

# THE *SUSTENTASIE*<sup>1</sup> PROBLEM IN THE REFORMED CHURCHES OF SOUTH AFRICA: UNMASKING THE DILEMMA FACING BLACK THEOLOGIANs

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## Abstract

*Is the financial dependence of poorer black churches in South Africa compromising their theological message? Are black ministers diluting their sometimes critical views of so-called 'white mother or sister churches' because their ministers depend on the latter for their livelihood? Are black churches afraid of biting the proverbial hand that feeds them? Is the financial assistance (Afrikaans 'sustentasia') that wealthier churches offer to poor churches having the effect of 'colonising' the minds of black theologians, causing them to embrace Western theology that they may not subscribe to or believe in. This article aims to address some of these issues. The article attempts to address the issue of the financial support from the white Reformed Churches as a strategy that has been used as the hegemony of colonising the theological critical thinking of black theologians as well as subjecting them to blindly accept white views on theology.*

**Key Words:** Sustentasia, Liberation Theology, Black Theology, Self-governing, Africanism and Schism

## Introduction

Speckman and Kaufmann (2001:252) said:

*What made it difficult for ministers and congregations of the three black Reformed Churches to express their opposition to apartheid, even if they wanted to, was the fact that they were financially dependent on subsidies from DRC (white) congregations, presbyteries or synods. This economic dependence entrenched the power of white Christians and the disempowerment of black Christians. It also reinforced racist attitudes, because they were powerless and dependent on the whites.*

The views of the theologians Speckman and Kaufmann were echoed by Boesak (1990:25) when he said: "It is no wonder, then, that the Black church sometimes finds it hard to respond meaningfully to Blacks in need of God's presence in their lives. A precondition for the authentic identity of the Black church is the ability to identify with the community it serves."

This undeniable truth finds resonance in the powerful words of Steve Biko, slain leader of the Black Consciousness Movement: "Powerlessness breeds a race of beggars" (Biko 1978:78). And here I am reminded of another compelling and thought-provoking statement

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<sup>1</sup> 'Sustentasia' refers loosely to the act of white wealthier churches subsidizing black poor churches financially to sustain their ministry.

by Steve Biko: “Black man you are on your own.” Biko’s statement evoked many different interpretations. A first of Banda’s (2009) interpretations was that a black person in Africa needs to take the course of his/her destiny, in particular his/her liberation, into his or her own hands. The second was an exclusion of whites, because blacks felt that they could not trust or entrust white people with what they viewed as fundamental to, and at the core of, the black/white conflict, namely freedom (Banda 2009:111).

When I tried to use Cone’s liberation theology as a lens through which to read and understand Biko’s as well as Speckman and Kaufmann’s statements, I realised that I needed to start thinking, eating, talking, reading, worshipping, theologising and praying like a black African. This is the least I can do to find my way back to the people to whom I am a minister. It was through the liberation theology advocated by theologians like Cone that I gained a better appreciation for the view that God identifies Himself with the poor and the oppressed and afflicting the oppressor in support of the oppressed (Cone 1975:63).

As a minister having to drive 150 kilometres to humbly negotiate for money to take care of my children, I started feeling that Biko and other Black Consciousness scholars were also referring to people like me when they spoke of the black person’s dependence on whites. And the situation became more pronounced with the bold decision on the part of some white ministers, who were ministering to black congregations, to reject support from the white Dutch Reformed Church in solidarity with the case of black people in the country. “Together with Charl le Roux and Gerrie Lubbe, Klippies took an option of rejecting salary subsidy coming from the DRC, a church proclaiming a policy of racial separation” (Banda 2009:21). A question that kept springing up in my mind was: If, in solidarity with blacks, the white ministers in question were denying themselves the comfortable lifestyle offered to them by the white church, what impression was I creating by encouraging my church’s dependency on white churches? “Unless one can break the crippling sense of financial dependence, no real leadership development is possible in an organisation, least of all a church” (Speckman & Kaufmann, 2001:253).

