemma; the slaves were able, with their creative imagination, to catch this spiritual dilemma, theologically, and develop a theory of providence. Encountering the cruelty, frustrations, and both physical and psychological oppressive forces of slavery, the black man "straightened the question mark in Jeremiah's sentence into an exclamation point: "There is a balm in Gilead!"<sup>7</sup> The basic insight here is one of optimism that grew out of the pessimism of slavery and transcended it. The slaves were able to take the pessimism of slavery and construct a sense of eschatological hope that ultimately perceived freedom as an inevitable reality. Although they were systematically dehumanized and oppressed, they never believed that the forces of evil would have the final word in reality. The theory of providence that they developed made them believe that ultimate defeat was unrealistic and impossible. This feeling was based on God's omnipotence and coercion.

If slavery had been accepted as an ever-unchanging reality, it is highly possible that the slaves would have perished on the plantation. But because they were able to cope with the contradiction between slavery and freedom, it enabled them to know that life in essence was not fixed. Because the slaves believed that the contradictions of life<sup>8</sup> were not ultimate, eschatologically speaking, they had a sense of optimism and hope in the midst of the pessimism of slavery. The pessimism of slavery and hopelessness comes out in the spiritual, "Sometimes I'm up and sometimes I'm down, Oh, yes, Lord; sometimes I'm almost to the ground, Oh, yes, Lord." The optimism of freedom and eschatological hope comes out in the spiritual, "I'm so glad that trouble don't last always."

When will the ultimate eradication of slavery, oppression and man's inhumanity to man come? The slaves perceived this in futuristic eschatological terms. They thought of it in terms of a futuristic consummation. This consummation of history had an

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7. Howard Thurman, *Deep River* (New York: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1969), p. 56.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 9.



apocalyptic element to it, meaning that it had a sense of divine destruction, judgment and victory to it. It was believed that at this time God would bring judgment and destruction upon the slave master; the slaves then would be vindicated. This vindication was perceived by the slaves as a state of reward and the destruction was thought of as punishment for the slave master. How did the slaves reason this out?

As they began to reason and think about the consummation as the abode of the righteous and hell as the abode of the unrighteous, they said, "I am having my hell now; when I die I shall have my heaven. The master is having his heaven now; when he dies he will have his hell."<sup>9</sup> And looking up to the big white house where the master lived, they said:

But everybody talking 'bout heaven  
Ain't going there.<sup>10</sup>

Heaven to the slaves represented a time when there would be no more slavery, cruelty, evil and oppression. It represented the time when God would force man to conform to his will and purpose. The above spiritual is both a protest against and a victory over slavery. Although the slaves believed that complete victory over evil and slavery was going to eventuate beyond history, they also felt that their freedom was going to occur in this world. In other words, in terms of their destiny, they stood both within history and beyond history. They developed this double sense of destiny from the Christian tradition; Reinhold Niebuhr describes it in this fashion:

It is only in terms of the Christian faith that an individual may stand both inside and outside of history. He stands inside because his faith affirms the meaningfulness of history and he stands outside because his faith asserts that history is borne by an eternal will.<sup>11</sup>

The Christian faith gave meaning and significance to the slaves.

The right of the slaves to govern and determine their own destiny was taken away by physical force, and therefore they were stripped of a sense of responsibility in this world. They were perceived by the slave master as objects, things or something of utility value. But from the eyes of God, they felt that they were somebody. Because they believed that history was borne by an eternal will, they were able to look for something better than their immediate

9. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

11. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of God* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), p. 70.

condition. It was in this sense that the slaves longed to go "home" or to "heaven." This notion comes out in the spiritual called "City Called Heaven" or "Po' Pilgrim":

I am a po' pilgrim of sorrow  
Tossed out in this wide world alone;  
No hope have I for tomorrow;  
I started to make heaven my home.  
Sometimes I am tossed and driven, Lord;  
Sometimes I don't know where to roam.  
I heard of a city called heaven;  
I started to make it my home.

Therefore we can clearly see that the black man's conception of freedom and liberation was perceived historically in a two-fold eschatological perspective. It contained, as we have observed, both this-worldly and other-worldly dimensions. Thus God's providential plan, as they saw it, was for the black man to be free both in this world and in the world to come. Many of the spirituals can be interpreted in this light. This twofold meaning comes out in the spiritual,

O Canaan, sweet Canaan,  
I am bound for the land of Canaan.

Frederick Douglas reveals the twofold meaning of this spiritual when he points out that it meant "something more than a hope of reaching heaven. We meant to reach the North, and the North was our Canaan."<sup>12</sup> Another spiritual that reveals this twofold meaning is,

I thought I heard them say  
There were lions in the way;  
I don't expect to stay  
much longer here.  
Run to Jesus, shun the danger.  
I don't expect to stay  
much longer here.

On the lips of some, this spiritual meant the expectation of a speedy summons to heaven, but on the lips of others it simply meant a speedy pilgrimage to a free state, and deliverance from all the evils and dangers of slavery.<sup>13</sup>

I have pointed out earlier that the black man believed that his freedom from slavery was inevitable because of God's omnipotence

12. Frederick Douglas, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglas* (Canada: Collier-Macmillan, 1962), p. 159.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

and coercion. This notion comes into focus even more vividly in certain historical black religionists.

Nathaniel Paul, a pioneer abolitionist black preacher, argued that the providence of God in the affairs of this life was the anti-thesis of slavery and oppression. Because he believed that slavery was against God's providential plan, he contended that the black man's liberation from slavery was inevitable.<sup>14</sup> The conception of God that underlies Paul's notion of the inevitability of freedom is omnipotence and coercion. Daniel Alexander Payne, bishop of the A.M.E. Church, contended, "Trust in God, and he will bring slavery and all its outrages to an end."<sup>15</sup> Believing in the omnipotence of God, Payne felt that God had a set time when he would intervene and eradicate the evils of slavery. Thus all the black man had to do, according to Payne, was to trust in the almighty power of God. Richard Allen, "father, founder, and first bishop of the African Methodist Church,"<sup>16</sup> adhered to the traditional notion of divine omnipotence and coercion. He says, "Trust in God, who sees your condition, and as a merciful father pitieth his children, so doth God pity them that love Him." "This will," he continues, "promote your freedom."<sup>17</sup> Allen believed that if the slaves waited on God, He, in his omnipotence, would deliver them. David Walker, a pre-Civil War black abolitionist and nationalist, believed that the black man's freedom was inevitable because of God's almighty power and providential plan. He grounded his belief in the idea of God's justice. He asks, "Can the Americans escape God Almighty? If they do, can He be to us a God of justice? God is just, and I know it—for he has convinced me to my satisfaction—I cannot doubt him."<sup>18</sup> Walker believed that God Almighty in due time would pour out his vengeance upon Americans for their inhuman treatment of slaves.<sup>19</sup> Since, thus far, we have discussed historically the black man's conception of freedom in light of divine omnipotence and coercion, let us now critically reflect upon this theological model in light of divine persuasion.

First of all, what does divine persuasion mean and how does it differ from divine omnipotence? Divine persuasion means that God

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14. Mays, *The Negro's God*, p. 42.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

18. See Walker's *Appeal* in Sterling Stuckey, ed., *Ideological Origins of Black Nationalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), p. 60.

19. Mays, *Negro's God*, p. 117.



influences man toward the good. God influences man by providing him with the best possibilities in the world for actualization. These possibilities are the paradigm both for the realization and the actualization of value in the world. They are inexhaustible in that man cannot exhaust the infinitude of these possibilities. As God provides these possibilities to man, it is up to man to accept or reject them.

Divine persuasive power differs from divine coercive power in that it does not force man in conformity to its control. Divine persuasive power does not force the outcome of a situation. The outcome of a situation is determined on the basis of the decision man makes in accepting or rejecting the ideal possibilities provided by God in his transcendent nature. Coercive power ultimately minimizes man's freedom and responsibility, whereas persuasive power maximizes man's freedom and responsibility.

Following this model of divine persuasion, we cannot say that the freedom of black Americans is inevitable.<sup>20</sup> It is not guaranteed. One of the difficulties with the notion of the inevitability of freedom is that it creates too much complacency and conservatism on the part of the black's stride for freedom and liberation. If God is going ultimately to break into history and force the black man's freedom and liberation, then why work for it? If God forces man into conformity to His will, it takes away man's freedom and responsibility. Traditionally, black Americans have said, man has freedom and responsibility up to a point, after which God takes control of the situation. Historically, as we have seen, this served as the black man's sense of hope, he believed that ultimately God in His omnipotence would intervene and eradicate the institution of slavery. Even today the black man continues to wait, eschatologically, for God's omnipotent intervention and eradication of oppression. As a result, black Americans have not utilized at the maximum capacity their physical, intellectual and spiritual facilities toward freedom and liberation.

Basic to this notion of the inevitability of freedom because of divine-omnipotence is the idea that God has a fixed time when He will eradicate oppression and evil. This fixed time is futuristic in its eschatological vision. From the perspective of divine persuasive power, there is no fixed eschatological consummation that God has planned for the elimination of black oppression. Divine persuasive

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20. For a further elaboration see my discussion, "Black Theology and William R. Jones," *Religion in Life*, Spring, 1975, pp. 19-23.

power argues that the possibility for black liberation is dependent upon the black man's decision to make it a reality. God will not force it into actualization. The future becomes an open risk. If we accept God's ideal possibilities and employ them toward the eradication of our oppression, then the future becomes one of genuine opportunity. But, if we reject God's ideal possibilities and resort to complacency, indifference and false hope, then the future becomes a threat. Therefore the assurance of black liberation does not reside in an omnipotent God who will force it into actualization. Rather, it resides in the black man's existential decision to make it a reality.

God will be affected by whatever decision the black man makes, whether negative or positively. God will not make the right decision for us, He will influence us toward it. If the black man decides to accept God's ideal possibilities toward the actualization of freedom, God will be affected positively and consequently will celebrate the triumph of the good with us. If the black man rejects God's ideal and resorts to complacency, conservatism, and indifference, then God will be affected negatively. Faith in God, from this perspective, does not mean that He will force our liberation, but it means that, on the one hand, God influences us toward liberation, and, on the other hand, He participates in the actualization of this process.

To say that God participates in the actualization is not to say that He does it by force, but it means that God and man are interdependent. It refers to the immanence of God. In His transcendence God is beyond the world and contains all ideal possibilities for the world in his nature. These possibilities are complete, absolute, immutable, infinite, inexhaustible and eternal. When God in His transcendence provides these possibilities for man, in His immanence God participates in the actualization of these possibilities. Again, God does this by persuasion and not by coercion. All of the good that man actualizes in the world is conserved in God's immanence. This good, after it is actualized, becomes efficient data for the actualization of future possibilities.

Historically, all of the good that comes from the black experience is conserved in God's immanence. God uses this good to influence contemporary black Americans toward the actualization of their possibilities. If contemporary black Americans accept the possibilities provided by God's transcendence, and if we allow the good conserved in God's immanence to influence us toward the actualization of the good, the future becomes one of opportunity.

# Toward a Black Christian Social Ethic

by HERBERT O. EDWARDS  
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Every new theological and ethical entry must make its way by pointing to the inadequacies, deficiencies and even errors implicit and explicit in the previous systems and approaches to the problem of trying to be faithful to the demands of the Gospel in a world which is "no friend of Grace."

In our racist society, the normal difficulties that new theological and ethical entries ordinarily encounter are exacerbated by the addition of the term "Black." For reasons which make sense only in a racist frame of reference, terms like Swedish Theology, German Theology, British Theology, Liberal Theology, Neo-orthodox Theology, Crisis Theology, Existentialist Theology, are all considered acceptable and, if attacked, are reproached for their substantive errors. But there is no problem with the name per se.

However, Black Theology is attacked because of the name. "There can be no such thing as Black Theology." One can expect, then, that any attempt to move toward a Black Christian Social Ethic would encounter the same kind of negative reaction. Consequently it is incumbent upon us to clear the decks by pointing up the inability of white American Protestant theological and social ethics to provide any meaningful guidelines for the black Christian who wants also to believe that he is not created for humiliation.

Every oppressive society precipitates rebellion and revolt. And the theological spokesmen of the establishment generally decry rebellion and revolt, as well as any action which threatens the existing order.

In revolting against oppression and enslavement, the slave is actually demanding rather than resisting order, for the oppressive system is not true order but systematized disorder. The revolt implies a demand that all recognize a common principle and a rejection of the disorder of a universe in which some have the rights of personhood while others are treated as objects.

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It is not enough for the slave to know, in himself, that he has value and intrinsic worth, he knows that it is necessary that this value be recognized by others. Revolution, thus, is a demand for a mutual recognition of humanity. The master-slave relationship precludes the possibility of that mutual recognition. And the master-slave mentality, still so prevalent in almost all institutions in American life, also precludes that mutual recognition.

