

Investigation of South African Black Theology and Its Lessons to Other African Christian Liberation Theologians

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Abstract

The Paper discusses South African kind of liberation theology called South African Black Theology showing that it is a unique liberation approach which has crucial lessons to other African Christian liberation theologians just as it too learns from them in mutual enrichment. It will explicate that liberation theology in this region of Africa concerns itself with the struggle and reaction against apartheid and the after effects of it together with other oppressive factors with the finality of emancipation towards freedom and re-establishment of life in Christ as the Liberator par excellence. This will mainly be done using secondary sources in libraries to get insights from renowned South African Black theology scholars like Boesak, Moore, Buthelezi, Tutu, Sebidi, Motlhabi, Mosala, Tlhagale, Goba and Mofokeng and a few others from North America like Conn and Wilmore. The term "black consciousness" will be accentuated as the key concept in their theologizing illumined by North American related slogans like "Black is Black," "Black is Beautiful" and "Black Power." It will be pointed out that the concept is further triggered by blacks' "ontological" music with exponents like the legendary James Brown's soul music of "I am Black and I am Proud", Martin Luther King Jr of "I have a dream" and Marcom X- among others. It will further be elaborated as founded on socio-religio-cultural belief that Jesus is the "Black Messiah," a title they attribute to Him functionally not ideologically hence its specificity. In this regard, a brief exposition of Mofokeng's Black Christology will come in handy. The Paper will then end by drawing out SABT lessons to other African Christian liberation theologians. The Paper has two fundamental objectives. The first one is to explore and verify that South Africa has a unique mode of liberation theology which when properly perused has significant teaching to other African Christian liberation theologians. The second objective is to discuss South African Black Christology, with Mofokeng's Black Christology as a model, to find out whether there are useful lessons to other African scholars. The main hypothesis is that South Africa has a unique mode of liberation theology which when properly perused has significant teaching to other African Christian liberation theologians. The second assumption is that South African Black

Christology whereby Jesus is viewed as the “Black Messiah,” as exemplified by proponent Mofokeng, provides both positive aspects and shortcomings to learn from. The procedure the paper will follow to realize the above is: introductory remarks; distinctiveness of SABT; operationalizing key concepts in SABT; brief historical setting of SABT; black consciousness as the key concept and its meaning; six main sources of SABT; Jesus the “Black Messiah”; Mofokeng’s liberation black Christology within the context of SABT; SABT lessons to other African Christian liberation theologians; concluding remarks followed by references. Among the findings is that of intrinsic employment of an African title “Black Messiah” analogically attributed to Jesus in specifically liberational orientation since the other African titles analogically attributed to Jesus are fundamentally in Inculturation approach.

Keywords: Black Theology, Black Consciousness, Black Power, Black Messiah, Conscientization, Liberation Theology, Feminism/Women Liberation Theology.

Introduction

Liberation Theology in Africa is such a broad subject. The complexity involved becomes clearer when one takes to account socio- cultural linguistic categorization of the continent into, for instance, Anglophone Africa, Arabic Africa and francophone Africa. For pragmatic purpose then, the Paper opts to focus on a specific Anglophone African country namely, South Africa. Reality has it also that liberation theology in the region is the most explicit compared to other African countries. In the Paper then, you will be introduced to South African distinct liberation theology called **South African Black Theology** (henceforth SABT). The Paper will discuss its nature and assess the peculiarity of this mode of theologizing as compared to other liberation approaches. You will also be made to understand how SABT is closely related to North American Black Power Theology. The Paper will then give and explain the historical setting as it qualifies the concept “**Black Consciousness**” as the core of the aforementioned liberation theology. It will, moreover, indicate and explain the six-fold main sources of SABT. This will be followed by a Christocentric discourse whereby the title “**Black Messiah**” is analogically attributed to Jesus and the rationale behind it. A further concretization of the attribute will be discussed by focusing on Mofokeng’s monograph namely – *The Crucified Among the Cross Bearers* (Mofokeng, 1983) within the context Liberation Theology in South Africa. After that, I will draw out striking lessons other African Christian theologians can learn from the above.

Distinctiveness of Sabt

South Africa is famous for a brand of liberation theology called **South African Black Theology (SABT)** which became more explicit in early 1970s thanks to a vivid influence by North American Black Power theology with which they enriched their mode of theology but critically (Motlhabi, 1986:41-44). Its key concept is **Black consciousness** (Goba, 1986: 59-63). This peculiar theological approach concerns itself with the struggle and reaction against **apartheid** and structures of racism cum economic exploitation together with the after effects of it with the goal of emancipation towards freedom and re-establishment of life in Christ as the Liberator *par excellence*. That is why it is famous for its assertion of blackness and struggle for justice, equality, self-assertion, alleviation of oppression based on race, emancipation from color-bar and freedom from exploitation emanating from apartheid structures of racial segregation, economic exploitation and socio-political bias cum prejudices (Sebidi, 1986:20-22). It further has to its credit the intrinsic employment of an African title “**Black Messiah**” analogically attributed to Jesus functionally and not merely ideologically. There is no doubt that we do have several African theologians who have done that. Among them are: Nyamiti,

Jesus our Ancestor; Bujo, Jesus our proto-Ancestor; Wachege, Jesus our *Mũthamaki* Christology; Mbiti, *Christus Victor* Christology and Pobee, *Nana* Christology. To the best of my knowledge, however, these are mainly in the realm of Inculturation approach while the South African one is specifically liberational in orientation where the concept, as will be elaborated, is employed functionally and not merely ideologically. It will, moreover, be verified that the exponents of the approach to theology readily acknowledge borrowing from North American Black Power theologians like Conn and Wilmore.