Mbiti (1971:2) made an appeal to African theologians to Africanise Christianity and to give it an African character, which involves church structures, theology, planning, worship and financial independence. This is a plea that most African scholars made and are still making within the black Reformed Churches. Black Reformed Churches are not practising ‘reformation’ as an ongoing process: their main responsibility seems to be just to defend what the white Reformed Churches teach as part of their doctrine. For Mashau (2003:125) the most pressing issue is that until the black churches become *financially independent*, the issue of many black ministers practising Black Theology will never become a reality. It seems to be within our colonial hierarchical understanding not to rebel against that which we depend on to ‘live’.

I have learnt from Black Theology that God identifies Himself with the poor and the oppressed and afflicting the oppressor in support of the oppressed (Cone 1975:63). I realise that as long as a Reformed black minister is not liberated (economically), his or her Black Theology will not always reflect the feelings of the black people whom he or she serves. God must become the voice of the voiceless as Cone mentioned, and theology must consider the circumstances of the people it addresses. This paper aims at addressing one of the obstacles that discourages some Reformed ministers and theologians from practising Black Theology, namely the issue of subsidy.

In my opinion this obstacle is linked to the question which Tshaka (2007:535) presented to John Mbiti: “Have we clearly indicated who is qualified to speak on the subject of African theology?” His question forms an important point of departure for this paper.

Mbiti's answer was, "You know who is an African." It was later discovered that there is an urgent need for Reformed theologians who consider themselves to be Africans to entertain the issue of theology, as well as deal with their own ontological aspects of existence (Tshaka 2007:534).

Many black Reformed congregations in South Africa are still dependent on white churches for financial aid. Although there may be numerous reasons that black ministers are 'suppressing' their theological convictions, this paper focuses on the economic dependence of black churches as a factor in their avoidance of Black Theology. In many cases, white control is still a reality, and this makes it difficult for black ministers to identify with the black church (Boesak 1990:24-25). How does Black Theology view the oppression and domination orchestrated by those with money to give to the poor black churches? My study rests on the knowledge gained from various authors and my personal experiences in the ministry, as also expressed in my autobiography. The minutes, agendas, records and decisions of major assemblies in the church were consulted to gain a better understanding of the current trends and sentiments surrounding this issue.

## **Historical Background**

### *The Meaning of Sustentasie and its Influence on the Church*

The concept of *sustentasie* is the Afrikaans version of Latin word *sustentation* (from *sustentare*) meaning "something that sustains or a support." It is defined as the act of sustaining life by food or providing a means of subsistence. It can also be explained as an activity of providing or maintaining by supplying with money or necessities" ([www.thefreedictionary.com/sustentation](http://www.thefreedictionary.com/sustentation)). In the Reformed church tradition it is used to refer loosely to an act where wealthier churches subsidise or financially support poorer churches to sustain their ministry. Others use the term 'paternalism' to refer to more or less the same practice. This practice had been common among most of the mainline churches that were formed as a result of missionary attempts by Western people. For the sake of this study my focus on *sustentasie* will be focused in accordance with its application in the Reformed Churches in South Africa (*Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid Afrika* (GKSA), while other related churches with similar practice will be considered for clarification's sake.

Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA) were initially divided during the apartheid regime into three different synods, viz Synod Potchefstroom (comprising the white Afrikaans-speaking population), Synod Soutpansberg (predominately Venda, and a few Tsonga-speaking congregations) and Synod Midlands (composed of different ethnic groups mainly in what is now the Gauteng province of South Africa). More than three-quarters of the Synod Soutpansberg's congregations are a result of the missionary endeavours of Christian Reformed Churches in Holland, while the last quarter (composed of the Shangaan people) were a result of the missionaries of the white Reformed Churches around Pretoria, which formed part of Synod Potchefstroom. Synod Midlands was a result of the missionary work by churches that also formed part of Synod Potchefstroom. I will use the concept of *sustentasie* in this paper to refer to the different ways in which the White Reformed Churches financially support the black poor congregations.

The aim of *sustentasie* is financial assistance to the missionary churches to help them grow to independence. This sound aim could easily be manipulated by those who also aim to drag the black people whom they support into a state of unconditional obedience. According to Banda (2009:116), this is one of the reasons that Kritzinger "took an option of

getting rid of the salary he was receiving from the white Dutch Reformed Church for what they considered as stipend for doing mission work at their so-called daughter church”.