The slave tends to recognize the master without being recognized in turn. This is why slaves always know so much about masters, while masters know nothing about slaves. This is why, in American educational institutions which now admit black students, the black students, the descendants of slaves, are required to learn about the ways and the cultural traditions of the masters, but any suggestion that the cultural traditions and ways of the former slaves and their descendants be included in the curriculum creates literally a "crisis of conscience." To insist on mutual recognition of the common humanity of the slave is to invest him with a comparable humanity with the master and must be resisted.

The resistance which is offered to the demand to accord to the victims of oppression the same human status which the oppressor sees as his natural and ordained right is seldom justified by coming to grips with the basic, fundamental issue at conflict. Usually the demand is denied on other, more expedient, grounds. An instance which is representative is the response of Rachel Henderlite to the mounting opposition in the white South to the 1954 Supreme Court decision on education.

Most of us know that to insist on recognition of human rights for all people as seems clearly a minimum requirement of Christian faith, and to insist on full integration of the Negro into American society all at one time, is to bring about bloodshed, elimination of the public schools, recriminations and hostilities of many kinds. This is obviously a situation in which to do what seems right is to bring about much that is wrong!<sup>1</sup>

### Establishment Ethics

White American Protestant theological ethics has been establishment-oriented in reference to its responses to the black presence in America. Indeed, one can probably show with little difficulty that it has been establishment-oriented in reference to a number of other issues as well, but our concern is with the kind of stances adopted toward black Americans. The following will serve to cast the issue in bold relief.

1. "The Christian Way in Race Relations," *Theology Today*, Vol. XIV, No. 2, July 2, 1957, p. 196.

The racial stereotypes which were so much a part of white American thought in every discipline and in common usage, found their way into the writings of theological ethics. This stereotypical thinking is evidenced in the thought of Reinhold Niebuhr, who, in 1932, commenting upon the Negroes' plight and advising a technique of non-payment of taxes, boycotts, etc., said:

"One waits for such a campaign with all the more reason and hope because the *peculiar spiritual gifts of the Negro* endow him with the capacity to conduct it successfully."<sup>2</sup>

Paul Ramsey also falls victim to stereotypical thinking in regard to the black presence in America. He says, ". . . If there are in the south 'darkies' or 'mammies' who themselves think that the conditions, e.g., of public education, ought not to be the same for all, we may say with definiteness that they ought not to think so."<sup>3</sup>

Stereotypical thinking which is racist-informed comes through in other ways. The reactions of white theologians and ethicists to the Civil War, Reconstruction and the post-Reconstruction period which ushered in, with a vengeance, the age of legal separation, capped by the 1896 Plessy vs. Ferguson Supreme Court decision, clearly reveal the impact of racist historiography upon establishment ethics.

According to Niebuhr: "William Lloyd Garrison solidified the south in support of slavery by the vehemence of his attacks against slave-owners. Many of them were, within the terms of their inherited prejudices and traditions, *good men*; and the violence of Mr. Garrison's attack upon them was felt by many to be an evidence of moral perversity in him."<sup>4</sup> The Abolitionists are often accused of precipitating the Civil War by their idealistic and unrealistic stance toward slavery.

The responses to Abraham Lincoln are also further evidences of the one-sided reading and re-writing of history required by establishment ethics. Lincoln is often spoken of as a great nineteenth-century theologian. John Bennett said: "Lincoln expressed essential elements of Biblical religion though he did not use the Christian symbols which would be divisive in our pluralistic society. He humbled himself before the sovereignty of God as the transcendent God of history, as the God of righteousness and mercy."<sup>5</sup>

2. *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), p. 254 (italics added).

3. *Basic Christian Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 334.

4. Niebuhr, *op. cit.*, pp. 248-49 (italics added).

5. *Christians and the State* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 8.

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The fact that Lincoln was a racist created no problem for white ethicists. Indeed, one of Reinhold Niebuhr's last articles defended Lincoln against the charge. ("The Negro Minority and Its Fate in A Self Righteous Nation."<sup>6</sup>) It seems that Lincoln's own words are ignored. He stated on more than one occasion:

I will say then that I am not, nor ever have been in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races, that I am not nor ever have been in favor of making voters or jurors of Negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people.<sup>7</sup>

In commenting on the mistake made by President Eisenhower in letting himself be "forced" into sending troops into Little Rock, Niebuhr said:

The President was right in insisting that the majesty of the law must be upheld when it is threatened by mob violence. But even a northern liberal must agree with the *people of the South* in a distaste for the use of Federal troops in domestic situations. It reminds the *South of dreaded Reconstruction days*.<sup>8</sup>

The "majesty of law" *qua* law must be upheld against mob violence, but force must not be used to enforce the desegregation decrees or to protect black citizens in the exercise of their rights. The use of Federal troops reminded the *white people of the South* of 'dreaded Reconstruction days'! Why were the Reconstruction days so dreadful? Was it because Federal troops were used to protect former black slaves in their recently acquired freedom?

Niebuhr continued: "Unfortunately the troops may have also done much to harden the hearts of the racists. This proves that the President was probably more right in July, when he said that he could not imagine a situation which would prompt him to use Federal troops, than he was in September when he was prompted to use them."<sup>9</sup>

Professors Beach and Bennett were one with Niebuhr in interpreting the Reconstruction and "separate but equal" period from a totally white perspective. Professor Beach pointed out that:

With the master-slave community smashed by the Civil War, the Reconstruction era saw the slow development of segregation in Southern

6. McCormick Quarterly, Vol. XXII, No. 4, May, 1969, pp. 201-210.

7. Don E. Fehrenbacher, ed., *Abraham Lincoln: A Documentary Portrait Through His Speeches and Writings* (New York: New American Library), p. 106.

8. Reinhold Niebuhr, "Bad Days at Little Rock," *Christianity and Crisis*, Vol. XVII, No. 17, October 14, 1957, p. 131 (italics added).

9. *Ibid.*

custom and law. At its best, this legislation represented a *feasible transitional arrangement*, which, in theory at least, by substituting a wall for the ceiling of slavery, *proposed to lift all restrictions* upon Negro development and enable both Negro and white to achieve peace and concord by *separation and mutual respect*. . . . By the process which corrupts even good *custom* and the idolization of an ephemeral institution, this *segregation which was partially redemptive* has now become the enemy of Christian community, the occasion for the sin of inhumanity of man to man, and the judgment of God.<sup>10</sup>

The re-writing of American history from a white perspective leads one down some strange and tortuous paths of reasoning. The clear object and intent of the brutality inflicted upon the black communities across the South was to take black Americans out of the political process which they had entered in significant numbers during the Reconstruction Era.

The developing and "partially redemptive" good custom of segregation was a clear attempt not to provide for a transitional period of separate and mutual respect and development; it was to devise and maintain an acceptable substitute to the master-slave relationship which would keep it intact in all but name.

In a response to the Supreme Court decision of 1954 Professor Bennett commented: "The reasons given for the decision are a sound interpretation of the results of a long experiment in race relations, an experiment with the 'separate but equal' approach to the problem."<sup>11</sup>

Professor Bennett's interpretation of the 'separate but equal' *experiment* in race relations, although totally inconsistent with the historical facts (it was no more an experiment in race relations than was slavery), was consistent with his interpretation of the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson decision.

The 'separate but equal' formula was *right* in an earlier period. Not only did it represent a *great advance toward justice*; but, also movement along the lines laid down by it was necessary if the present step was to be taken without disaster. If there had not been the development of equality in many respects in parts of the South, the integration of the schools would be too difficult to attempt at this stage.<sup>12</sup>

Niebuhr was also prompted to compare the 1954 and the 1896 court decisions.

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10. Waldo Beach, "A Theological Analysis of Race Relations," in Paul Ramsey, ed., *Faith and Ethics: The Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), p. 220 (italics added).

11. John C. Bennett, "Editorial Notes," *Christianity and Crisis*, Vol. XIV, No. 8, May 17, 1954, p. 59.

12. John C. Bennett, "A Clear and Noble Decision," *Christianity and Society*, Vol. 19, No. 2, Spring, 1954, p. 3 (italics added).

In 1896, the Supreme Court tried to ease the hiatus between the ideal and the social realities by its doctrine of "separate but equal" rights before the law. *It was a very good doctrine for its day*; for we must remember that the present Supreme Court decision would, at the beginning of the century, merely have prompted revolt. And revolt which is so widespread that police power cannot suppress it represents the defeat both of the law and the ideal.<sup>13</sup>

Niebuhr was quite right in being sensitive to the ways in which the reading of the present situation can affect decisions, judicial or otherwise. In fact, changing historical circumstances, in reference to the black presence in America, might partly account for the shifting ethical positions taken by white ethicists and for the fact that, in spite of different methodological approaches and/or theology, they are generally in agreement in regard to the black presence.

In 1950, writing before the Civil Rights Movement really began to gain momentum, Paul Ramsey had this to say about the Christian's response to social change: "Even the humblest man must rapidly become willing to have the structure and customs of his world otherwise than they now are. . . ."<sup>14</sup>

However the racial situation had changed by 1961. Ramsey wrote the only full-length analysis of the black protest against racial discrimination in the light of Christian ethics. The general tone of this work reflects the changing responses of black Americans to the embodiment of racism in law and custom. The clearly expressed fear is that black Americans will assume that racist practices are sufficient justification for radically changing the social structures. Respect for law and order must be maintained. The Christian victim of injustice must learn not only patience, but also the restraining discipline of refusing to exercise a right if to do so will threaten to destroy the "garments of skin" with which God by His own hands has clothed naked human relations.

Christian realism supports law and the established order unless and until some better "garment" can be woven without letting worse befall.<sup>15</sup> ". . . In the Christian view, *simple and not so simple injustice* alone has never been a sufficient justification for revolutionary change. There is always also the question of order to be considered, and a need for restraints placed upon all and upon the

13. Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Supreme Court on Segregation in the Schools," *Christianity and Crisis*, Vol. XIX, No. 10, June 14, 1954, p. 75 (italics added).

14. *Basic Christian Ethics*, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

15. Paul Ramsey, *Christian Ethics and the Sit-In* (New York: Association Press, 1961), p. 48.



injustice infecting even our claims for greater justice.”<sup>16</sup>

The Civil Rights movement came to be viewed as a threat to order and the majesty of law. Their insistence that the law should be enforced led to criticisms based on the “limits of law.” Stateways cannot change folkways. To enforce the law would seem to be the right thing to do, but to use “force” to do so would be wrong. According to Niebuhr, “These cases of nullification will in due time be brought before federal courts and if force is not used, as it must not be used to enforce the Court’s decision, we may expect a large scale pattern of nullification.”<sup>17</sup>

Force must not be used! Indeed, one may question the use of the word “enforcement,” according to F. Ernest Johnson, “with reference to any statute or legal principle that applies to entrenched custom and deep-seated attitudes.”<sup>18</sup> One of the ways to avoid the use of force was to insist, with Niebuhr, that “. . . Negroes will have to exercise patience and be sustained by a robust faith that history will gradually fulfill the logic of justice.”<sup>19</sup>

The impatience of black people, coupled with the growing recalcitrance of whites, led to establishment ethics beginning to increase its criticism of the former out of fear for the unity of the country, which was threatened by the latter.

James Sellers distinguished between the sit-in movements of 1960 and the Freedom Rides of 1961. He suggested that the major difference between the two was in tone. The sit-in movement couples economic withdrawal with moral protest, essentially by young Negroes living in the community. However, in contrast, the Freedom Rider’s methods involved neither economic withdrawal nor local protest, but depended instead on positive imposition, often over long distances, into a situation. “To say the least, this shift takes away some of the *gentility and humility* that had characterized the earlier movements.”<sup>20</sup>

The Freedom Riders, lacking the “gentility and humility” of the sit-inners, showed a lack of respect for the processes of orderly change.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 49 (italics added).

17. Reinhold Niebuhr, “Schools, Church, and the Ordeals of Integration,” *Christianity and Crisis*, Vol. XVI, No. 16, October 1, 1956, p. 121.

18. F. Ernest Johnson, “The Long Road to Desegregation,” *Christianity and Crisis*, Vol. XVI, No. 22, December 24, 1956, p. 175.

19. Reinhold Niebuhr, “Civil Rights and Democracy,” *Christianity and Crisis*, Vol. XVII, No. 12, July 8, 1957, p. 89.

20. James E. Sellers, “Love, Justice, and the Non-Violent Movement,” *Theology Today*, Vol. XVIII, No. 4, January, 1962, p. 430 (italics added).

. . . the obligation to respect laws *that may be* 'unjust' has probably not been explored sufficiently by either the non-violent leaders or the neo-confederates. A way could be found, I would suggest, by which the testing of a law by deliberate violation could be combined with greater over-all respect for the processes of orderly change (legislation and litigation) than was apparent, for example, in the 'Freedom Rides' of 1961.<sup>21</sup>

The insistent and persistent demands for justice led establishment ethics to a support of order as such. In 1965 Paul Ramsey's comments on the Civil Rights Movement clearly reveal how the villains and victims in the drama have changed roles.