Operationalizing Key Concepts in Sabt

To have clarity of SABT, an understanding of the main terms, namely, Black Theology, black consciousness, black power, Black Messiah and Feminism/Women liberation theology from the point of view of liberation theology in South Africa is indispensable.

Black Theology

According to Allan Abbrey Boesak

“Black Theology is the theological reflection of Black Christians on the situation in which they live and on their struggle for liberation. Blacks ask: What does it mean to believe in Jesus Christ when one is black and living in a world controlled by white racists? And what if these racists call themselves Christians also?” (Boesak, 1977: 1-2). In this connection, he adds:

“The search for true and authentic human identity and liberation is also to acknowledge that one’s Africanness is a God-given blessing to delight in rather than a fate to be lamented. Moreover, African theology wishes to be no more than the reflection of African Christians in the light of the Word of God, on the African situation, on African culture and traditions, on the African past and the African present” (Ibid., 40).

National Committee of Black Churchmen in June 1969 explains it in this manner:

“Black Theology is a theology of black liberation. It seeks to plumb the black condition in the light of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the Black community can see that the Gospel is commensurate with the achievement of black humanity. Black Theology is a theology of ‘blackness’. It is the affirmation of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both white and black people” (Goba, 1986:60). For Bonganjalo Goba: “Black Theological Reflection is a critical reflection on the praxis of Christian Faith, one which participates in the ongoing process of liberation with the black Christian community” (Ibid., 60).

Black Consciousness and Black Power

Boesak indicates that: Black Consciousness and Black Power are not to be dichotomized.

They are inter-related concepts- each shedding light to the other. With this in mind, he gives the following explanation:

“Black Consciousness may be described as the awareness of black people that their humanity is constituted by their blackness. It means that black people are no longer ashamed that they are black, that they have a black history and a black culture distinct from the history and culture of white people. It means that blacks are determined to be judged no longer by, and to adhere no longer to white values. It is an attitude, a way of life...Viewed thus, Black Consciousness is an **integral part of Black Power**. But Power is also a clear critique of and a force for fundamental change in systems and patterns in

society which oppress or which give rise to the oppression of black people” (Boesak, 1990:1).

As such, **Black Consciousness** strives to eliminate the mental slavery implanted in the minds of the blacks. The destruction of such shackles provides **Black Power** i.e. power to assert oneself and affirm one’s personality as a black human being- and being proud of it.

Black Messiah

The title is analogically attributed to Jesus in a functional rather than ideological manner for having so much in common with South Africans, being a role model in their SABT and affirming them in their mode of liberation as a Godly ministry.

Feminism/Women liberation theology

According to Anne M. Clifford: “Feminism is a social vision, rooted in women’s experience of sexually based discrimination and oppression, a movement seeking the liberation of women from all forms of sexism” (Clifford, 2001:16). Joan W. Conn complements the notion as follows; “Feminism is both a coordinated set of ideas and a practical plan of action, rooted in women’s critical awareness of how a culture controlled in meaning and action by men, for their advantage, oppress women and dehumanizes men” (Ibid., 17).

Brief Historical Setting of Sabt

Without going into details, let us provide a brief historical setting of the above.

SABT of Liberation Emerged more explicitly and in a more startling manner in the late 1960s. This was mainly through the efforts of South African Black scholars like A.A. Boesak, B. Moore, M. Buthelezi, D. Tutu, L. Sebidi, M. Motlhabi, I. J. Mosala, B. Tlhagale... and B. Goba. It sprung up in reaction to the **apartheid** situation in life and other oppressive factors with the finality of emancipation towards freedom and re-establishment of life in Christ as the Liberator *par excellence*. On this account, James H. Conn says: “In South Africa, to be black is to lose one’s land, suffer economic exploitation and racism, and be denied one’s culture and humanity.” It is from such un-freedom factors that SABT endeavors to liberate the South Africans towards authentic living and freedom. That is why it is a type of liberation theology imbued with fundamental themes accentuated by Simon Maimela (Maimela, 1986: 101-112) namely:

- 1) Racism and black solidarity;
- 2) Biblical insights into the struggle against Apartheid i.e. the use of the Bible passages or pericopes for liberation purposes;
- 3) Black feminist responses;
- 4) Employment of African Traditional Religions, cultures, philosophy, **black consciousness** and “Marxism”;
- 5) Christocentricity whereby Jesus Christ is seen as the “**Black Messiah**.”