It is not easy to separate the concepts of mission and *sustentatie* in the Reformed Churches because whatever is done as missionary work involves the money which the sister church will donate to or use to subsidise the smaller poor church. It becomes relevant then to discuss how these white churches understand the mission in which their financial assistance played a major role. In agreement with Kritzinger, according to the white Reformed Churches a mission is what white Christians do among black people, and evangelism is what they do among lapsed white Christians. This understanding helped to promote the colonial idea that mission is what you do far away, across the seas, among benighted heathens, while evangelism is what you do among civilised post-Christian people (Kritzinger, 1990:1). It was within this framework of thinking that the white Reformed Churches became the architects of the black churches and engaged in missionary endeavours.

This implies that the recipients of this mission are black people who are also supported financially to kick-start their church administration. From theological training to ministry, white churches took responsibility for financing the studies of their theological students, and went on to support them as they became ministers with *traktament*.<sup>2</sup> In this way, Western missionaries succeeded in convincing Africans to dress, talk and eat like Westerners but failed to make Africans realise that Christianity seeks to address life in totality (Mashau, 2003:126). Black people (theologians in particular) would find it hard to revolt against those whose clothes they were wearing, food they were eating and books they were reading. How could one criticise or theologise against such caring people? Instead, one was expected to become a copy of what the givers/providers expected one to be. Black ministers and black people's lives remained fundamentally inferior, as seen, for example, in disparities relating to education and housing. In this case apartheid is still very much alive (Prozesky, 1990:126).

### **The Meaning of Black Theology in South African Context**

The Committee on Theological Perspectives of the National Conference of Black Churchmen in the United States (1966) states the following about Black Theology:

A theology of black liberation seeks to plumb the black condition in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, so 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. It affirms the humanity of white people in that it says 'No' to the encroachment of white oppression (Cone & Wilmore, 1993:38).

Jones (2009:2) understands the programme of Black Theology as being a self-conscious crusade to eliminate white racism, particularly its ecclesiological and theological manifestations. Although, according to Storms (2006:2), some radical advocates of black power insisted that Christianity was a white religion, used by the latter to oppress the black community, Cone appealed that Christianity was the only hope for the black community, hence he strongly advocated the notion that “God has constantly been taking the side with the poor, and He became the voice of the voiceless”. On Black Theology Boesak (1990:4)

<sup>2</sup> 'Traktament' is a Reformed Afrikaans expression referring to a minister's salary.

had this to say: "Our theological reflection must take into consideration – more strongly still, must emerge seriously out of – that which white theology has never taken seriously: the Black experience."

The need for Black Theology becomes more evident when reading part of the song by Pambani Mzimba after being frustrated by the squabbles with the white church over money he raised for them overseas: "But to me it is clear that even the Black man in Africa must stand on his feet in matters of worship like the people in other countries and not always expect to be carried by the White man on his back. He has long learnt to walk by leaning on the white man but today he must stand without leaning on anybody except his God so that the work of the Gospel should flourish" (Speckman & Kaufmann, 2001:383). Therefore Black Theology emerged initially from the pains that black people went through, just as when in Latin America people like Martin Luther King stood up to be the voice of the black sufferers.

If Black Theology originates from the unique experience of the black people's pain, humiliation, exploitation and oppression (Maimela & Konig, 1998:111), then it should be an opportunity for every black theologian to have a particular response to their unique situations. Only a few of those who have never experienced black people's pain and suffering can reveal the true picture of what black Christians should be. Warunta and Kinoti (2000:62) indicate the problem very clearly by saying: "Theologians should be facilitators of the process, rather than its chief actors. The image of Africans as submissive and patient people should be replaced by the virtues of self-assertion and liberation." The eminent change that is very pressing for black theologians is to think and rethink, to reshape and redirect theology that will speak about black Christians in their own context.

### **The Effects of *Sustentatie* on Black Theology among Reformed Ministers and Theologians**

#### *Subjection of Black Ministers and Theologians*

One Reformed minister said:

You still hear statements like "*Hulle kerk vir ons*" (their church for us) because we are still '*die jong kerke*' (young churches). Paternalism does not allow the inferior part to say no; once you start speaking your mind, it is said that you are kicking the hand that gives. There is nothing new you can bring or implement. The only thing you do is to receive and accept. The culture of accepting without questions is prevalent at our synodical meetings where delegates would accept anything, and raise questions later on their way back home (Lekalakala, 2002:14).