Order is a good in itself, in that the orders provide the fabric in which men may dwell . . . Habits of upheaval and disobedience to law on *one's own determination* that it is unjust are not easily slacked.<sup>22</sup>

The Civil Rights Movement was not attacking "order" as such; it was attacking unjust orders. Neither did the participants determine, on their own, that racially discriminatory laws were unjust. Ramsey himself said, in 1950: "Discriminatory legislation in general, however, is wrong even if the whole group discriminated against votes for it."<sup>23</sup>

The situation in 1965, however, causes Ramsey to conclude: ". . . from the beginning of the Civil Rights movement in the United States the duty of compliance with law has been vastly underestimated by many of the leaders of Christian opinion and action."<sup>24</sup>

In responses to the black presence and the Civil Rights movement, establishment ethics clearly reveal the tendency which John Bennett warned against in 1958:

There is always a tendency for both moral and legal thinking to become crystallized around the institutions of a society in a particular period or the interests of a particular dominant social group. Moral or legal norms, believed to be absolute, usually reflect those institutions and interests and need to be continually criticized and purged in the light of new situations, of new needs, or of new awareness of old needs.<sup>25</sup>

The inadequacies, deficiencies and errors in white establishment ethics in regard to the oppression faced by the black Christian in

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21. James Sellers, *The South and Christian Ethics* (New York: Association Press, 1962), fn. #13, p. 189 (italics added). Cf. Waldo Beach, "The Sit-Down Boycott," *Christianity and Crisis*, Vol. XX, No. 4, March 21, 1960, p. 27.

22. *Deeds and Rules in Christian Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), p. 116 (italics added).

23. *Basic Christian Ethics*, *op. cit.*, p. 334.

24. *Deeds and Rules*, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

25. Bennett, *Christians and the State*, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

America should now be clear. If space permitted, attention could be called to the attempts to read the concept of race as experienced in America back into the mind of God; attention could be called to the willingness to ask black Americans to accept something called "good race relations" in lieu of human and legal rights.

Attention could be called to the attempt to make appeals to "original sin" to explain and, in part, justify, white racism; one could lay bare the attempts to place "racial justice," "racial brotherhood," "racial integration in the churches" in an eschatological, ideal realm, thus absolving white Christians of any responsibility for their failure to achieve or permit these conditions to be realized in this "fallen world."

One could call attention to the general inability to recognize the humanity of black people because they were viewed as "problems" for white Christians, and to the complete absence of any guiding word to black Christians in their struggle to achieve a just society except that they should be patient. However, it seems that enough has been said to justify the need for Black Christian Social Ethics.

We therefore close this section with a 1959 and a 1965 quote from Reinhold Niebuhr, who in the former statement fails to tell the truth about America, and in the latter one perhaps explains why the former is less than true.

In America our treatment of the Negroes is based upon the national presupposition that they will be *fully incorporated into the national community*.<sup>26</sup>

It must have been as difficult for the civilized Romans to discover a common humanity with the barbarian European hordes who overran the empire as for modern white oligarchies in Africa and America to recognize that cultural differences between Negro and white groups are not innate but historically contingent.<sup>27</sup>

### *Black Christian Social Ethics: A Working Definition*

By the term Black Christian Social Ethics we mean to designate and develop an academic discipline which is at once descriptive and normative, reflective and action-oriented. This discipline should be rooted in selective categories of the black Christian tradition, the Biblical revelation interpreted from a black perspective,

26. *The Structure of Nations and Empires* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), p. 214 (italics added).

27. *Man's Nature and His Communities* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), p. 95.

and the existential conditions of black life in the contemporary social, economic and political arena. It should seek to explicate and make operational in behavioral and public policy terms the practical implications of Black Theology for black liberation from racism and oppression. It should seek to develop norms for the ethical valuation of black reality and strategies for orienting the action of black individuals and communities—particularly the church—toward the eradication of the misery, powerlessness, exploitation and oppression experienced by people of African descent everywhere in the world.

### *BLACK* Christian Social Ethics

There is an historic community of color in all Western societies. The segregation, exploitation and oppression of this community is related to the African slave trade and the colonization of non-white peoples by the Christian nations of Europe and America.

We speak of blackness ontologically and ideologically. To be black, ontologically speaking, is to be a part of this community of color—a community of people who, because of their color, have been despised, humiliated, exploited and rejected by white people who themselves have imputed ultimate meaning to skin color and physiognomy. In Western societies color symbolism is a part of ultimate reality.

To be black, ideologically speaking, is to be engaged in a conscious, deliberate struggle against the suffering, misery and oppression which this community of color has experienced, mainly at the hands of white people.

### Black *CHRISTIAN* Social Ethics

To be Christian in this context means to cling to the faith and hope that the ultimate answer to white racism and black oppression lies in the significance and implications of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Liberator. It is to be dissatisfied with the conditions under which black people are forced to live because we believe that God has affirmed our black humanity in the Person of Jesus Christ, and that in that same Christ he has come to set all oppressed people free. To be Christian is to enter into that struggle for liberation in continuation of the mission of Jesus of Nazareth who said: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me. . . because he has anointed me . . . to set the captives free." We understand the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ as his action

in history for the liberation of the oppressed and the humanization of the existence of every person, of every race and every nation.

### Black Christian *SOCIAL* Ethics

By *social* we imply an orientation of analysis and action. It is to be aware of the interrelated character of human action; to be sensitive to community and to the lack of community; to be cognizant of the barriers which preclude free, truthful and effective communication between persons and between institutions. In ethical reflection it is to recognize the sociological as well as the theological character of the church and to affirm the importance of those communities in which people find themselves and apart from which they cannot be free human beings.

### Black Christian Social *ETHICS*

To do ethics is to come to grips with values and disvalues in human relations in accordance with the need for goodness and righteousness in the life of persons and institutions. It is to analyze and reconstruct the *is* in the light of the *ought*. To do ethics in a black context is to seek to tell the truth about the situation of black people *vis-a-vis* the structures of oppression and exploitation—particularly about institutions in society, religious and non-religious, and their positive or negative relationship to black liberation. Further, to do ethics in this sense is to develop a value system, adequate to the prevailing ethos and styles of black behavior and adequate, at the same time, to the deepest insights of the Christian faith—as a guide to effective social action in the struggle for humanization and liberation. To do *Black Christian Social Ethics* is to analyze and actively respond to the black situation in the light of Biblical, theological and sociological interpretations of the liberating acts of God, taking into account previous assumptions and presuppositions of those who have sat and sit where the oppressors sit, and those who have sat and sit with the oppressed.

The sources and norms of Black Christian Social Ethics are, therefore, Biblical, theological and sociological—broadly understood. By sources we mean the relevant data for the ethical task; by norms we mean how that data is to be used. The norms of Black Christian Social Ethics arise from two aspects of a single reality: the liberation of black people and the revelation of Jesus Christ as the Liberator.



The starting point for Black Christian Social Ethics is the black community in which we find Christ, manifested in the lives of the people of the ghetto, making decisions about white and black existence and white and black liberation. Analysis must not only contain normative statements. It must lead to a rational and systematic explication of the operational significance of those statements. From analysis we seek to move toward an evaluation of the situation inclusive of the resources available for change and the demands of the Gospel for making free persons. Evaluation leads inevitably toward the spreading of the consequentialist net, the assessment of alternative modes of response to the situation in the light of the requirements of justice and freedom. We are then free via the Gospel to relativise our institutional loyalties, particularly the loyalties presumed by a racist church and state, in such a way that we can work for the possible alteration and/or destruction of every institution and pattern of life which is inimical to the freedom of black people and all other oppressed peoples.



# Black Liberation, Christian Education and Black Social Indicators

by GRANT S. SHOCKLEY

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Increasingly, there is agreement among, and often between, black theologians and Christian educators that a basic and fundamental purpose of education in the black church is the liberation of oppressed black people (and any other people) in the black community. William Jones refers to this in theological terms as "committed" or "engaged" theology.<sup>1</sup> In educational terms, Christian educators refer to it as "praxiological" church education, which for Paulo Freire and others is an engagement of the realities of the historical situation in and through the learning process and "teaching" commitment to act in relation to those realities to the end that they become humanized and humanizing.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to re-focus the educational task of the black church. Through the use of "indicators" it will attempt to demonstrate how black churches can narrow the discrepancy between the "soft data" or rhetoric of much of black liberation theology and the "hard data" or performance that is needed in the black community through a black church ministry of advocacy and action.

With this purpose in mind, the objectives of the paper are three: (1) to examine selected statistical data related to the black condition and the need for black liberation; (2) to evaluate this data in relation to what selected black churches affirm to be their mission; (3) to suggest a set of "black church indicators" that may be used to measure, evaluate and guide black churches in understanding, initiating, interpreting and educating for effective, praxis-oriented liberation.

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1. cf. William R. Jones, "Toward an Interim Assessment of Black Theology," *Reflection*, Vol. 69, No. 2, January, 1972, p. 1.

2. cf. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971).

It has been indicated that an "indicator" system approach would be used in developing this paper.<sup>3</sup> Such an approach was selected because it seems to provide a highly expeditious way of assembling, integrating and interpreting data. It also affords a frame of reference for the development of criteria that can articulate the "quality" as well as the "quantity" of information. Following this introduction, the paper will divide into three sections: (1) black liberation indicators; (2) black religious indicators and educational planning in black churches; (3) a concluding and summarizing statement.

### *1. Liberation Indicators*

#### The Black Experience

Many, if not most black churches in black communities lack both the quantity and quality of data that is needed to accomplish meaningful planning, to do productive decision-making or to effect systemic change.

For the black church especially, such planning must begin with a realistic comprehension of the context of black church life in America. That context is the "black experience"—the life and world of any and all "people of color" in America who must (or will) identify themselves as being of African descent. This arbitrarily defined and usually spatially confined "black world," viz., the black "ghetto," is a primal experience for black people. It affects black people in a way that no other racial experience affects any other minority. The "black experience" is the ever present reality of knowing, feeling and living as a non-white in white-oriented society. It is the black group experience, historic and present, of being oppressed, disdained, deprived, excluded, and neglected.

While occasionally circumstances have been such that some few black people have been able to escape some of the worst of the brutalizing experiences that are common to being black in America, essentially, for all black people, the "black experience" is a matter of degree rather than kind in terms of negative attitudes and treatment from white or white-oriented persons and institutions.

These perceptions of black people by whites as being infra-human and inferior have caused our nation from its inception to

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3. cf. Lyle E. Schaller, "Where Are Our Ecclesiastical Indicators" *Religion in Life* (Autumn, 1971).

move “. . . toward two societies, one black and one white, separate and unequal.”

It is actually this *white* separatism, subtle and overt, ubiquitous and endemic, that prescribes “racial” boundaries for living, learning, loving, working and even dying. All of this is the “black experience.”

### The Black Revolution

A recent event in the “black experience” that has effected a fundamental change in the direction of thought and action in the black community is the Black Revolution.

Beginning in 1966 the Civil Rights movement took a new direction. Black people began to define themselves and rejected white (or more precisely non-black) definitions of themselves. The protest approach of the late 1950’s and the early 1960’s had become pressurized. Confrontation replaced conciliation. Black pride, black integrity and black self-determination became “values” in many previously externally white-dominated black communities.

Under the leadership of men such as Joseph R. Washington, James H. Cone, Albert B. Cleage, Vincent Harding, Deotis Roberts, Major J. Jones and others, theology, Christology and ecclesiology were rethought, revalued and restructured. Black theology emerged as a rationale for the liberation of the black oppressed in the black community. In Cone’s words, “it is thus incumbent upon us as black people to become revolutionaries for blackness, rebelling against all who enslave us.”

The Black Revolution was an indication of the indictment of white America by black “denizens” who, in the words of C. Eric Lincoln, had committed themselves to a new and audacious objective; namely, “the substitution of a new system for one adjudged to be corrupt, rather than corrective . . .”

Summarily, there emerged in the late 1960’s in the black community a new leadership segment whose avowed purpose was to achieve for themselves, i.e., black people (and all minority peoples), the rights and options of the society and its economy which are open to white people as a matter of course.

The crucial significance of the Black Revolution was its articulation of the basic problem of black people in this country—powerlessness. As a color minority and a numerical minority we are politically, socially, economically, educationally and legally impotent!

## The Black Ghetto

The locus of major social indicators of change for black church-oriented religion is the black ghetto, involuntarily segregated black urban areas often characterized by poor housing, poverty, sub-standard schools and other signs of acute social disorganization.