At the beginning, in its Infancy, SABT had Militant and Aggressive Elements. This was basically because of its affinity with the radical NABPT as propagated by scholars like James H. Conn especially in his three books titled, **A Black Theology of Liberation; For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church** (Conn, 1969); **Black Theology** (Conn, 1990) and **Black Power** (Conn, 1990) and Wilmore works (Wilmore, 1998). Under the above influence, exponents of SABT took “**blackness**” as symbolizing the oppressed and “**whiteness**” as signifying the oppressors. This, of course, was both a dangerous caricature and unrealistic

categorization. Eventually, however, the above exaggerated approach was transformed. It became more objective, more moderate, more accommodating and, above all, more Christian whereby even radical social revolution had to be guided and inspired by Jesus the liberator *par excellence* (Boff, 1980; Sobrino, 1999). This shift happened under the influence of drawing insights from African Traditional Religions and philosophy of life which is saturated with Godly elements and humanitarian characteristics.

Theirs is a Theological Approach which Emerges from the Awareness of the Suffering, exploited, oppressed, segregated people owing to their race and color. It is a liberation theology of black people as they struggle to regain their human dignity, personal worth, cultural respect, own history and identity and, above all, **freedom/liberty**. In this regard, as **Mosala and Tlhagale** put it: “Black theology is the product of concrete struggles that were being waged by black people in the late 1960s and early 1970s” (Mosala and Tlhagale, 1986:v). It is also of great interest to note the following remarks by **Sebidi**: “As long as the black people in this country suffer a double bondage-racial oppression and economic exploitation- the task of Black Theology will always be double-pronged. Racial capitalism is the name of the game” (Sebidi, 1986:35). He goes on to affirm that: “The term ‘black’ must perforce remain prefixed to ‘theology’ because for the past 117 years ‘blackness’ in this country has been the symbol of economic, class exploitation” (Ibid., 35). In this regard, it is of immense importance to note how he accentuates the twofold areas of oppression in the above namely: **race/color (bar)** and **class/economic** which points to the mission of a liberator as that of merging the two for an authentic liberation. That is why one would do well to reflect deeply in this regard to appreciate better the weight and uniqueness of SABT.

South African Liberation Theological approach was, Furthermore, Provoked by the Negative Manipulations of the Employed Workers. This was done through: the unjust capitalist structures especially on issues of poor wages for the blacks compared to that of the whites; corresponding outrageous racism; and sexism. It is valid then to assert that SABT operates within the life situation of economic/class exploitation and racism- in the context of Apartheid imposed by Dutch reformists. This is an oppressive system making Africans fugitives, aliens and miserable wanderers in their own motherland. Consequently, the concept **blackness** is seen as concrete term of race hate, economic exploitation and un-freedom. Owing to this, as A.A. Boesak puts it: “Blackness is a reality that embraces the totality of black existence.”

Black Consciousness as the Key Concept and its Meaning

What we have seen above makes **black consciousness** become the key concept in SABT. That is why it is critical to understand this core concept. It is actually indispensable to know the term and its implications so as to comprehend the kernel of SABT.

Bonganjalo Goba defines the term “Black Consciousness” as follows: “Black Consciousness is a kind of political philosophy whose goal is to forge and promote the struggle for black liberation in a world of white domination.

“It is a program of black political self-awareness, a quest for black pride- hence the slogan ‘black is beautiful’.

“It is an attitude of mind or a way of life...an ontological concept, one which pertains to the meaning of being black in the world” (Goba, 1986: 59).

Boesak is more candid here. Not only does he indicate the indispensable intrinsic inter-relationship between black consciousness and black power as we saw earlier. He also spells out that **Black Consciousness is, above all, the acceptance of blacks' blackness**. It is a determined appreciation of one's black beingness. The underlying principle here is that of accepting and being proud of one's OWN African identity, OWN blackness, OWN black history and culture and world-view...and philosophy of life as distinct from that of the whites. **Blackness**, therefore, becomes the sign of blacks' humanity which is the reverse side of white supremacy. It is thus used not as an ideology. It is **used functionally/symbolically**. As such, it is limited to South African context because of this South African peculiarity. It is, moreover, against structures or evil forces of SIN. Consequently, it is no longer an embarrassment or a shame to be black.

Steve Biko: Although **Biko** was more of a political activist than a theologian, nevertheless, he is honored as the **"father of Black Consciousness."** The rationale behind this is that it is him, more than anybody else, who propagated, explicated, **concretized and accentuated the belief that all races are equal** and, therefore, there should be **freedom for all**. This was a cause for which he gave up his vibrant youthful life through the internationally renowned brutal murder which shook South Africa (Woods, 1978; Stubbs, 1979).

Six Main Sources of Sabt

SABT did not just emerge spontaneously. It was triggered by some crucial factors. The Paper identifies and explains at least six of its main sources as follows:

Black People in the USA

SABT has its roots in the black people in the USA. In other words, the South Africans borrowed and adopted their theological perspective from the North American Black scholars. The North Americans also influenced even the emergence of South African Black Consciousness- their very core or key concept in their theologizing. This is a concept triggered by Negro spirituals, blacks' identity in their defiant assertion of **"Black is Black"**, **"Black is Beautiful"** and **"Black Power"**. It is a concept also provoked by blacks' "ontological" music cum soul music with exponents like the legendary **James Brown** of **"I am Black and I am Proud"**, **Martin Luther King Jr** of **"I have a dream"** and **Marcom X**- among others. **Mokgethi Motlhabi** acknowledges and appreciates the affinity and borrowing in these words: "There is general agreement that Black Theology originated in the USA when, in 1969, James Cone produced his pioneering work on the topic, titled **Black Theology and Black Power**" (Motlhabi, 1986:38). It should, however, be noted that the South Africans did not copy that of North America blindly. They borrowed critically and utilized it creatively hence the following contrast that distinguishes the two:

- a) Whereas North American Black Power Theology (henceforth NABPT) is based on **Black Power Movement**, SABT starts from **Black Consciousness**.
- b) NABPT is, as a result of the above, fundamentally **secular** while SABT is basically **religious**. It should be remembered that SABT is essentially religious since it is rooted in the African culture which is imbued with traditional religiosity.
- c) While NABPT is one of **revolution** hence its militancy cum aggressiveness, that of South Africa is not. It is, indeed, generally **opposed to the use of violent means-unless as a last resort**.

- d) NABPT **hardly integrates African traditional elements** whereas the South African one tends more and more to **integrate African traditional characteristics in its very core**.
- e) Unlike the North American Black Power theologians like **James H. Cone** and **Gayraud S. Wilmore** with who the South Africans have an explicit affinity, the South Africans are not reluctant to borrow **Marxist social analyses** in their theologizing. They critically employ Marxist tools thereby enriching their methodology. They freely, but critically, utilize Marxist social analysis as means/tools for deeper theologizing. One should, however, not be quick to call them Marxists.

The aforementioned comparison creates awareness that although SABT has many similarities with that of North America, nevertheless, despite the profound affinity, there are apparent differences that confirm the distinctiveness between the two.

South African Theologians Themselves

The other main source of SABT is South African theologians themselves in their exegetical homilies/sermons and preaching, symposia, academic endeavor, monographs, periodical and pastoral implications and applications thereby.

- a) Scholars like **Dr. Basil Moore**- a white Methodist theologian much respected by South Africans for being genuinely supportive and sympathetic with Africans. A reputable scholar who played a major role in organizing and engaging black theologians with regard to the focus on this new way of theological reflection.
- b) Scholars like **Dr. Manas Buthelezi**-an exemplary thinker.
- c) Scholars like **Allan Abbrey Boesak** who is of international repute in this regard and thus meriting more exposure namely:
 - i) Being the very first person to publish a major scholarly book on SABT, he is sometimes referred to as the **"father of SABT."** The monumental monograph is titled- *A.A. Boesak, Farewell to Innocence: A Social-Ethical Study on Black Theology and Black Power, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1977)*. The monograph provides a wealth of liberation theology in general and SABT in particular.
 - ii) He is of the strong opinion that a strict categorizing and dichotomizing of Liberation theology as- Black theology in South Africa, Black theology in the USA, Latin American theology of liberation, and African theology is rather artificial. He endeavors to treat them as Liberation Theologies. This is how he puts it:

"While we acknowledge that all expressions of liberation theology are not identical, we must protest very strongly against the total division (and contrast) some make between Black Theology in South Africa and Black Theology in the United States; between Black Theology and African Theology; between Black Theology and the Latin American theology of liberation. As a matter of principle, we have therefore treated these different expressions within the framework where they belong: the framework of theology of liberation" (Boesak, 1977: 7).
 - iii) For Boesak, SABT, indeed like any other liberation theology, aims at **restoring human authenticity**. It does this by contextualizing the Gospel. It gives hope to the oppressed as it reminds them of the **Father Principle** (that we are all brothers and sisters since we have one Father) (Eph. 4:5-6). It puts squarely on the Church to concern herself with the realities of the tension between the whites and the blacks; the oppressors and the oppressed; the haves (the rich) and the have-nots (the poor).
 - iv) The author goes on to explain that Black Theology awakens the Church to the awareness that remaining **"innocent"** and un-involved is un-Christian. He accentuates that the

Church has no option but to side with the oppressed/poor as exemplified by Jesus Christ and Yahweh God. Failure to take this challenge of making a fundamental option for the oppressed cum poor will render the Church irrelevant, out-dated, un-orthodox and redundant.

- v) So, for **Boesak**, it is **farewell to** that kind of **innocence**- i.e. the self-induced harmlessness in embracing history as it comes i.e. the pseudo-innocence (naivety with a bad connotation).
- vi) Boesak sees his book as a genuine attempt at interpreting authentically the Black people's experience within South African situation in life in the light of the Gospel with the finality of restoring African identity, dignity and authenticity as his contribution to the Christian ministry of liberation.
- vii) Inserting himself in his South African rooting, Boesak is a bitter man. In this milieu context, he manifests his bitterness as follows: "This book was born of the black experience in South Africa- out of anguish and deep concern; out of the inevitability of commitment; out of anger and a fragile but living hope; out of an explicable joy through faith in Jesus the Messiah, whose refusal to let go of me has been my liberation" (Boesak, 1977: xi).
- viii) He sees this as an attempt to take black situation seriously- an element ignored by Christian theology (Ibid., 10).

African Independent Churches

The third fundamental source of SABB is that of African Independent Churches. These Churches have a tremendous impact on and attraction of the Africans. This is mainly due to their real effort in inserting themselves in their people's situation in life making the Gospel more significant- notwithstanding their fanatical fundamentalist inclinations and spontaneity in approach.