The church belongs to those with money, while black ministers are just obliging and following the regulations of the 'hands that feed'. Black church members even know that their black ministers have no say, but that the white man who gives them second-hand clothing and pays their school fees is the one with the final say. A black critical mind is not encouraged. Reformed Christian theologies were largely responsible for the doctrine of apartheid which created a huge chasm between blacks and whites in South Africa. According to Tshaka (2007:154), it became prudent for the financial sustenance of black theologians and their churches for them to be placed as subjects. This is why theologians such as Warunta and Kinoti (2000:63) say that ministers became hesitant to implement what they thought would be good for their African churches, or even to argue against white supporters on issues related to churches because they feared being accused of disloyalty to the ecclesial establishment.

The subjection of black ministers in the Reformed Churches becomes more evident when it comes to the issue of language. Classis Limpopo of the Reformed Churches still holds its meetings in Afrikaans which makes it difficult for black people who do not understand the language to participate in matters that affect their churches, even theological issues. It is almost unthinkable that this Classis includes churches from Zimbabwe and Zambia, countries where Afrikaans is completely foreign. The synod meeting held on 18 and 19 November 2008, for instance, discussed very important issues, which were supposed to have been heard also by these gentlemen who cannot understand Afrikaans, under the report entitled: “*Die karakter van die opleiding van predikante*” (the character of the training of ministers). Under this topic which was presented in Afrikaans alone, issues were covered such as “*Daar is eger ook soms enkele onaangename sake van studente wat oor swak prestasie vermaan word of wie se studies selfs getermineer moet word.*” (There are also sometimes unpleasant issues of students who do not perform well or whose studies have to be terminated.) The debate would have been more far-reaching if the above statements had been presented and discussed in English, since the issue of who is supposed to be trained for ministry and who not relates to the whole church (blacks included), not only the people who run and make decisions for the church. I was one of those black fellows who did not participate in such sensitive discussions because I could not understand or speak Afrikaans. I only asked for a translation of this part from a brother a few days after the meeting. Blacks are expected to attend these meetings without even participating because of the language barriers. They keep on attending because they are ferried (by the whites) to come while some of their ministers depend on the white majority for their monthly income (Agenda of Partikuliere Sinode Bosveld, 18-19 November 2008: AA38-1139).

As our church was still receiving the support of one missionary church (let’s call it the Reformed Church Lovefields, not its real name) I received a call from the white minister saying: “I think I should advise you no longer to do house visits to the members of Reformed Church Hosiyatlhela (not a real name) before you consult a consulate<sup>3</sup> because we heard that you have differences with them.” Reformed church Hosiyatlhela is a church which called me into ministry, while Lovefields is the one that is financially supporting it. I interpreted this statement to mean that “You can minister the church, but on condition that you heed my advice to serve under another minister who has the same calling and qualifications as yours, because the latter can take our instructions unconditionally.” Firstly I asked myself who was addressing issues relating to personal differences with white missionaries; secondly I consulted the Reformed Church order article 84 (Du Plooy, 2003:124) which says:

No church, minister of the word, elder or deacon shall in any way dominate other churches, ministers, elders or deacons respectively.

When the white minister, whom I believe arrived with this article from the West, suggested that I go against it by submitting myself to another minister (because I seemed to be expected to blindly obey those who paid part of my salary) I not only became confused, but I started realising that the time for me to have freedom from white domination had come, theologically speaking. That alone did not make me waste time in agreeing that indeed South African contextual theology has been largely a white male affair (Speckman & Kaufmann, 2001:367).

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<sup>3</sup> Consulate is a Reformed theological term meaning a relieving minister.