These black communities are the settings for the black experience. Generally they are where black people must live and learn, love and play. The black ghetto is plural, not singular, however. It is the foul-smelling slum of the central city, the "nigger" side of town in the rural areas, or the "posh" black ghetto of suburbia. Regardless of its location it is a visible symbol of white negative attitudes toward black people. It is, as Kenneth B. Clark so aptly describes it, like an invisible wall erected ". . . by the white society, by those who have power, both to confine those who have no power and to perpetuate their powerlessness."<sup>4</sup>

Again in the words of C. Eric Lincoln, the worst aspect of the white-fabricated ghetto ". . . is that the same sentiments that cause whites to consider the black ghetto a proper residential reservation for blacks compel whites to conceive and enforce reservations in other fields also—employment, education, religious life and the administration of justice."<sup>5</sup>

In view of the cruciality of understanding in the black ghetto and its challenge to black urban church-oriented religion the remainder of this section of the paper will present data about five measurable trends in the black ghetto: (1) demographic; (2) environmental; (3) economic; (4) civil rights; (5) cultural; these are pertinent for the stated goals of the Black Revolution. The purpose will be to probe the meaning and direction of such trends and, hopefully, to forecast their rate of change and implications for the planning and educational process in black churches.

### 2. Demographic Indicators

#### Population

The 1960 census enumerated 18.8 million black people in America. The 1970 statistic is 22.6 million. This figure (10.8 million males and 11.8 million females) comprises an 11.1 per cent block of the total American population, an estimated 204 plus million. It also represents a 20 percent increase since 1960.

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4. Kenneth B. Clark, *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power*. (New York and Evanston, Ill., 1965, p. 11).

5. C. Eric Lincoln, "The Black Revolution in Cultural Perspective," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* (Vol. XXIII, No. 3, Spring, 1968), p. 22.

While the number of black people who live in the southern states has declined rather steadily since World War II, more than half (52 per cent) still live there; 40 per cent reside in the North and 8 per cent in the West. A significant demographic indicator in the current census pertaining to the black population is the fact that practically all of its increase has been in the central or inner cities of the metropolitan areas. The total increase in these areas by 1970 was 3.8 million, the black increase 3.3 million.

### Income

According to a joint study report by the U. S. Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics (1970), black income levels have continued to lag behind white. The median income for non-white\* families rose 102 per cent in the 1960-1970 decade to \$6,516. The median income for white families during the same period rose 75 per cent to \$10,236. The "indicator" here is the fact that the dollar gap between black and white family incomes actually increased. In 1960 the black median income was \$2,602 less than the white, and even though it rose more percentage wise during the decade it was still \$3,720 less than the white median income in 1970. The black "increase" statistic had been measured against a smaller base figure thus giving a misleading indicator.

Another way of stating this is to say that although blacks were nearly 11 per cent of the population in 1970 they were 30 per cent of those who were below the poverty income level.

### Family

The black family statistic for the decade 1960-1970 is a mixed report. The average black family in America has more education, more earning power, better housing and fewer children than ten to twenty years ago. Also, contrary to much "opinion," 75 per cent of all black families *are* headed by visible males.

The negative side of the situation reveals the facts that: (1) black family incomes are 50 per cent lower than white, and the gap is widening; (2) an increasing number of black (and white) women family heads are separated or divorced; (3) most of the poor black

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\*In this paper, when speaking in statistical terms, "black" or "Negro" will be used interchangeably with non-white. Actually, most non-whites in America are "black" ". . . (the percentage varying from 96% in the 1950 census to 93% in the 1960 census)," cf. "Negro Population Growth and Distribution," *The Negro Almanac*, H. A. Ploski and Roscoe C. Brown, Jr. eds. (New York: Bellwether, 1966), p. 217.



children are in broken homes; (4) the mortality rates for black infants and mothers are much higher than for whites.

The statistical indicator of significance here is the fact that the poor black family living in the ghetto, very often a "broken" family, has made virtually no income gain in the last decade.

### 3. *Environmental Indicators*

#### Poverty

The poverty statistics based on a 1969 non-farm family income of \$3,745 or less found more in this category generally (black and white) than in the 1960's. Out of a total of 25 million poor (more than 5 million families), seven million or approximately one-third were black: specifically, blacks were 29 per cent of the poor in 1960; in 1970 they were 31 per cent.

During 1959-1969 other statistics about blacks and poverty developed. Only a few blacks (or whites) in the poverty class received public assistance. A larger number of poor black families than white have children under 18 years of age. Black poverty is found in concentrated masses in the urban areas *but is more prevalent in the rural sections of the nation.*

A major contributing factor to poverty among blacks, especially in the South, is a low basic education profile. Though only 20 per cent of the region's population, they contribute to more than 50 per cent of its illiteracy.

#### Housing

The housing situation profile for blacks, the key to school, recreation and community facilities, is poor and worsening. Black home ownership increased during 1960-1970 from 38 to 42 per cent but this figure refers to a minority among millions of blacks facing the housing question. Housing for blacks in rural areas is more substandard than it is in the urban slum. Here almost half (41 per cent) of all black dwelling units lacked adequate sanitary plumbing. By 1970 this percentage had decreased to 17 per cent.

Sub-standard housing costs more to blacks in the inner city than to whites. Even though black families may have comparable incomes to whites they are confined in their choice of housing opportunities.

With projection that between 1970 and 1980 blacks will increasingly occupy the central cities of America, plus the fact that pres-



ently two-fifths of the housing is sub-standard and the supply of any kind limited, the outlook is very poor for equality in this area.

### Health

Adequate health care for the poor in black communities is usually costly, unavailable or inaccessible. Among the reasons for this situation still (the 1970's) are discrimination, neglect, inadequate health education and lack of professional personnel. For 1967 the black-white health problem-area ratios per 100,000 of the population were as follows: tuberculosis cases, 65.1—15.3; maternal mortality, 37.5—19.7; infant mortality (first 28 days), 25—15; (first year), 12.5—4.7; life expectancy, 61.6—71.3. Twenty per cent or more of black children fail to get the standard protective shots against diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough, while 91.4 per cent of white children receive them.

The major indicator here seems to be the fact that "industrialized" health care systems are increasingly available only on a purchasing power basis and thus "least available to those who need them most."

### Education

The statistic for education in the black community is at best precarious. While it shows signs of advance, its relative gains are small and its problems increasing.

Only 58 per cent of black grade school children complete the eighth grade versus 73 per cent for whites; approximately 40 per cent of black high school students graduate versus 62 per cent for whites; black college enrollment has practically doubled since 1964, *but* the relative percentage has not changed appreciably, i.e., less than 7 per cent of all college graduates were black in 1970 compared with 5 per cent in 1964; in graduate school approximately 1 per cent are black.

A significant indicator here is the fact that *increased education does not necessarily mean increased earning capacity for blacks as a whole, and at each level, blacks have less income than whites.*

## 4. Economic Indicators

### Consumerism

The buying habits and power of black Americans during 1969 are indicative of several things about the black condition and future than would first seem apparent.

In 1969 black America's 22,727,000 people spent more than 35 billion dollars for goods and services. This sum is a little less than the Gross National Product of Canada.

Generally speaking, urban families (black and white), in the same income bracket have similar spending habits. Black families, however, spend proportionately more on basic items (food, shelter, utilities, clothing). In other areas, e.g., savings, debt, home and automobile ownership, differences appear. Blacks with low income have less debt than whites. Middle income blacks save more than middle income whites. Fewer blacks than whites buy cars or own homes.

The indicator here is precarious consumer credit, its high cost and scarce availability, especially in the area of housing.

### Employment/Unemployment

There seems to have been some movement toward better positions and jobs for blacks in the labor market during the 1960-1970 decade. Professionals (including technicals) increased from 5 to 9 per cent; proprietors and managers from 3 to 4 per cent; clerical workers, 7 to 13 per cent; sales workers, 1 to 2 per cent; craftsmen and foremen, 6 to 8 per cent; semi-skilled workers, 14 to 10 per cent (decrease); household help, 14 to 8 per cent (decrease); and farm workers, 12 to 4 per cent (large decrease); other service workers remained the same, 18 per cent.

The indicators in this situation are not the fairly high increases in upgrading but the still relatively few blacks in these categories and the low base on which the increases had to be computed. Generally the situation is that (1) blacks have the lower paying jobs; (2) blacks receive less pay for the same education; (3) blacks produce too few college graduates; and (4) the black unemployment rate is high.

### Youth

A recent (1969) United States Census Bureau Survey revealed that proportionately more blacks than whites belong in the youth category. The median age for white youth is 29 and for black 21. There are also proportionately more black males than white males between the ages of 5 and 19. Black females form a larger per cent (31) of the total 5-19 age category than do whites (28 per cent).

This demographic situation highlights several problems for the black community: (1) generally youth have the highest unemploy-

ment rate; (2) black youth unemployment rates (16-17 year old) exceed those of whites by 27.8 per cent to 15.7; (3) black youth, experiencing cumulative frustration from past lack of job opportunities, drop out of the labor market sooner than whites, and thus their unemployment rate is even higher but invisible; (4) the unemployment rate for young blacks in the inner cities often exceeds 30 per cent. Figures for black veterans, though not available, have been estimated to be only slightly less than double the general rate for veterans as a whole.

This increasing black population of young men and young women comprise the most angry, militant and frustrated youth generation in history.

### 5. *Civil Rights Indicators*

#### Educational Justice

Various determined definitions of a "desegregated" and/or an "integrated" school and the lack of precise data present a somewhat unclear picture of racial integration in the public schools during 1960-1970. Generally, statistically meaningful integration is yet to be achieved.

A Time magazine report claims that 40 per cent of all black children in the South attended somewhat integrated schools in 1970. In 1964 the percentage was one per cent. Health, Education and Welfare figures show that black pupil attendance in white schools across the South for 1967-1968 was 14 per cent. This rose to 20 per cent in 1968-1969. In terms of states the range was from 38.9 in Texas to 6.1 in Mississippi.

Nationally the integration statistic is low. Seventy-five per cent of all Southern black children attend schools that are predominately (95 per cent) black. Outside of the South (North and West) in 1969, "a survey of 75 cities revealed that three out of four black elementary pupils attend schools that are 90 per cent or more Negro."

National statistics are not available but all indicators are that black principals and teachers face an even worse situation than pupils.

#### Political Rights

Voting rights legislation culminating in the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, gave impetus to black involvement in the political process (registration, voting, party politics and office-

seeking). Statistics compiled by the Voter Education Project (VEP) of the Southern Regional Council report the following changing situation in six Southern states in the 1960's.

Black voter registration in Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, Texas and Virginia more than doubled in every state, and the per cent of black voters in terms of registration age population rose spectacularly. In Mississippi by the fall of 1968 55.1 per cent of the voting population had been registered, while in Texas the percentage had risen to 83.1.

Nationally the registration voting situation among blacks leaves much to be desired. The 1970 census revealed that slightly less than 44 per cent of the eligible black voting population votes regularly. This figure must be compared with the better but none too good white percentage of 56 per cent.

Office seeking and holding has been on the increase, especially in the South, where it rose from a handful in the early 1960's to 385 in 1968. Nationally there are currently about 1,800 black office holders, but this is less than one per cent of the 500,000 such positions available. The New York Times (February 4, 1973) reports for 1972 that blacks made a "significant showing" in elections in eleven Southern states, putting 598 blacks in office.

### Housing Discrimination

Housing segregation has increased in urban areas since 1960. In rural areas black people have found it more than difficult to obtain standard dwellings.

In the black ghetto the housing density which is 3,071 units per square mile is practically double that of (white) middle class urban neighborhoods. It is almost 100 times more than the residential density in (white) suburbia. Yet since World War II a mere 800,600 central city units of housing have been financed by the Government, compared to the financing of 10 million suburban homes. Only recently (1970-1972) has this pattern altered.

An additional fact about housing for the urban poor (chiefly black) is the tragedy of new highway progress, "urban renewals," etc. which literally destroy more housing for the poor than they create!

### Labor Practices

Out of a total of approximately 20 million labor union members in America today (1973) 2 to 3 million are black. This 2 to 3 million represents only one-third of the more than 6.5 million

black workers in the nation. Similarly the 17.5 white union members represent about 25 per cent of the white entire working force.

There are several major problems confronting the black union workers: (1) flagrant discrimination in the building trades and railroad unions; (2) virtual non-presence in Locomotive Firemen or Railway Trainmen's Unions; (3) gross under-representation in the construction unions, e.g., iron workers (1.7 per cent), plumbers (0.2 per cent), elevator constructors (0.4 per cent); (4) relegation to lower paying jobs; (5) relegation to least desirable jobs; (6) lack of opportunity for advancement in the unions.

An indicator of positive change in the labor industry, characterized by many blacks as very racist, is the formation of black unions and black labor caucuses.