They revolted from the mainstream Churches because of Inculturation deprivation (by then), spiritual hunger, poor liturgy that hardly touched the kernel of their being and beingness, and suppression of healing and prophecy and vision(ary) gifts and Gospel of prosperity.

African Traditional Religions and Culture

The fourth crucial source of SABB is African religions and culture. This is basically important for black consciousness- the key concept for their kind of liberation as explained earlier. **Desmond Tutu**, one of the champions in dismantling apartheid (Webster, 1984; Du Boulay, 1989) discloses that far from being antagonistic, African Traditional Religions and Black Theology are inter-related, intertwined and inter-dependent. He convincingly asserts that African theology has done a wonderful service in rehabilitating the African religious consciousness. It is his conviction that African religious heritage and culture was and still is a basic source of Black Theology. **Itumeleng J. Mosala** makes the following observations in view of the above source:

"The point must be made unequivocally, therefore, without creating the impression that all elements of African traditional culture are progressive and relevant for contemporary society that without a creative reappropriation of traditional African religions and societies both African and Black Theologians will build their houses in the sand. A Black Theology of Liberation must draw its cultural hermeneutics of struggle from a critical reappropriation of black culture just as an African Theology must arm itself with the political hermeneutics that

arise from the contemporary social struggle of black people under apartheid capitalism" (Mosala, 1986:99).

The Holy Scriptures

The Bible is another invaluable source of SABT. **Itumeleng J. Mosala observes:** "There can be no Black Theology of Liberation and no corresponding Biblical hermeneutics of liberation outside of the black struggle for both survival and liberation. Such a struggle, however, requires being as clear about issues in the black community as possible" (Mosala, 1986:197). Still on the indispensability of the Bible, Mosala emphasizes that: "Black Theology's exegetical starting point expresses itself in the notion that the Bible is the revealed 'Word of God'. The task of a black theologian is to recognize 'God's Word' and help illuminate it to those who are oppressed and humiliated in this world" (Ibid., 177). He further points out that among the limitations of SABT is that its exponents rely heavily on Western exegetes. It is a fact that any exegesis is imbued with the exegete's situation in life, cultural background, and personal bias as well as own people's world-view. That is why Africans are challenged to do their own genuine exegesis to come up with a serious relevant authentic theology or theologies.

Christological Source

The sixth extremely important source of SABT is Christological source. Among the Christological ideas South Africans borrowed from James H. Cone reads:

"The Bible is the witness to God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ. Thus the black experience requires that Scripture be a source of Black Theology for it was Scripture that enabled slaves to affirm a view of God that differed radically from that of the slave masters. The slave master's intention was to present a 'Jesus' who would make the slave obedient and docile. Jesus was supposed to make black people better slaves, that is, faithful servants of white masters. But many blacks rejected that view of Jesus, not because it contradicted their African heritage, but because it contradicted the witness of Scripture" (Conn, 1975:8).

In their kind of liberation theology, the South Africans enrich themselves with insights, guidance and support of Jesus Christ. Mind you it is mainly Jesus Christ seen not only as Liberator *par excellence* but also as "the Black Messiah." As Ronald Nicolson puts it, "In Jesus, marginalized because of his race, also poor, also depersonalized, also pushed around, and eventually killed, black people can see a reflection of themselves" (Nicolson, 1990:208). With the foregoing in mind, SABT opts for its unique Christology i.e., that of the "**Black_Messiah.**"

Jesus the "BLACK MESSIAH"

The specificity of SABT's Christology in which Jesus is understood as the "**Black Messiah**" is quite interesting. It has the following main characteristics:

It is basically Ascending Christology: The approach is also called functional Christology or Christology from below. This does not mean that the South Africans ignore Christology from above also called ontological Christology or Christology from above. It is a question of accentuation! As such, their starting point is Jesus of Nazareth who entered into our concrete historical existence to free, save and redeem all.

Stress is Made on the Historical Background of the Texts on Jesus of Nazareth

- a) Jesus lived in a society which was oppressed and exploited by the Romans. This reminds them of the oppression and exploitation by the Dutch colonizers.

- b) Jesus was poor mainly owing to the Roman exploitation and oppression just as they are poor not because South Africa –with gold and other precious minerals and resources- is poor but thanks to oppression and exploitation by the colonizers. With these parallels and interesting similarities they find a common denominator that makes them own Him. Hence He was “Black” (a Black Liberator).
- c) It was His mission to fight against this poverty, oppression, exploitation and lack of freedom. Hence Biblical texts like Lk 4:16-30 -a central pericope of Black Christology and others- are interpreted in this sense.
- d) Jesus died in this liberation fight against oppression, exploitation and un-freedom. But by raising Him God has shown God was for Him and with Him in His struggle against the above un-freedom factors.

Consequently, the Christians -as followers and disciples of Jesus Christ the Liberator-who fight their own oppression, exploitation and other factors effecting un-freedom participate in Jesus’ liberational/salvific/redemptive fight: they **carry on His work of liberation**. **Thanks to this engagement**, they *ipso facto* identify themselves with the “Black Jesus.” They also identify themselves with God’s will for whose cause Jesus the “Black Messiah” died.