In our conversations the white minister in question indicated that it was because they were supporting me that I needed to heed their advice. A week later I had convened our church council to decide about the two options I had presented to them, i.e. whether I should terminate my ministry (meaning I should quit the ministry) or stop whites from supporting our church. The choice of the church council was that the money should stop and I should remain in service. It was one of those difficult decisions (considering that my local church could not pay even half of my salary by then) that I was ready to abide with. My refuge, pride and delight were found in the verse: "Better a little meal of vegetables where there is love than fattened calf with hatred" (Prov. 15:17). It later took me 30 months to serve the church before they could pay a single salary into my account. But as time passed when the church realised that we should stand on our own, it gradually started to flourish financially and paid everything plus investments. It was in this sacrifice that the dependence mindset changed to one of independence. I found I could not be a hypocrite and ignore that I was a black African; this would have jeopardised my opportunity to participate in liberation theology which was wielding a capital 'no' to oppression and other sins issuing mainly from white racism, according to Motlhabi (2008:45).

Because African people respect their source of income, not supporting their Africanism would for some theologians have been unpatriotic and tantamount to being passive observers of their own churches. The feelings of inferiority have clearly not escaped black Reformed ministers and theologians, and such feelings of inferiority cultivate in black people a sense of wanting to escape themselves (Tshaka, 2009:8). Such positions as subjects are the ones which in most cases put us at the mercies of our grand masters (Tshaka, 2009:11).

### **Biased Theological Training**

I concur with Boesak (1990:28) that the black church's dependence on white resources almost amounts to accepting a dependence on alien theology. Since the theological training of black ministers is in the hands of those who are financially able to run the programmes, Waruta and Kinoti (2000:18) have a very valid point when they articulate:

*Raising challenging issues during training is not tolerated because critical thinking is believed to be the work of the devil and inimical to the faith of the individual. Books of 'liberal theologians' do not appear on reading lists. The clergy then come out of training devoid of a critical approach to their ministry. The training curriculum has not been geared to the African cultural milieu, hence the clergy cannot contextualize.*

As a result, many Reformed preachers are only trying to preach against any form of African culture and the Africanisation of Christianity because their aim is to protect the white doctrine which they were taught at all costs. They have not been exposed to or allowed to explore liberal theology which will open their minds. It is my conviction that the theological training one receives should shape one's character and morality as a theologian. One's theological training seems to be guided by those who are paying for the studies, and prescribing and purchasing library books; books are bought which answer their problems, often with scant regard for the needs of the theological students. Similarly, the curriculum is planned accordingly. I concur somewhat with the Reformed Synod Soutpansberg (Maambiwa, 2004:62) when they sent their concerns to Potchefstroom Theological School saying:

*We are not happy about Potchefstroom Theological Seminary. We rejected the Hamanskraal Theological Seminary and started Heidelberg Theological Seminary. We*

*agreed to close the school because we believe the time has come that we as churches should have a strong say in training. Our position was that Potchefstroom theology must be broadened, and the only way is by appointing people from our churches who are accepted by our churches who understand the need and vision of our churches.*

Their concern was that the training of their theological students (their future ministers), who would be ministering to their churches, ignored the context within which these students live. It was not an easy task to convince the school of the Soutpansberg Synod's suggestions, because those pulling the financial strings have their own purposes in mind. Financial dependence is something most African churches face. Both qualifications, and vision for and acceptance in the church, should be criteria. Issues seem to have been confused when the same synod sang a different song of praise to receive a retired American professor to teach their theology:

Meeting with CRCWM: In this meeting we were focusing on how can we work together in mission as churches. We look at the possible ways. We agreed that we could work together in: Education: The CRC do have many Christian teachers who retired at the age of 55 and they may assist Heidelberg Institute for CHE. They are ready to assist in THEOLOGICAL TRAINING, they do have retired professor and through CRCWM they can come for few months (*Minutes of Synod of Soutpansberg*, 06-07 December 2006, page 44).

Since there is no mention of whether the retired American professor was accepted by their churches or had a vision for their church, one wonders whether their first argument holds any water. Do they claim that the American lecturer for theology (who has never worked in their churches) would understand their needs and vision? It would have been wiser for the synod to have indicated that they prefer their theological training to be more American than African. The question that one keeps asking oneself is whether the whole issue is about theology in the context or about something else.