## *6. Cultural Indicators*

### **Art**

The professional black artist in America has been largely unrecognized by his white counterpart. As late as 1966 the Museum of Modern Art in New York City did not know of the existence of any "qualifying American Negro Artists." Most blacks were rejected as students at white art schools. Black works held by major white galleries are few: Metropolitan Museum owns 10 out of 1,200; National Collection of Fine Arts, eleven out of 1,599; The Museum of Modern Art, twelve out of 450; the Whitney Museum, 15 out of 1,000. The National Gallery in Washington, D. C., could only recall having three black works and the Art Institute in Chicago, one.

In the world of the black artist today there are several schools of thought expressing different artistic styles as well as degrees of identification with the black experience. These range from those who create art, to which the black community can respond, e.g., Dana Chandler, Jr., to those for whom the issue of blackness is not a matter to be injected into their productions. The fact that most black artists are forming their own galleries does say something, however.

### **Music**

American black people through the "spiritual" gave to the world America's only unique musical form, unless it is jazz and/or the "blues," which are also of black origin. Nevertheless the black-white music statistic is not impressive. In the 1960-1970 decade



only two black records "turned gold," i.e., sold more than a million copies. In the nation's eleven symphony orchestras, there are a total of only six blacks. Further, there are only 150 conservatory-trained black orchestra musicians. In the operatic field it took a Marian Anderson three-fourths of a career to reach the "Met." However, of the eight American-born women in top operatic roles today, four are black women.

Two indicators in the music area stand out in the 1960's: (1) Ornette Coleman's and the late John C. Coltrane's "New Thing" jazz composed "with the pain of being black in America"; (2) the investiture of the Reverend Harold A. Salmon (as the first black priest of a large Roman Catholic parish in Harlem) to the tune of a jazz band and gospel music and a litany for liberation.

### Literature

The cultural statistic that reflects most uniquely the changing mood of the black community is literature. Here the full force of the new movements of "black awareness" come to focus. Some concept of the pace of this movement is gleaned from the fact that it took renowned Richard Wright's *Native Son* twenty years to sell a million copies. It took Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul On Ice* less than two. Such is the force of the objective of the angry, "young black poets" whose efforts are "to reunite" the poet and the common people in a common cause.

The corresponding statistic is not nearly so impressive. Four top-level black editors exhaust the trade publishing field, and thirty probably covers the entire publishing industry. Contrary to much opinion, not a great deal is being written by blacks. Much of the black book market is gutted with reprints going back to David Walker's *Appeal* (1829) and earlier, e.g., only about fifty "new black" titles appeared in 1970. This 0 to 8 per cent black authorship is a critical indicator of something other than discrimination—probably the modest black market?

### The Theatre

Essentially both "progress" and "change" for blacks in the American theatre can best be characterized by the reminder that Broadway is still the "Great White Way," Ruby Dee, Ed Bullins, Diana Sands, Moses Gunn, Roscoe Brown and a few others excepted. In recognition of this "opaque" situation the Negro Ensemble Company (NEG) and the New Lafayette Theatre (NLT)



groups were founded and have become break-through points for "black experience" acting, black actors and budding playwrights. In Gunn's words "blacks achieved 'visibility' in the 60's, and in the 70's they may achieve 'variety' in exposing 'the (whole) scope of black experience and in playing the entire canon of dramatic literature.'"

Meanwhile the statistic is depressing. Most blacks still work in all-black productions. Plays and musicals with metropolitan settings seldom have blacks. Black producers are almost non-existent, as are black directors—except in the black theatre. The actors' union, Equity, has approximately 500 blacks out of a 16,000 (1970) membership. Broadway plays seldom deal seriously with black themes. A significant indicator in the field of theatre as in the other arts has been the rise of black theatre groups, e.g., NEG, NLT. Probably the major problem of the black theatre, in addition to dealing with white racism, is gaining and maintaining an audience. In the last five or six years these have changed from 70 per cent white and 30 per cent black to 30 per cent white and 70 per cent black.

## Films

Black indicators are beginning to appear in the film industry. Catering to a not inconsiderable black movie audience, white and black producers and actors have recently developed a new approach in projecting black people. Gone is the slow-moving obsequious Step-'n'-Fetchit, only to be replaced by the super-black too often identified with crime, narcotics and gross immorality. A significant indicator here is the almost total lack of serious treatments of serious black themes from black history.

### *Religious Indicators and Educational Planning*

Simpson and Yinger in discussing the functions of religion among minorities state: "The religious belief and institutionalized structures of a group not only show intrinsic religious aspects but reflect the secular problems faced by the group."<sup>6</sup> The statement has validity when applied to the black church. In this part of the paper we shall attempt to show how black churches can interrelate, institutionally, through an education and planning process, the demands for liberation and the nature and purpose of the black church in the black community.

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6. G. E. Simpson and J. M. Yinger, *Racial and Cultural Minorities* (New York: Harper, 1953), p. 515.

In the light of the indicators that have been discussed, education in the Black Church must assume the role of change agent and emphasize its function as an educator for change. Black church members, individually and collectively, need to be made aware of and empowered to deal with systemic oppression and subtle racism.

There are several "indicators" of the effectiveness of black churches in black communities dealing with the issues highlighted by the brief indicator study we have discussed. First the black church must recognize its unique function as a liberator in the black community. Such liberation is comprehensive, embracing social, economic, political and cultural aspects of oppression. Second, the black church must recognize and become committed to the engagement of those issues and problems which restrict the fullest possible development of persons as persons and groups as groups. Third, the black church must reconceptualize its program to effect maximal change in the personal and social conditions of all of the people in its communities. Fourth, the black church must devise ways of enabling its leadership to develop more effective planning styles and support systems inside and outside the local congregation. Finally, the black church must derive an evaluative process to check out its performance and chart future directions.

If we think of these competencies in relation to the end-goals of the Gospel and its saving words to persons, the following "indicators" and activities<sup>7</sup> should be evidenced in black churches as they are educating and guiding their members in liberating ministries:

### Dialogue

A logical first indicator of a program of liberation for black people through a black church in a black urban community is a committed congregation. Congregational study in some depth by the laity of the church to determine anew the nature, purpose, mission and ministries of the black church is essential if black church members are to come to grips with the demands of the gospel in the black urban ghetto.

This study program is not to be "study-in-general" but "study-for-planning and decision." It should involve congregational and community persons as well as members who are decision-makers and the action-authorizers.

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7. cf. *Resource System for the Local Church Council on Ministries*, ed. James E. Alexander (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1970), *passim*.

The content of such study should include black studies in biblical, theological, historical, sociological and other disciplines that can identify and illumine the task of the Black Church.

### Diagnosis

Identifying, investigating and analyzing the needs of black people in the parish area of the black church becomes a second major indicator toward developing a viable ministry with black people in urban communities.

"Diagnosis" in this sense of the term is more specific than a "survey." It is radical issue-definition or discovering those problems in the black community that require definition, decision and action by the black church. Specifically this means locating and defining the problems that oppress black people.

The next step in diagnosis is the gathering of information about the issues and interpreting what they mean for our black congregations.

### Goal-Setting

Describing, coordinating and adopting goals to be acted toward is the third step in the indicator model to effect liberation through the black church.

The congregation having understood and committed itself to the mission of the black church, identified and analyzed certain specific issues in the context of an oppressive white society, it is now prepared to develop an action goal(s), i.e., "a statement of intention for one aspect of the congregation mission," e.g., developing a tutoring program by September 1 for elementary grade children, ages 9-11 years old, to enable them to cope more effectively with their ongoing problematic formal education learning tasks.

Two remaining steps in goal-setting are (1) the coordination and prioritizing of the several or many action goals in a unified design and (2) the validation and authorization of the goal(s) by the board of control of the local church.

### Planning

Detailing action-goals follows naturally after these goals have been set. This activity entails inventing, devising, selecting and describing specific activities, experiences, strategies, etc., which the congregation may actually do to achieve their adopted goals.

Generally the following steps in planning should be observed: (1) the development of an action sequence; (2) the delineation of

a program, i.e., what, precisely, needs to be taking place if the goals are to be actualized, what settings are to be constructed such as classes, study groups, service-action groups, retreats, training programs, etc.

A program for black liberation through black urban church-oriented religion must have impact upon its every facet: (1) preaching; (2) worship; (3) church education; (4) church fellowship; (5) church administration; (6) church finance; (7) church budgeting, etc.

### Leadership

Leadership is a crucial indicator of the potential effectiveness of any program of black liberation. C. D. Coleman points to the broader task that this implies for the black church in saying: "The first priority for the black church is to recapture the leadership of the black people. It must reclaim the unqualified trust and commitment traditionally associated with the black church and the black community."<sup>8</sup>

This having been done, black churches that opt for the liberation approach need to consider how to involve those who are to be immediately affected at every stage of planning. Basic questions to be asked are: (1) what leader-competencies are needed? (2) what are the sources of this leadership? (3) how indigenous is the leadership to the community to be served? (4) what are some style-models of black leadership in church-oriented programs of religion? (5) how can expertise in and outside of the black community be utilized?

### Organization and Administration

Church organizational structuring is the process of developing related goals, experiences, and settings into a dynamic, vital, systematic whole. Administration in the church sector is the constant task of clarifying, articulating and supporting the ministry to which the church is committed through the enabling leadership of pastor and laity, both on behalf of the entire congregation.

Relating these concepts to the black church experience that is liberation-oriented has several implications: (1) the function of the church in the black community should determine its institutional form and its administrative style; (2) the unique role of the black

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8. C. D. Coleman, "Agenda for the Black Church" *Religious Education*, Vol. LXIV, No. 6 (November-December, 1969), p. 441.

church in the black community, requiring almost total involvement and instantaneous decision-making calls for an autonomous, flexible, community-based board of control; (3) the need to involve people who will be affected by change in the planning process means significant small group activity in deciding issues of direction, policy and action.

### Evaluation

An evaluation indicator builds accountability into the entire programming process. In terms of measuring the direction and pace of change in effecting liberation in the black community, it serves a unique and irreplaceable function in seeking quality information, checking out performance and charting futures.

The method of evaluation here is the collection, analysis and interpretation of any and all information that may become the basis for determining the degree to which an enterprise, in this case black liberation through the black church in the black community, has achieved its goal. Evaluation is more than assessment. It is actually measuring progress in fairly specific previous identified areas of endeavour.

The following steps are minimal in evaluating achievement in black church ministries: (1) the identification of information needed to evaluate the program; (2) determining the method of gathering information; (3) interpreting the information gathered; (4) decoding the evaluation for future use.

### *Conclusion*

The purpose of this paper has been to define, identify, articulate and relate the use of "social indicators" to the current task of the black church in the black community, where it must function as spiritual resource, change-agent and adult educator. A basic question that it raised was this: Do black churches use meaningful indicators in measuring their condition in the black community in relation to their avowed goal of liberation? A further question was: Does Christian Education serve this function in any significant way?

This has not been a definitive investigation but an exploratory one. Hopefully it will stimulate further study by black and white researchers in the cognate fields it touches.



# Martin Luther King, Jr. : Theology in Context

by LONNIE EDMONSON and ARCHIE LOGAN, both M.Div. '75

The present examination of the ministry of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., will focus on the relationship between theology and the endorsement of nonviolent direct action as a Christian method to achieve social change.

Certain special features of Dr. King's situation stand out as significant for the scope and orientation of this study. First, there is the fact that Dr. King was self-consciously neither an ethicist nor a theologian. He wrote no systematic exposition of the principles of the Christian faith, nor did he systematically treat the data of Christian decision-making. Thus a particular understanding of the nature of the theological task is necessary before we can proceed to call Dr. King a theologian. If theology is an essentially intellectual, critical and analytical discipline, then it becomes difficult to consider Dr. King as a theologian in the traditional sense. According to the traditional understanding of theology the discipline is only indirectly and abstractly related to particular human contexts. However Dr. King's charismatic role in the struggle for black liberation is a manifestation of direct and pragmatic participation in the social and political arena.

How can we reconcile the apparent contradiction between the reflective, academic theologian and the activist crusader? As suggested, a new understanding of theology is required. Instead of starting with the data of the Christian faith and systematically expounding its relevance to contemporary concerns, the kind of theology in which King was involved *begins* with the concrete human context—in this case, the dehumanization and oppression of the poor and the black—and maintains the concern for developing humanity as its central emphasis. In short, there is a specialized anthropological focus at the core of King's theological pronouncements.