So, just as God was with Jesus, God is also on the side of the oppressed and exploited agents fighting for their liberation. Furthermore, just as Jesus was raised to fullness of blissful life after He was eliminated accomplishing the will of God which is freedom for all and authentic solidarity as brothers and sisters of the same loving Father, so also will those who die for this Godly cause be eternally rewarded.

Mofokeng’s Liberation Black Christology Wthin the Context of Sabt

For practical purposes, the paper presents Mofokeng’s black Christology as a model of the above:

A Brief Biography of Takatso A. Mofokeng

- a) Mofokeng is one of the exponents of South African Black Theology (SABT). He was born in Johannesburg, South Africa in 1942. This means that he grew squarely in the notorious era of apartheid. He witnessed the structures of injustice, race hate and color-bar propagated by the Dutch colonizers. He felt that the best way to help liberate his people was to become a preacher and a moderate activist at that. He thus became a preacher in Mamelody 17km. to the East of Pretoria.
- b) As a Pastor, he was confronted with miserable dehumanized and depersonalized blacks and this triggered his interest in South African kind of liberation theology. By divine providence, Mofokeng got a chance to go for further studies. Unbelievably, this was in Kampen, Holland.
- c) The deep question that bogged his inquisitive mind was: “How can faith in Jesus Christ empower black people who are involved in the struggle for their liberation?” (p.x). With the scholarship he got, he was able to research and reflect on this path of African theologizing in John Calvin theological Academy where he defended his PhD thesis on 14th October 1983.. The outcome is his renowned Doctoral theses which we are now focusing on. It is titled: ***The Crucified among the Crossbearers: Towards a Black Christology*** (Mofokeng, 1983).

- d) Apart from his oppressive cum exploitative experiential knowledge, Mofokeng was also influenced by Latin American liberation theologians like **Jon Sobrino**- especially his monograph titled -*Christology at the Crossroads: Latin American Approach* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1978); and **Gustavo Gutierrez** especially his book titled- *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York, 1973). He was furthermore influenced by proponents of North American Black Power Theology like **James H. Cone** especially his book titled- *Black Theology and Black Power* (Minneapolis: The Seabury Press, 1969). He also enriched his reflections by borrowing useful ideas from **Karl Barth's** Christological works like those found in his *Church Dogmatics, Vol.1V*.
- e) Moreover, the fascinating philosophy and theology of Black theology and Black consciousness as propagated by fellow South African scholars excited him too. Among the most outstanding was **Allan Abbrey Boesak** especially his book titled- *Farewell to innocence: A Social Ethical Study on Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis books, 1990) and **Manas Buthelezi**.

The Path His Kind of Liberation Christology Follows

- a) Benefiting from the already existing South African **Black Consciousness** perception as the key concept in SABT as well as his experiential knowledge, Mofokeng reflects on his people's un-authentic situation in life in the light of relevant Biblical passages. He wonders how to come up with a Christology that will liberate and empower his people to live as they ought to in the spirit of Jesus Christ the Liberator *par excellence*. He realizes and explains that Jesus had so much in common with South Africans such that they can usefully own Him as their **Black Messiah**.
- b) No wonder he accentuates **functional Christology** (Christology from below/ ascending Christology) without ignoring ontological Christology (Christology from above/ descending Christology).
- c) Through dialogue with Latin American liberation theologians like J. Sobrino, he gets some response to his concerns which he, nevertheless, finds inadequate to South African situation in life.
- d) He then borrows ideas from European Scholars like Karl Barth and others of political theology who had reflected from the point of view of the World War with devastating genocide, injustice, stumbling block to human autonomy and un-freedom.
- e) Mofokeng furthermore sharpens his mind and solidifies his liberation stance by opting for more insights from North American Black Power scholars more specifically James H. Cone. On the bases of these factors, he now creates his kind of Christology.

His Methodological Approach

- a) As earlier indicated, and like many other SABT scholars, Mofokeng focuses more on Christology from below. The historical Jesus comes out handy. He inserts himself into his people's apartheid situation of life. He then makes social analyses using other disciplines like sociology and philosophy. After that he relates this to Biblical passages drawing more from Genesis creation and fall story in the light of liberating Exodus event, Prophets etc highlighting the will of God for all to live fully as taught by Jesus.
- b) Mofokeng eventually handles the praxis aspect whereby he provides pastoral transforming indications. On this you can easily notice a lot of influence from L. Boff's methodological approach with his sequences which Boff calls mediations or aspects. The author gives more light with regard to his methodology with the following articulations:

“Engagement in the struggle for liberation poses questions that reflect the crisis of this engagement, to the text, thereby opening the text for those engaged. These questions are taken up, rephrased and answered. The story of this God, who is engaged in the struggle of the poor, in turn criticizes and enlightens their engagement and thereby invokes a new engagement creating new possibilities and a new self-understanding and appreciation and cause for new questioning. This is the so called hermeneutical circulation (Althusser) that has praxis of liberation as its point of entry and is kept open by the hope that is implied in it (the hope that the new society and new subjectivity of the people will become a reality).” (Ibid., p.50).

c) With the finality of coming up with a Black Christology that transforms his alienated people into freedom and living fully as willed by Jesus, Mofokeng sources also from own experience, fellow South African scholars bound together in this liberating mission, the victims themselves, relevant Biblical pericopes and findings from global liberationists like Boff, Sobrino, Gutierrez, Cone and those of political theology like Metz and Barth.