It is inevitable that Black Theology will at times have to reveal aspects of an unpleasant past, while taking cognisance of economic realities. The actions of our ministers and theologians are often the result of their training. There was a discussion under the topic "*Die karakter van die opleiding van predikante*" (the character of the training of the ministers) at a meeting of the Particular Synod in which most of the black ministers from Limpopo, Zimbabwe and Zambia were only passive participants as they could not understand the Afrikaans. I only discovered after the meeting how important the topic of discussion was to black ministers. But because of language barriers only whites discussed the training of theologians, while blacks were just expected to accept the decisions which may negatively or positively affect their churches (Agenda, of Particular Synod Bosveld, 2008:AA37). From this it becomes clear that there is a racial group (whites in this instance) which is responsible for running and developing all matters that pertain to the training of ministers (from both black and white churches); the other group (blacks) is only receiving ministers who may or may not address the problems the black Reformed churches are facing.

As a practical example, in the Reformed liturgics only a pastor is expected to raise his hands and bless the congregation in both *votum*<sup>4</sup> and *benediction*<sup>5</sup> (that is opening and closing of the worship service). In white churches it may be practical for the local minister

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<sup>4</sup> Votum means the opening of Reformed worship service characterised by the raising of hand(s) by minister to bless the congregation.

<sup>5</sup> Benediction is the official closing of the worship service by a Reformed minister raising his had(s) to bless the congregation.

to serve in one building and in the same town or city. An elder or woman is allowed to do this, but only if she is an ordained minister. The difference with black churches is that we have different preaching points to form one congregation. It is very possible for a distance of 50 kilometres to separate preaching point A from preaching point B. The question that arises is: What happens about the *votum* and *benediction* for preaching point A at a Sunday service if the preacher is serving preaching point B? Could we allow an elder or someone else to do it on his behalf, or should we skip that beautiful part of the liturgy? To complicate matters, some preaching points are composed only of women, and the decision of the synod is that no women should be ordained in this church. Should a woman then perform these proceedings in contravention or should the church service be closed for that day? I am not presenting the case for female ordination (a possible topic for further research), but I am trying to highlight the inconsistencies that come to light through the biased training of the ministers in the Reformed Churches, which does not consider the needs of black African Reformed Christians. This theology does not only become irrelevant to black people, but it also serves to alienate ministers from their society. If we need to produce leaders who will be able to lead this fight we must take a serious look at the curriculum which is taught to our theologians (Tshaka, 2009:12).

### Schisms, Splits and Church Divisions

Paternalism paves the way for a 'divide and rule' system that was used to strengthen apartheid. That is why Classis Limpopo of the GKSA used the following statement as a motivation to seek a clear decision on the relationship between GKSA (Potchefstroom Synod) and Synod Soutpansberg (predominately Venda):

*Out of the conversations with the scribe of the article 48 deputies (Synod Potchefstroom and the article 48 deputies of Synod Soutpansberg it seems that there is no clarity on the exact nature of the relationship between the two synods (as well as the relationship between congregation in the two synods). On one level there are for example bitter disputes, but on another level there is a co-operation in mission work. To which of the two synods will the new converts connect up? On this issue there is already uncertainty in the Pietersburg area.*

This indicates that some ministers (or congregations) from the Synod Soutpansberg which excluded themselves from the unity of the GKSA Synod are asking for subsidies from the very same white churches they avoided uniting with. It also indicates that there are white churches which are using their money to support the mission work of some of the congregations which are part of Synod Soutpansberg, which denied their inclusion in GKSA. Then those who receive the subsidies use the very same subsidies to invade and destroy black churches which are in the GKSA. We need to ask who is really destroying the black churches within GKSA. Is it ministers from Soutpansberg or is it the white Reformed Church? I believe the invasion that the former Capricorn Classis (now part of the Limpopo Classis) is experiencing is not from Soutpansberg, but from within white churches (in the Limpopo Classis) which finance the damages from their own well-lined pockets. The subsidy succeeded in getting the black churches into this collusion. Perhaps the architects<sup>6</sup> of this system celebrated when they heard that "this tension has already led to attempts to resolve disputes in worldly courts" (Agenda 2008:AA34). This system successfully divided black churches and if blacks do not do something about it, the bitterness between black

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<sup>6</sup> Architects refers to white churches which involved themselves in supporting black Reformed churches with an aim of dividing and subjecting them.

ministers which is growing daily will soon spread to innocent church members, making the church not only a laughing stock in the eyes of the world, but also cause it to look like a shebeen.