It is not the intention of this study to debate the validity of such an approach. We are aware of critical perspectives which suggest that such an approach represents, at best, the confusion of



theology and ethics, religion and social reform. Such is the critique offered by Joseph Washington, who suggests that in King's use of Jesus as a norm for Christian behavior "the absence of any real theological understanding is blatant,"<sup>1</sup> and that King was unable to transcend his roots in a black folk religion. Such a criticism is rooted both in an identification with traditional theological norms and in an understanding of theology as primarily discursive. It is our thesis that King's theology represents a move away from abstract speculation toward contextual application. What King was concerned with was not the articulation of the "truth" of Christian humanity in general terms, but the bringing into reality of that humanizing possibility. His concern tended to move him away from in-depth analysis to application of what he felt were the self-evident principles of the faith. We must also note from the outset that it is not our intention to deal exhaustively with King's theology. We must face the tragic fact of Dr. King's assassination at a time when his tactics and principles were being called into question by more militant, aggressive segments of the black community. How Dr. King might have modified his stance in light of mature conceptions of Black Power and cultural nationalism cannot be stated with certainty. We are forced to follow an inferential path and to avoid general criticisms based on hindsight.

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As a black American, Dr. King had seen and known first hand the dynamics of a racially exclusive society. In *Stride Toward Freedom*, he writes of childhood memories of Southern racism:

I remembered a trip to a downtown shoestore with Father when I was still small. We had sat down in the first empty seats at the front of the store. A young white clerk came up and murmured politely:

'I'll be happy to wait on you if you'll just move to those seats in the rear.'

My father answered, 'There's nothing wrong with these seats. We're quite comfortable here.'

'Sorry,' said the clerk, 'But you'll have to move.'

'We'll either buy shoes sitting here,' my father retorted, 'or we won't buy shoes at all.' Whereupon he took me by the hand and walked out of the store. This was the first time I had ever seen my father so angry. I still remember walking down the street beside him as he muttered, 'I don't care how long I have to live with this system, I will never accept it.'<sup>2</sup>

1. Joseph Washington, Jr., *Black Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 5.

2. Martin Luther King, Jr. *Stride Toward Freedom* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), p. 5.

It is obvious that, in part, Dr. King's commitment to human liberation stemmed from his membership in the community of the oppressed. It is crucial to realize, however, that in the Christian faith he found the primary motivation—a motivation so intense, compelling and demanding that his zeal for human dignity would have been of prophetic stature regardless of his station and situation in life.

In King's thinking nothing was possible apart from God; with Him were all things possible. Therefore religious questions were answered by neither pietistic withdrawal nor scientific materialism, but in terms of action linked to God:

Neither God nor man will individually bring the world's salvation. Rather, both man and God, made one in a marvelous unity of purpose through an overflowing love as the free gift of himself on the part of God and by perfect obedience and receptivity on the part of man, can transform the old into the new . . .<sup>3</sup>

This also suggests the primacy of religious categories in King's thinking. Christian understandings were not merely dragged in through the back door; it is obedience to God that provides the rationale for social action: "Your highest loyalty is to God, and not to the state or the nation, or any man-made institution. If any earthly institution or custom conflicts with God's will, it is your Christian duty to oppose it."<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, the critique of segregation is not merely based on political or economic considerations. King saw racist structures as antithetical to Christian human relations:

Racial segregation is a blatant denial of the unity we have in Christ. . . . Segregation scars the souls of both the segregator and the segregated. The segregator looks upon the segregated as a thing to be used, not a person to be respected. Segregation substitutes an 'I-it' relationship for the 'I-thou' relationship. Thus it is utterly opposed to the noble teachings of our Judeo-Christian tradition.<sup>5</sup>

Here, in the recognition of the dehumanizing effects on both oppressor and oppressed, is one seed for a doctrine of reconciliation; another source was King's understanding of the nature of man in Christ or man conformed to God in obedience. King saw this perfect state as "a creative synthesis of opposites in fruitful harmony."<sup>6</sup>

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3. Martin Luther King, Jr. *Strength to Love* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 124.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

5. King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, p. 182.

6. King, *Strength to Love*, p. 1.

This was profoundly influential in his choice of tactics, for the future reconciliation had always to be considered. Only if black people could bring together "toughmindedness and tenderheartedness"<sup>7</sup> could they "move creatively toward the goal of freedom and justice."<sup>8</sup> In King's opinion nonviolent direct action avoided soft-minded complacency and hardhearted violence and was thus the ideal vehicle to bring about reconciliation. (Segregation was to be criticized from this same vantage point. By attempting to substitute a man-centered universe for a God-centered universe, segregation contradicts the quest for balance and results in "practical atheism.")<sup>9</sup>

The quest for harmony and balance is evident throughout King's published works. It is derivative ultimately from his conception of God. King writes, "God combines in his nature a creative synthesis of love and justice which will lead us through life's dark valleys and into sunlit pathways of hope and fulfillment."<sup>10</sup> Agapé love is the highest expression of God's reconciliatory nature. Translated into human interaction this means that "we love men not because we like them, nor because their ways appeal to us, nor even because they possess some type of divine spark; we love every man because God loves him. At this level, we love the person who does an evil deed, although we hate the deed that he does."<sup>11</sup>

This brings us to an important aspect of King's philosophical theology, that is, his willingness and desire to separate an evil deed from the human agent who commits the deed: ". . . The evil deed of the enemy-neighbor, the thing that hurts, never quite expresses all that he is. An element of goodness may be found in our worst enemy."<sup>12</sup> By this logic, racism, slavery and injustice are all attributable to human weakness, ambivalence or unenlightenment. However a specific moral demand emerges at this point for the Christian church: "As the chief moral guardian of the community, the church must implore men to be good and well-intentioned . . . Never must the church tire of reminding men that they have a moral responsibility to be intelligent."<sup>13</sup> The influence of the "social gospel" as promulgated by Walter Rauschenbusch is evident here. In King's opinion, Rauschenbusch had done a great

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7. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

13. *Ibid.*

service for the Christian Church by insisting that the gospel deals with the whole man, not only his soul but his body, not only his spiritual well-being but his material well-being."<sup>14</sup> Thus King's activism was buttressed by the belief that:

. . . any religion which professes to be concerned about the souls of men and is not concerned about the social and economic conditions that scar the soul is a spiritually moribund religion only waiting for the day to be buried.<sup>15</sup>

The most familiar building block in King's pilgrimage to non-violence is the so-called "love ethic" of Jesus, which he eloquently describes as "a radiant light revealing the ugliness of our stale conformity."<sup>16</sup> The significance of this principle for King cannot be overstated. "Love for enemies," declares King, "is the key to the solution of the problems of our world."<sup>17</sup> Without love the struggle for justice is futile. "There will be no permanent solution to the race problem until oppressed men develop the capacity to love their enemies."<sup>18</sup>

Closely related to the love ethic is the role of suffering; blacks are among the "creatively maladjusted" who are to bring about the redemption of the human race:

Human salvation is in the hands of the creatively maladjusted . . . Christianity has always insisted that the cross we bear precedes the crown we wear. To be a Christian, one must take up his cross, with all of its difficulties and agonizing and tragedy-packed content, and carry it until that very cross leaves its mark upon us and redeems us to that more excellent way which comes only through suffering.<sup>19</sup>

The philosophy of nonviolent direct action, as King understood it, was the only logical option for his intensely moral program of protest. King saw in nonviolence the appropriate tactic for his philosophical orientation once he realized its social applicability:

Prior to reading Gandhi, I had about concluded that the ethics of Jesus were effective only in individual relationship. The 'Turn the other cheek' philosophy and the 'love your enemies' philosophy were only valid I felt when individuals were in conflict with other individuals; when racial groups and nations were in conflict a more realistic approach seemed necessary. But after reading Gandhi, I saw how utterly mistaken I was.<sup>20</sup>

14. King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, p. 73.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

Nonviolence nearly emerges as the exclusive tactic, but it is not the only option discussed by Dr. King, nor is it the only one which receives his support. But nonviolence is clearly foremost in King's thinking. In addition to its logical consistency with what has gone before, other positive aspects are appealed to by Dr. King:

1. Nonviolence maintains the dignity of the oppressed and avoids the malice and hate of the oppressor.
2. Nonviolence exposes injustice to public scrutiny and thus neutralizes brutality and terror tactics.
3. Nonviolence is the balanced combination of the toughmind and tenderheart.
4. Nonviolence as a means is consistent with the ends sought.
5. Nonviolence is the only logical option in the face of white political and military power.
6. Nonviolence keeps the issues clear and avoids confusion.

King abhorred violence in any manifestation. His critique of the use of force was informed both by political pragmatism and by moral demand. Thus King was at philosophical and theological odds with the supporters of Black Power. Fundamentally King saw Black Power as negativistic. He argued that "Beneath all the satisfaction of a gratifying slogan, Black Power is a nihilistic philosophy born out of the conviction that the Negro can't win."<sup>21</sup> (Elsewhere King makes a more positive assessment of Black Power, but even then his emphasis is on political and economic self-development, not on the use of force.)

Dr. King's attitude toward other tactics is much more moderate than his anti-violence stance. He felt, in fact, that ethical appeals and persuasion had to be "undergirded by some form of constructive coercive power."<sup>22</sup> Included in the category "constructive" are economic boycotts, judicial litigation, alliances with labor and other mutual-interest groups. However King believed that non-violent direct action would "continue to be one of the most effective tactics in the freedom movement."<sup>23</sup>

The ministry of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was the embodiment of theological contemplation and nonviolent direct action as a Christian method to achieve social change. Dr. King, in order to be understood or classified as a theologian, must first be seen as a

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21. Martin Luther King, Jr. *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 51.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

minister of the Gospel. He established a new starting point for theology. Unlike traditional theologians who used the God/Man question as a starting point, King began with the human plight of the oppressed, the poor. He did more than philosophize theology. He transformed the "question" and the philosophizing of theology into positive concrete action and accomplishments.

King used the religious tradition to inspire oppressed individuals of America and the world to overcome, to become triumphant. A theology grounded in nonviolent direct action becomes a theology that does more than systematize, it becomes a theology that actualizes. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., more than any other Christian theologian, has realized that religious tradition has direct parallels to human plight:

We are all one in Christ Jesus. And when we truly believe in the sacredness of human personality, we won't exploit people, we won't trample over people with the iron feet of oppression, we won't kill anybody . . . Man is a child of God, made in His image, and therefore must be respected as such.<sup>24</sup>

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24. Martin Luther King, Jr. *The Trumpet of Conscience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 72.



# The Kenneth Willis Clark Collection of Greek Manuscripts

On the afternoon of May 15, 1975, the Friends of Duke University Library and the Faculty of the Divinity School honored Kenneth Willis Clark with a reception in the Rare Book Room of Perkins Library. The occasion was celebrated by naming the collection of Greek manuscripts for Dr. Clark, Professor Emeritus of New Testament, who served in the Divinity School from 1931 to 1967.

Greek manuscripts, particularly those of the New Testament, have been the substance of Kenneth Clark's study ever since his mentor, the late Professor Edgar J. Goodspeed, introduced him to the lore of these ancient books in the graduate school at the University of Chicago. From those days in the late 1920's, Professor Clark has concentrated his teaching, research, and publication on the textual history and criticism of the Greek New Testament.

The pursuit and study of Greek manuscripts have taken him and his wife, Adelaide, throughout America, Europe, and into Asia. From this country his *Descriptive Catalogue of Greek New Testament Manuscripts in America* (Chicago, 1937) is still the only reference work devoted entirely to New Testament Greek manuscripts in the U.S.A. Both he and Adelaide spent 1949-50 photographing manuscripts in the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai and at the Greek Patriarchate in Jerusalem. On the occasion of Dr. Clark's receiving a D.D. from the University of Glasgow, Professor William Barclay observed in his lauration that Kenneth Clark had probably perused more manuscripts of the New Testament than any of his contemporaries.

Through his dauntless enthusiasm for the study of these ancient books and his zeal to build a research collection of Greek manuscripts, the Duke collection now numbers 64, of which 20 are of the New Testament. Not only has he searched for these books, but he has also assisted with the purchase of many of them. From the day when he and Adelaide arrived at Duke in 1931—it was in the spring of that year that the Library bought its first Greek New Testament manuscript—he has devoted his energies to building an outstanding collection. It is singularly appropriate that the collection be called *The Kenneth Willis Clark Collection of Greek Manuscripts*.

John L. Sharpe, III  
Curator of Rare Books  
B.D. 1965, Ph.D 1969

## Focus On Faculty

JOSEPH B. BETHEA: *Director of Black Church Studies*

One day in May, 1972, I was conducting some visitors on a brief tour of St. Matthews United Methodist Church in Greensboro. We had recently returned from General Conference in Atlanta, and were preparing for Annual Conference at Lake Junaluska. The St. Matthews Church building was little more than a year old, and I was showing it off with pride and satisfaction (and some concern for the semi-annual note payment due soon). The secretary interrupted the tour to say that Dean Langford of Duke Divinity School was on the phone and wished to speak with me. "Now what could he want?" I said. "Some student probably needs a recommendation."