d) Reading this book you will become aware that he also employs dialectic philosophy in analyzing historical situations- Biblical and post-Biblical. This is how he puts it: “There is a fruitful dialectical movement or interplay between the text (Scripture) and the context which is the liberation project. We have a double grounded hermeneutic of praxis” (Ibid., p.21). The bottom-line is that he does not find metaphysics friendly in his South African theology. The impression is that he has contempt of it perceiving it as “abstract and therefore alienating to the poor and the oppressed who are in need of a concrete solution” (Ibid., p.101. Also pp. 55-57).

e) The above should not make you forget the finality of Mofokeng’s Christology. Its goal according to him is to endeavor to take a definite step towards responding to the critical question namely: How can faith in Jesus Christ empower black people who are involved in the struggle for their liberation? This, according to him, is owing to the fact that in South Africa the black person has been alienated from own history, culture, social values and land. As such, his theology seeks to make him/her acquire a revolutionary and critical consciousness and activity thereby making an effort in creating a black subject as an event in liberation.

Some Highlights With Regard to His Liberation Christology

The following are some of the fundamental aspects in his Christology:

- a) His is mainly Christology from below also called ascending /functional Christology;
- b) The Jesus who got involved in redemptive/salvific ministry in His entire life had the gumption to challenge the sinful powers that be. He encountered opposition even from powerful religious discriminating leaders. He encountering crisis after crisis culminating in His crucifixion. This Jesus is the model of liberation to the oppressed in South African and elsewhere who encounter related injustices showing how to live in freedom and human worth;
- c) In His commitment to establish the Kingdom of God, He showed solidarity with the poor, the dehumanized and the rejects sinful ones as He embraced hostility for His salvific cause readily accepting crucifixion and death (Ibid., pp.32ff.);
- d) This God-man uplifts the downtrodden with whom He identified transforming them into liberated liberating people of God as He empowered them to take after Him as liberators and redeemers too (Ibid., p.34, 245f, 263);
- e) The hopelessness of His death by crucifixion was, through resurrection event, transformed into triumph proving to all that God was for Him and with Him (pp. 13, also M. Buthelezi,

Violence and the Cross in South Africa, in Mofokeng, op. cit. p.39). This resurrection and glorification phenomenon becomes a proof that God is on the side of those committed to liberation task and that they too will be rewarded;

f) His life, death, resurrection, glorification and establishment as Lord as the One sent by the Father in the Holy Spirit provides the best model of Black Theology more fruitful to the downtrodden (Ibid., pp.234ff.).

Sabt Lessons to Other African Christian Liberation Theologians

Drawing from the Paper, one is able to spell out important lessons African Christian liberation theologians can learn from SABT both from the positive aspects and the shortcomings:

The Positive aspects:

a) Intrinsic employment of an African title “Black Messiah” attributed to Jesus. There is no doubt that we do have several African theologians who have done that. Among them are: Nyamiti, Jesus our Ancestor; Bujo, Jesus our proto-Ancestor; Wachege, Jesus our *Mũthamaki* Christology; Mbiti, *Christus Victor* Christology and Pobee, *Nana* Christology. To the best of my knowledge, however, these are mainly in the realm of Inculturation approach while the South African one is specifically liberational in orientation.

b) A critical disposition to creative dialogue with non-African liberation theologians while explicitly acknowledging such sourcing as exponents like **Mokgethi Motlhabi** acknowledges and appreciates the affinity and borrowing. It is in public domain that other African liberation theologians readily source from Latin American with scholars like Gutierrez, Boff and Sobrino or even political theology with scholars like Moltmann and Metz hiding their source from their readers.

Shortcomings in Mofokeng’s Black Christology to enrich other Africans with:

a) First and foremost, the over-emphasis on functional approach at the expense of ontological orientation as well as his “contempt” for metaphysics impoverishes His Christology. He should have learned from Karl Barth who he uses here and there the invaluability of metaphysics in any theology for the purposes of deeper analyses and more systematic approach;

b) Though he admittedly acknowledges that the North American scholars of Black Power Theology do influence him, nevertheless, he does not seem to guard himself adequately in some issues from their militancy;

c) The issue of Jesus being the Liberator of ALL i.e., not just of the oppressed but also of the oppressors does not come out well. Mofokeng seems to be victim of the unlawful generalization. The impression he gives is that Blacks are the innocent oppressed sinned against and the whites are the evil guilty ones. This, of course is a dangerous categorization Jesus aimed at dismantling. The rationale is that: since we all are both oppressors and oppressed, both sinners and sinned against so long as we are in this sinful world- all of us are in need of redemption and salvation as John reminds us (1Jn 1: 8,10). On this note, Jesus demands that we forgive always (Mt 18: 21-22; 18: 23-35; Lk 23: 39-43);

d) One also gets an impression that Mofokeng is so much swallowed up in liberation from socio- political economic factors that the crucial aspect of personal sin is sidelined in his Christology. This is a serious lacuna since liberation ought to start from within us through the spiritual exercise of genuine self-examination;

e) There is also a narrowing of oppressive factor making his Christology less comprehensive since issues like liberation from hunger, superstitions, revenge, exaggerated clanism, negative ethnicity, illiteracy and disease are virtually ignored.