This is why even the theological schools for black theologians have been divided. The Reformed Churches (GKSA) had Hammanskraal Theological School which trained ministers for black Synod Midlands, Heidelberg Theological School which trained black ministers for black Synod Soutpansberg, and Theological School Potchefstroom which trained ministers for white Synod Potchefstroom. These schools were all closed to form one school, Theological School Potchefstroom, in 1994, following the political changes that took place as a result of the official abolition of apartheid in our country.

It is a sad reality that just some months later, the white churches started two other theological schools again in different places which to me is a direct replacement of the other two black schools. I share the sentiments of Lekalakala (2002:13) when he says:

*We presently train most of our students in three Theological Institutions, which are Mareetsane, Mukhanyo Bible College and Potchefstroom theological school. The students are taught from different levels and standards; this is true when you compare the qualifications of Tutors and profound knowledge in these theological disciplines, and bearing in mind that some of the students will complete their studies with only a diploma, while others will already be prepared for a master's or doctoral degree. This can be a good source of division (a racial one according to author), it is just like having a GKSA with its three synods. Already many students feel inferior about their qualifications.*

The concern is why we have closed Die Hammanskraal Teologiese Skool and Heidelberg Theological School if we are in need of three theological training centres? (Lekalakala, 2002:14). Racial divisions are still masterminding our church, especially because those who have money to fund or subsidise others (even to start new theological schools based on race) cannot be criticised because it is their money. The Dutch Reformed Churches also had four (4) separate theological seminaries before 1994. The schools were at Decoligny in the former Transkei, Witsieshoek in the Free State, Dingaansat in KwaZulu-Natal and Turfloop in the Limpopo province. These seminaries were also called 'ethnic seminaries' but they were linked together as official DRC seminaries in the association of Stofberg Theological Schools and they were all closed in 1993 after socio-political and theological stresses and strains (Saayman, 2009:21).

Both Theron and Wit (2009:153) agree that the mainline churches are experiencing a fast deterioration in membership while the pentecostal churches are enjoying rapid growth in South Africa. It is the duty of the church leaders, especially theologians, to think about and research the reasons for this migration. Those ministers who are critically minded start their own churches if their voices are ignored in the church, and so people will go to their new churches. I conclude this section by quoting Warunta and Kinoti (2000:68-69): "It is time to say that Africans do not want to be pitied. They demand to be respected. We need each other as partners, but not as oppressors and oppressed."

### **What is the Way Forward?**

It has become very clear that money has become a weapon for mass destruction of the black Reformed people at this stage. According to the white Reformed people, without money one cannot have a say in theology. This is what Bottignole (1984:67) means when articulating that paternalism and authoritarianism become more visible and have damaging effects on the recipients. The economic dependence of the black people of this country has

caused them to betray their own people. One Venda-speaking minister once gave me good advice in the form of an idiom when I was still a theological student: "*A hu na khuhu ino kudzela makumba a in'we*" (there is no chicken which can warm another chicken's eggs). To me it means that everyone must take responsibility for his own people. Why are black theologians ignoring and betraying the cries of their own black churches by using their time of need to ask for money from white farmers? If black ministers and theologians do not consider researching the calamities and needs facing black churches, they cannot expect anyone to do it for them. Vorster (2001:26) is very correct when he articulates: "To overlook the wrongs amongst ourselves and only talk about the things we like, hampers our way to glory."

To suggest that black Reformed ministers should *be on their own*, I completely agree with Lou Havenman in his address, in a letter, to the Soutpansberg Synod of the Reformed Churches: "We need to stand with our own resources. No more handouts. No more subsidies. No more paternalistic partnerships. It is time to preach and teach stewardship and our responsibility to give and support the work of the church. It is time to give up the sophisticated begging and for our leaders to lead" (Maambiwa, 2004:122).