The Dean wanted to talk with me about some plans the Divinity School had for a program in Black Church Studies. Subsequent talks with the Dean, members of the faculty, the Black Seminarians Union, and others in the Divinity School community, took place immediately; and after a few days I was invited to join the staff as Director of Black Church Studies.

"Who? Me?" It must be a dream! During the years of my study at Gammon Theological Seminary in Atlanta, which were also the years of my pastorates in South Carolina, I fancied some involvement in the training of ministers and prospective ministers. The dream did not die during the years of my ministry as pastor in North Carolina and District Superintendent in Virginia. I suppose it was the dream that led me to pursue a graduate degree at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond. I did not complete that degree, but I think the experience helped me put some things in proper perspective.

"Who? Me?" The son of a successful pastor and District Superintendent in South Carolina might be expected to make some contribution to the life of the church. I still want to learn how to preach (if that can be learned). But to live in the reality of a dream, at least partially, to have some small part in the development of God's preachers and ministers, is joy unspeakable.

"Who? Me?" Since I had married Shirley Cundiff in 1958 and Josefa Elizabeth was born in 1964, I consulted with them. I also sought the advice of Bishop Earl G. Hunt, Jr. and some other

friends. As I reflect upon those consultations, I'm not sure that their reactions were not influenced by my own enthusiasm.

And so I'm here at Duke—recruiting black students, advising them in planning their courses of study, assisting them in their field education placement and supervision, and helping them meet their financial and adjustmental needs here at Duke. In addition to my work directly with black students, I share in the development of courses related to the black religious experience, in the development of continuing education experiences for black church leaders, and I make some effort to bring to Duke an awareness of the role of the black church and of the black minister.

If my presence and work contribute to the wholeness of theological education at Duke, that result will justify the time and effort.

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HERBERT O. EDWARDS: *Associate Professor of Black Church Studies*

It is never easy to find a way into another person's thoughts; it is not always easy for them to share enough of themselves with us to permit more than a passing and inadequate glance at the basic reality that is the other person.

It is no less difficult to lift out of the foggy bottoms of memory those events and circumstances, which, when honestly shared with others, will help them to better understand why I am me and no one else. Why I think as I think, feel as I feel, loathe what I loathe, dream what I dream. In spite of the difficulty involved, I find it necessary to try to take a brief intellectual, spiritual, and experiential stroll down memory lane, stopping here and there to allow permissible glimpses at those factors which I consider possessed of significant yesterdays for me.

Life began in a small coal mining town in West Virginia. Black men and white men earned their living by working underground in the coal mines where the coal dust colored everyone black. The cave-ins and explosions were as democratic as the black dust, making no distinctions of color, snuffing out life without regard for the values of racism.

However, the two major institutions in the town, the church and school were white and black. There was no high school in the county for black children; there was one for white children less than two miles away. So we all rode buses to high school. And whenever the white children received a new bus, we would get their old bus. They rode four miles a day; we rode forty-four miles each way to and from school, eighty-eight miles per day.

During World War II, the county authorities decided that they had to save gas, so black students were required to walk two miles each morning, almost to the white high school where their bus would pick them up; no change was made in the bus schedule for white students. Black parents protested until the policy was changed.

I worked in the coal mines for almost two years after finishing high school. Events and circumstances led me to Cleveland, Ohio. I had been called to preach and, for reasons unknown to me, had dreamed of doing so in Cleveland, Ohio, a place to which I had never been, not even for a visit.

After working in a foundry and steel mill for two years, I was drafted into the Armed Forces, spending 19 months in Europe. I felt the need to complete college in three years in order to save a year of G.I. eligibility to assist me in Seminary.

While at Harvard Divinity School, I began serving the Union Baptist Church in Cambridge as minister. In 1961 I went to Baltimore as minister of the Trinity Baptist Church. I taught philosophy and history at Morgan State College also.

My involvement in the Civil Rights struggle, both in Cambridge and in Baltimore, seemed to me a natural response to the demands of the Gospel. So, in the winter of 1964-65, I took a leave of absence from my church and worked with the National Council of Churches in the Delta Ministry in Mississippi.

In working with black churches in Mississippi, and in the Poverty Program in Baltimore upon my return, I found myself struggling with the problem of the relationship of the church to other institutions and institutionalized patterns of behavior in the social order. This concern was eventually to send me back to school for more study.

My appointment by Governor Tawes of Maryland as the Executive Secretary of the Maryland Commission on Interracial Problems and Relations, charged with the responsibility of enforcing the 1964 Civil Rights law in the state, also gave me opportunity to work with churches across the state in seeking their help to gain compliance with the new law.

As in my youth in West Virginia, I learned again the strength, power, and commitment to racial injustice, of those twin guardians of racism, the church and the school. How they complemented each other! The former supporting and contributing to an ethos of anti-blackness in the name of God, and the latter transmitting a fund of culture that denied the black presence any significant role in

the history of the country, in the name of white patriotism. Black religious expression had no validity in the former; black history and culture no place in the latter.

I left Maryland to accept the position of Executive Director of the Providence Human Relations Committee in Providence, Rhode Island. After a year in that position, I entered Brown University.

In the last few years, prior to coming to Duke, I have taught at Trinity College and the University of Hartford (College of Education), in Hartford, Connecticut, at the University of Rhode Island, and at Harvard Divinity School.

Many things are not yet clear to me as I reflect on the long and circuitous route that I have traveled to this place. One thing, however, is clear. My life is still intimately bound up with those two institutions—school and church—which first introduced me to the fate of blackness in a world of whiteness which is yet determined to deny any significant status and meaning to the created beings of God clothed in ebony. Nonetheless, for me the struggle continues, the struggle not to be disobedient to the heavenly vision!

All of my yesterdays drive me on; all of God's tomorrows draw me on. So be it!



## Book Reviews

*Christian Ethics for Black Theology.*  
Major J. Jones. Abingdon. 1974. 205  
pp. \$4.50.

In an effort to bring Christian ethics into the black struggle for liberation and into the black theologizing process, Major Jones pinpoints and discusses many of the problems faced by black Christians in a pro-white society. The issues dealt with are relevant, and must claim our attention in the continuing effort to create a new church and a new society.

Amid all the rhetoric about liberation and reconciliation, Jones is bold to assert that the idea of reconciliation is not relevant for current American race relations. Since the concept of reconciliation implies a prior ideal relationship, and since there has been no such relationship between blacks and whites in America, what is there to reconcile? Rather an altogether new relationship, creative and loving, and that never existed before, is proposed.

Agapé for the white, ex-master oppressor, and agapé for the black, ex-slave oppressed, may issue in differing mandates. Thus the ethical question must be divided. Jones proceeds then to develop an ethical mandate for black Christians.

Christian love, non-violence, and an assumed posture of freedom and hope are important assets in the liberation struggle. These formulations, for Jones, meet the demands of the Christian ethic, and, since their potential has never been exhausted in the struggle, they are viable principles by which the black Christian may act today.

Hate is futile. Agapé love, "affirmation of the other, with a complete disregard for self . . . mutual concern for the other. . . the empowering disposition to serve another without thought of any good that may accrue

. . . [is necessary] to heal . . . the brokenness that now exists between America's ex-slave and America's ex-master."

Critics of Dr. Martin Luther King's nonviolent stance have failed to understand that it is a way of life, as well as a strategy for social change. "Neo-non-violence," or an "assumed posture of freedom" is not only a further elaboration of King's views; it is still viable, because it is redemptive for the oppressed and, when fully implemented, will prove effective to change the oppressor.

For Jones, "no violence can be justified." Violence on the part of the slave toward the master denies the "assumed posture of freedom." It is ethically wrong. It may well lead to a reversal of the slave-master role, and we cannot risk this danger. What we seek is a new and creative relationship where there is neither master nor slave. If one must resort to violence or any un-Christian act, one must recognize that action for what it is. One must at that point adopt what Paul Ricoeur calls the "ethics of distress" and admit that such action is not Christian. We simply cannot claim that "by any means necessary" is ethical in the Christian frame of reference.

Hope is the ultimate option of the black Christian. Liberation is both now and not yet. If it is neither or only one or the other, it is not hope. Jones decries the freedoms that are yet unclaimed by black Americans. To assume the posture of freedom is to claim the unclaimed and be liberated in the midst of oppression. It is both now and not yet.

Dr. Jones would want to be first in asserting that this book is not the last word in "Christian Ethics for Black Theology." He is adamant in his position that his formulations,



possibly not realistic now, are distinctly Christian and ethical. And he dedicates the book to the memory of his parents, who gave him "a deep sense of black religion and of the ethical," and to his daughter and her friend, "who will in the future live a fully recognized hope—a liberation and freedom for which black people of my generation can only hope and yearn."

—Joseph B. Bethea

*Contemporary Reflections on the Medieval Christian Tradition. Essays in honor of Ray C. Petry.* George H. Shriver, ed. Duke, 1974. 279 pp. \$9.75.

Historians are, as a general rule, reluctant to review a *Festschrift*, especially when it is a volume of essays produced by students as a tribute to their teacher. Anthologies of essays are notoriously difficult to review because of their miscellaneous character. The essays in this volume are devoted to five general subject areas, reflective of Professor Ray C. Petry's own teaching and research: (1) preaching in the great tradition; (2) Christianity and the arts; (3) reform, dissent, heresy; (4) history, eschatology and the contemplative life, and, finally, (5) teaching in the great tradition. Aside from an appendix, which includes a bibliography of Professor Petry's published works (compiled by Joyce L. and Donn Michael Farris) and three addresses composed by Professor Petry himself, brief editorial comments by George H. Shriver, and an appreciation of Ray C. Petry by a former colleague, Stuart C. Henry, the majority of essays are written by Professor Petry's former students. One essay—very unusual in any *Festschrift*—is written by Professor Petry's own teacher, John T. McNeill, and one by his former bishop and fellow medievalist, William R. Cannon, now of the Atlanta Area of the United Methodist Church. One can reasonably expect that a collec-

tion of this kind will be somewhat uneven, since no teacher's students (even the students of a well-known and respected teacher) are all equally gifted.

Such hesitations, though understandable, are not well-founded in the case of this *Festschrift*. While not all contributions are equally valuable, none of the essays in this volume is unsatisfactory, most are quite good, some are even excellent. J. T. McNeill's essay, "Perspectives on Celtic Church History," is immensely instructive and well worth the price of the book. W. R. Cannon's brief survey of the rise of the university as a medieval institution, while presenting nothing very new to the specialist, is still a useful synthesis which can profitably be assigned to students. David Burr's attempt to define the limits of intellectual freedom in the later Middle Ages by reference to the case of Peter Olivi is an original and stimulating piece, as is Larry Bond's argument for the centrality of Christology in the coincidence of opposites in the teaching of Nicholas of Cusa.

Maurice Ritchie's emphasis on the pastoral concern of John Tauler is a welcome reminder of an important perspective on medieval mysticism and an invitation to further research. William Mallard examines the *Sitz-im-Leben* of forty sermons of John Wyclif in order to sketch the character of Wyclif outside the lecture halls of Oxford. The sermons show him as "a primarily moralistic preacher" with an "inflexible outlook on faith and morals." I was sorry that James Jordan did not pursue more explicitly his debate with James S. Preus, since Jordan argues that Faber Stapulensis places a higher value on the literal sense than either Preus or I believe he does. I am not yet persuaded that Jordan is right (though I am not unpersuadable) and would like to see the passage cited in footnote 44, page 105, reproduced in the footnotes and more extensively interpreted.

George Shriver offers a useful bibliographic essay on Catharism, which

appeared in an earlier form in the periodical, *Church History*. James White has, as always, written intelligently on Christian worship, this time on the influential and much used *Rationale divinorum officiorum* of William Durandus (c. 1286). Gerald Shinn has summarized the results of his extensive research on the eschatological function of the iconography of the Dresden Manuscript of the *Sachsenspiegel*. Roger Ray and Grover Zinn have written careful and interesting essays on the nature and role of history in Oderic Vitalis and Hugh of St. Victor.

In short, Professor Petry's students have honored their teacher with a collection of essays of which he can justly be proud. Alumni of the Divinity School who are not medievalists will be glad to have available in a convenient form the reflections of Professor Petry on the nature of Church history and the role of the historian in the Church, his chapel talks on the relation of Christianity and the arts, and his address at South-eastern Seminary on the place of the Divinity School in the University.

—David C. Steinmetz

*God Incognito*. S. Paul Schilling. Abingdon. 1974. 207 pp. \$5.95.