Positive Aspects of Mofokeng’s Black Christology to enrich other Africans with:

It is a good attempt in making Jesus more relevant to South Africans and the others faced with related life situations of oppression and exploitation;

- a) He does well to enrich his ACT by disposing himself to enrichment also from non-African scholars like K. Barth, J. Sobrino, J.H. Cone thereby showing that he is not a victim of false particularism and parochial-mindedness;
- b) He reasonably responds to Jesus' interrogation as to who Jesus is to South Africans in their concrete historical existence. As he puts it: "this question is Jesus Christ's question as the One who is already creatively and provocatively and critically operative in the world of oppressed black human kind. This question is, therefore, contained or enclosed in His question about His own identity' (Ibid., p.228);
- c) He, furthermore, presents Jesus as an exemplary fulfillment of the Pentateuch Exodus experience and challenge to the oppressed to even use forceful means as a last resort if need be for their liberation (pp.229ff);
- d) Mofokeng, moreover, draws interesting anthropological implications of Christ Event in view of relevance to his people; "Anthropologically, in the entire incarnation unto death, or the entire history of the Cross of the Son of God, God creates and empowers the poor and the weak to become active subjects of their own history." (Ibid., p. 258).

Conclusion

The Paper has discussed South African kind of liberation theology- a distinctive approach called South African Black Theology. It was explicated that liberation theology in this region of Africa concerns itself with the struggle and reaction against apartheid and the after effects of it. It was mainly done using insights from renowned South African Black liberation scholars like Boesak, Moore, Buthelezi, Tutu, Sebidi, Motlhabi, Mosala, Tlhagale, Goba and Mofokeng and a few others from North America like Conn. It emphasized black consciousness using related slogans like "Black is Black", "Black is Beautiful" and "Black Power." It was pointed out that the concept also provoked by blacks' "ontological" music with exponents like the legendary James Brown of "I am Black and I am Proud", Martin Luther King Jr of "I have a dream" and Marcom X- among others. This was further elaborated as founded on socio-religious belief that Jesus is the Black Messiah. In this regard, a brief exposition of Mofokeng's Black Christology came in handy. The paper then ended with drawing out SABT lessons to other African Christian liberation theologians. The paper had two fundamental objectives. The first one was to explore and verify that South Africa has a unique mode of liberation theology which when properly perused has a lot to teach other African liberation theologians. The second objective was to discuss South African Black Christology, with Mofokeng's Black Christology as a model, to find out whether useful pedagogy to other African scholars. The main hypothesis was that South Africa has a unique mode of liberation theology which when properly perused has a lot to teach other African liberation theologians. The second assumption was that South African Black Christology whereby Jesus is viewed as the Black Messiah, as exemplified by proponent Mofokeng, provides both positive aspects and shortcomings to learn from. The procedure the paper followed to realize the above was: introductory remarks; distinctiveness of SABT; operationalizing key concepts in SABT; brief historical setting of SABT; black consciousness as the key concept and its meaning; six main sources of SABT; Jesus the "Black Messiah"; Mofokeng's liberation black Christology within the context of SABT; SABT lessons to other African Christian liberation theologians; concluding remarks followed by references. The paper has confirmed the assumption that South Africa has a specific approach to liberation theology which is pedagogical to other African liberation

theologians. Another confirmation was that South African Black Christology whereby Jesus is viewed as the Black Messiah, as exemplified by proponent Mofokeng, provides both positive aspects and shortcomings to learn from. The paper has, therefore, confirmed the assumption that South Africa has a specific approach to liberation theology which is pedagogical to other African liberation theologians. Another confirmation is that South African Black Christology whereby Jesus is viewed as the Black Messiah, as exemplified by proponent Mofokeng, provides both positive aspects and shortcomings to learn from.

Theoretical and Contextual Contribution

Among the theoretical and contextual contribution of the Paper is that of blending Liberation and Inculturation approaches for more fruitful theologizing. It spelt out the intrinsic employment of an African title “Black Messiah” analogically attributed to Jesus in specifically liberational orientation while some other African titles pointed out- Nyamiti, Jesus “our Ancestor”; Bujo, Jesus “our proto-Ancestor”; Wachege, Jesus “our Mũthamaki (Ideal Elder)” Christology; Mbiti, “Christus Victor” Christology and Pobee, “Nana Christology”- analogically attributed to Jesus are fundamentally in Inculturation approach. As such, a mutual enrichment arises whereby South African’s liberation Christology becomes a model to the other Africans’ Inculturation Christologies and vice versa. The bottom line is that liberation Christologies and Inculturation Christologies are essentially related as they handle the selfsame Jesus Christ in accordance with the needs, thought-forms, mentality, aspirations and indeed, world-view of the Africans. All these is significant since Christology is a central mystery in Christianity which when approached as recommended above will assist in tackling the other Christian mysteries like Trinity, Pneumatology and Ecclesiology. This is thanks to the theory of nexus mysteriorum (interconnection of Christian mysteries) which designates the teaching that Christian mysteries are organically linked together in such a way that it is possible to gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of any mystery by examining its link with any other mystery or mysteries (Nyamiti, 2005:28).

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