I may sound jealous of those who receive subsidies from white churches, but to be honest I know what I am writing about because I was in those shoes before and I do not dream or hope to be there again. Do not emulate me if I am preaching what I do not practice. If white theologians like Kritzinger, Speckman and Kaufmann denied themselves opportunities to receive fat salaries from their own white brothers for the sake of contributing to both Black Theology and the livelihood of black people, then why should the black theologians pretend to be heirs of the white Reformed Churches? That alone should be a wake-up call to many black theologians who are really eager to see Black Theology and the black churches take their rightful place in the Christian field. There are many things that a Christian minister is expected to do, and sacrifice is certainly one of them. It is good to preach about sacrifice, but it is even more important to be examples of such a teaching. Those churches who are receiving subsidies are the right people to start challenging the givers to reshape and redirect their obligations and conditions of giving and receiving. It was for our lives that other people like Steve Biko sacrificed their own lives and the same should apply to us for our black fellows. It is time black Reformed ministers took the bull by the horns and the God 'of the oppressed' saw them through. It is time Reformed ministers revisit priding themselves on high university degrees which only speak to white churches, but are not useful tools to their black African people and their concrete situations (Tshaka, 2009:7). The fact that mainline churches have dwindling attendance figures should be a concern for our black theologians, because those people who no longer attend church services become powerful weapons who effect rapid growth of other churches in which they take a refugee (AIC in particular) (Theron & Wit, 2009:153).

Our democracy advocates equality where black and white people with the same qualifications and employment earn equal salaries; it is unthinkable then for one to ask for money from a person who earns the same salary. Something may have gone wrong with the mind of the beggar. Black ministers should also rethink an issue of the tent-making ministry. Many of the African Independent Churches which are growing so rapidly are headed by ministers who are also serving in different circular jobs like teaching. When Kritzinger, Speckman, Lubbe, Le Roux and Kaufmann, all from Reformed Churches became tent-makers it worked, so it can also work with other ministers as well (Speckman & Kaufmann, 2001:254; Banda, 2009:116). From this article a Reformed perspective is that a local congregation is autonomous (self-governing), but that is not true because the money-

owners decide on missionary issues as well as theological training. The truth is that before we are financially liberated we can never claim to be self-governing churches. That is why I completely share the sentiments of Lekalakala, (2002:14) when he articulated that the church needs to grow towards progress and become self-supportive, so that she can run her business and work towards building a united church of Christ.

Finally black churches should start empowering themselves. The mindset of seeing church and business as enemies has long changed. We have internalised that a Reformed minister (black in particular) should not get involved in business that will divert his attention from the church; meanwhile many white ministers and professors were farmers. Denominations should for example not shy away from investing in commercial farming, transport services and supermarkets. They can also establish cooperative banks or societies with loan facilities for jobseekers and small-scale businesses. Waruta and Kinoti (2000:30) say that the church in Zimbabwe intends purchasing Kentucky Hotel in Harare and is also considering running a bus service. The church of the province of Kenya has started a motor vehicle training institute in Muranga with the aim of training women in motor vehicle mechanics. The same understanding of empowering ourselves is also advocated by Speckman and Kaufmann (2001:253).

### **Concluding Remarks**

It is very clear even today that one of the issues that mark the difference between black and white Reformed Churches is the economic dependence of black churches on their white counterparts. This issue colonises and subjects the critical minds of those who receive to those who give. Black congregations are expecting their theologians to arrive at possible answers to their calamities and challenges, or face the extinction of black churches. It is a question of weighing up the options before deciding whether to continue with this state of conditional dependency or not. For black ministers to identify with black churches, there should be mutual dependency in which we need the whites as much as they need us. It has become critical to reformulate and rethink our mission: is it aimed at pleasing the mother churches or at building the African people to serve God faithfully within their context. Because in a final trenchant analysis, it seems unethical to bite the hand that feeds!

Finally, black Africans should learn to be independent or face the psychological and spiritual demise of Black Theology. The dehumanised, degraded and reduced image of black ministers and their churches as being mere beggars from white churches will not fade until black ministers and theologians do something about it themselves. I do not subscribe to the school of thought which advocates that black Reformed Churches are a bunch of able beggars, because when whites arrived in South Africa they did not find black people begging, but planting crops and herding their cattle.

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