In the past decade we have seen the publication of a number of books dealing in one way or another with the problem of religious experience—or absence of it—in a secular age. S. Paul Schilling has added another to that list with the publication of *God Incognito*, a sequel to his earlier book, *God in an Age of Atheism*, also published by Abingdon in 1969. The latter was a study of the significant alternatives and challenges to theism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—from Feuerbach to Altizer. In it Schilling attempted an analysis of the bases of the atheists' varied objections and "a fresh exploration of the meaning of God, with particular reference to the atheistic criticisms." (*God*

*in an Age of Atheism*, p. 137) The new book is an effort to correlate (a methodologically important word) the meaning of God proposed there with actual experience, thereby building a case for the reality of the experience of God and of the God experienced. (It should be noted that, according to critics influenced by "the linguistic turn," the question of meaning is prior to the question of validity. This means that the attempt at communication with these critics on their terms must involve the establishment of the meaning of the word "God" prior to any consideration of the validity or reality of some experience associated with that word. See Langdon Gilkey, *Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God-Language*, Chapter 1.)

After a rather general characterization of the context for this work, Schilling turns to a consideration of the meaning of experience and religious experience. Here he is laying the groundwork for a broad concept of religious experience which can incorporate the "intimations of transcendence" on which he relies. For that reason it is disappointing that the ground is not more carefully and extensively laid. Schilling wants to insist on the reality of the referent of religious experience (thereby avoiding a subjective idealism) while at the same time assuming that "the presence or absence of a religious dimension in experience depends on how it is taken. . . ." (p. 32) Granted that these two assertions are not necessarily contradictory, I still wonder why Schilling did not see fit to give a fuller account of his epistemology so that we could see how they are related. The question is touched in chapters 2 and 10, but never with the care and probity we would expect from a theologian of Schilling's standing. (It is interesting that Schilling implies a rejection of epistemological monism on p. 139, even though certain aspects of his argument seem to rest, at least implicitly, on some sort of monism. We must then ask if Schilling himself was willing to admit the ontological

and epistemological basis of his theological method.)

Part I closes with the recounting of a number of experiences of transcendence. The accounts in chapter 3 are told from the perspective of a conscious awareness of the presence and activity of God. Chapter 4 is comprised of selections from authors who do not necessarily make reference to God, some of whom would explicitly deny belief in God. All this prepares the reader for Part II: "Incognitos of God—Forms of His Unrecognized Presence." Here we see the description of the types of experience in which God is co-implicated, though His presence is unacknowledged or even denied. There are no surprises here: depth in existence, human dependence, the search for meaning and wholeness, the call to responsibility, and the pull of the not-yet.

It appears that Schilling is trying to rebuild a liberal apologetic encompassing the Schleiermacherian and neo-Kantian traditions and the contributions of modern Marxist philosophers—especially Ernst Bloch. The neo-orthodox revolt of the first half of this century should have made us all aware of the problems this raises. Schilling's program, however, is too strongly influenced by Tillich and, perhaps, Boston personalism to heed Barth's warnings against grounding our faith and our theology in some universal religious experience. Schilling is still starting his theology with cultural questions and attempting to discover theological answers in light of them. (p. 5. See Tillich's *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, Introduction.) The *Thou* addressed by the Psalmist in Ps. 36:9: "In thy light do we see light," is no longer God but the atheist critics. For that reason the final argument for the reality and cognitive value of the experiences as *experiences of God* amounts to little more than the assertion that a theistic answer is, on the whole, more adequate to describe these experiences than a non-theistic one. The next move, to a description of the co-

implicate of experience as "the dynamic, personal love that sustains and permeates the whole of our existence," (p. 202) seems to me to be a tenuous one.

I believe Schilling could have used his material to better advantage. I do not object to an attempt to broaden our understanding of religious experience, to deepen our awareness of the unlimited ways we are encountered by God. But why not do that by beginning with the confession that all of creation is subject to the sovereignty and sovereign grace of God rather than by attempting to find closet Christians under every rock? If theology is to be taken seriously as a function of the Church, responsible to the Church and its context, then I believe our energies could be better directed. If we are to speak to the secular culture of this country in this decade, then our theology might more appropriately take the form of prophetic polemic, not soft apologetic.

—Robert E. McKeown  
M. Div., 1972

*Proclaiming the Promise.* Foster R. McCurley, Jr. Fortress. 1974. 160 pp. \$4.95.

The author, associate professor of Old Testament at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, begins by calling attention to the neglect of the OT by the clergy and, indeed, by whole denominations. After briefly listing some of the reasons for neglect (e.g., linguistic, literary, and psychological problems; the OT's equating of nation and people of God, a non-eschatological expectation of salvation, sometimes an unattractive view of deity; etc.), the author states that his hope is to show that "the results of critical exegesis . . . open up for the preacher a wide and varied range of possibilities for proclamation . . ." (p. 5).

After citing the discontinuities between the Testaments articulated by Marcion, Schleiermacher, von Harn-

ack, and Delitzsch, all of whom rejected the theological value of the OT for the Church (pp. 7-11), the author does not accept their conclusion but nonetheless acknowledges major discontinuities (pp. 12-17). On the other hand, there is a basic continuity: What God promises in the OT he fulfills in the New (pp. 18ff.).

McCurley realizes that many of the promises to Israel *were* regarded as fulfilled within the pages of the OT (e.g., that Abraham would have a son and become a great nation), but points out that others were not so regarded (e.g., the expectation of a universal peace, in Isaiah 9 and 11) (p. 35). Indeed, in view of the variety of promises, can one speak meaningfully of "promise and fulfillment"? Perhaps it would be helpful to speak of *the* promise, i.e., not of things, but of God's coming to be with his people. This central expectation is heightened with the passing of time, each experience of the divine presence renewing the expectation of an ultimate fulfillment, which was realized only through "God's deed in Christ" (p. 37). However each expression of the promise (of God's faithful activity in behalf of his people) is a valid text for proclamation; it does not necessarily point beyond itself to Christ, nor does it need be set beside a NT text in order to be preachable (pp. 38ff.). In this fashion McCurley seeks to distinguish himself from the promise-fulfillment relationship which recent seminarians will know best from the works of Gerhard von Rad (e.g., *OT Theology*, II, part 3).

McCurley now turns to the crucial problem: If the new age is already upon us, if the decisive manifestation of the promise is behind us, why does the world remain pretty much as it was previously? In traditional fashion he speaks of the past decisive moment "which still looks forward to a final consummation." Thus the Church still lives under the promise (p. 41). But, if the Church, like ancient Israel, looks both forward and backward, if "Christians are in some sense Old Testament

men . . . wherein is the difference or the uniqueness of the New Testament?" The uniqueness, he says, is in what the NT claims: a once-for-all act of reconciliation, an act for which there is no comparable claim in the OT. Thus while the Christian will be able to proclaim the Word solely on the basis of an OT text, he/she will more deeply perceive the need for reconciliation and more decisively declare the ultimate victory (p. 43).

More than one half of the book is given to treatment of specific OT texts (9 of them), plus two sermons. Each text is treated under the following headings: establishing a working text, setting in life, literary matters, the criticisms, the context, interpretive renderings, and theologies of the passage.

Those who desire to study the question of the proper use of the OT in preaching will profit from McCurley's inexpensive and clearly written volume. However, as they read it, they might keep the following questions or observations in mind.

1. Can discontinuities between the Testaments be drawn as strongly or around the particular issues which McCurley raises? I limit myself to two examples, although none which he offers is immune to serious question.

(a) "In the Old Testament the people of God is the empirical nation Israel—in the New Testament the people is a community of the last days" (p. 16). In actual fact, there is more than one view in the OT of what the community is or ought to be, just as there is in the NT. In one view, while the people of God may be concentrated in the nation Israel, it is not limited to it nor does it essentially depend upon it. If McCurley is right, how did the community manage to survive in Babylonia for the last 500 years of the OT period and beyond? Repeatedly Israel was warned by the prophets that the people of God cannot be identified with any given political or geographical entity. A major point of the priestly severance of the Pentateuch



from the longer sacral tradition (the Octateuch) was that Israel was meant to be a worshipping community, not a political power among others (see James Sanders, *Torah and Canon*, ch. 1). In reality, McCurley characterizes Israel from a perspective more akin to the so-called "false prophets" than the canonical writers. The latter never refer to Israel as the "nation of Yahweh" (goy-Adonai), but only as "the people of Yahweh" ('am-Adonai).

(b) "The revelation of God in Christ renders unacceptable the view of the witness to a God who slaughters the first born of Egypt, who commands the Israelites to kill off all Canaanites, who opens up the earth to swallow sinners, or who sends serpents to bite them for their murmuring" (p. 15). Thus, he says, the NT often serves to correct the OT (see also pp. 38, 44, 63). Presumably his subjectivity would not allow him to assert the reverse, which could be stated in the following way: The revelation of God, through Israel's spokesmen, that his mysterious graciousness is at work even in judgment, renders unacceptable the view of the witness to a God who opens an eternal hell to swallow sinners, including those who will not acknowledge that Jesus is the Messiah!

2. Is it accurate to characterize the OT as "promise" and the NT as "fulfillment"? Are these obvious descriptions, or do they flow from preconceived attitudes? The OT looks backward as much as forward; it proclaims fulfillment as much as promise. It is characterized by recital of the past as the key to identity in the present. A major point of the Yahwist may be that the kingdom of David and Solomon is the fulfillment of the promise to the patriarchs. When the basic assertion 'immanu'el ("God with us") is used, it has a pan-temporal meaning (and not merely future). It is even doubtful that the OT, as a whole, expects a "decisive" fulfillment: certainly not the Pentateuch; not the early prophets, who hope for

renewal within history; certainly not the wisdom literature; and that only leaves the relatively late proto-apocalyptic and apocalyptic materials. And even McCurley seems uneasy with the description of the NT as "fulfillment" when he is forced to speak of Christ's unfulfilled promises and of the final consummation *yet to occur* (p. 42). His attempt to draw a distinction is quite feeble: "What is unique about the Christian under the promise is precisely the fact that the Christian is simultaneously under the fulfillment of God in the person and work of Christ" (p. 43). But was such simultaneity not the case at *every* moment of Israel's history . . . minus the subjective assertion that any event is decisive? One could say that *every* redemptive act of God is decisive: creation, Abraham's call, the Exodus, Sinai, return from Exile, Bethlehem, etc. For that matter, does he ever act *indecisively*?

3. Are there not dangers in asserting that there is a "canon within the canon" (pp. 44, 38), such that the pastor must pass judgment upon whether a given passage is "appropriate" (pp. 44, 63)? What is to prevent "appropriate" from becoming precisely what I like, or what I think the congregation will tolerate? If the NT becomes the standard for appropriateness, then the NT as interpreted by whom? What parts of it, since it also manifests tensions? Is it not the task of the interpreter to listen to *all* the voices from the Tradition, to bring them into dialogue with each other, to be open to judgment by each of them . . . rather than to assume that one's subjective value judgments are some sort of profound virtue? Is it not conceivable that those passages which we reject are precisely those which we most need to hear? (For those who desire to pursue this topic, I recommend: James Sanders' review of G. E. Wright's *The OT and Theology*, in *Interpretation*, XXIV [1970], 359-368 and in *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, XXV [1970], 392ff.;

and his review of B. Childs' *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, in USQR, XXVI [1971], 299-304.)

4. Can one be serious in saying that the function of Israel's law is "to reveal to man the hopelessness of trying to reach God by human means" (p. 22)? The Hebrew word *torah* does not basically mean "law," nor does its usual Greek equivalent, *nomos*. The OT text and the rabbinic literature make it quite clear that Torah (Scripture) has two inseparable aspects: (a) the story (*haggadah*) of what God has done for his people, and (b) stipulations (*halachah*) whereby they may express their gratitude for what God has already done (cf. I John 4:19). (Anyone who needs information in these matters might consult James Sanders, *Torah and Canon*, ch. 1, and his article "Torah" to appear in the Supplement to *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 1976.)

The perplexing move from text to sermon (from what the text *meant* to what it may *mean*) is not well covered by McCurley's book. Many of the assumptions which he makes are not articulated and some which are can be fruitfully questioned. Consider the following instance from pp. 64-65. He sums up the central thrust of Exod. 14:10-31 (Israel caught between the Egyptians and the Red Sea) as follows: "God redeems his people

from a bondage from which they are unable and even unwilling to save themselves." How might this be addressed to Christians in the present? Perhaps we could begin by asking: From what bondage does God deliver his unwilling people now? This produces an outline thus:

- I. Problem: An Overwhelming Force Entices Us to Wallow in Pessimism
  - A. Today's pessimism
  - B. Israel's pessimism
- II. Response: God Sets Us Free
  - A. Israel's God conquered the enemy
  - B. In his Son's death . . . God . . . sets us free

About this sermon one might ask at least the following questions. (a) The text does *not* say that God *redeems* his people. It says that, in a specific circumstance, he *redeemed* his people. How can one change the tense, the circumstance, the group? (b) The text does *not* mention the word "sin" nor is there anything in it about an "overwhelming force." Has McCurley let the devil found in NT theology slip into his OT text? (c) How can one move from the group-focus, with physical deliverance, to individual deliverance from sin?

—Lloyd Bailey



