

BLACK THEOLOGY: FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS OR A QUANTUM LEAP TOWARDS RESUSCITATION

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Abstract

*Black theology traditionally presented itself, implicitly or explicitly, as an instrument for black liberation. Its proverbial silence since 1994 in South Africa raises the question whether Black Theology should be left to die a natural death, or be resuscitated. This article proposes to measure the functionality of Black Theology within the context and culture of the 'new' South Africa. By so doing it will try to rescue Black Theology from its perceived dormant state as well as unravelling its current status as a theological and academic conundrum. It wishes to look at reformulating a tentative set of interpretive principles, which would serve as guidelines for validating Black Theology once again as a functional theological discipline among other credible theological disciplines. The appraisal of Black Theology will be done against its own historical strengths and weaknesses; against its own criteria as a 'hands on' theology embedded within the Christian tradition. It will ascertain whether its *raison d'être* can be rekindled to a renewed appropriateness.*

Key Words: Black Theology, Ecological Justice, Homophobia, Liberation, Victim-Mind-Set, Xenophobia

Introduction

The all-encompassing question this article ponders is whether there is a future for Black Theology in South Africa? Has Black Theology in South Africa reached a dead end? There seems to be an obscure perception that Black Theology in South Africa is of opinion that since it contributed towards the achievement of the prime liberation objectives, the spiritual and social impact thereof has been left to 'die a natural death'. Can this article assume that, since the basic human rights of all people in South Africa are enshrined in the country's refined Constitution, Black Theology in South Africa had achieved its said goals and is now ready to bow out gracefully and surrender any honourable grounds for further employment to legal or other reliable instruments?

On the other hand, if the task of Black Theology in South Africa is currently in abeyance, this article proposes areas that warrant not only its renewed activation, but also *de rigueur* reasons for its continued existence. This article thus endeavours to identify the current scenarios and victims of diverse forms of oppression, as well as the perpetrators of such oppression which are still in dire need of liberation. If black Theology perceives itself to be still a functional discipline among other theological disciplines, then Black Theology needs to work on its own emancipation. Before any 'second generation black theologian' can animate the prophetic courage to address current oppressive situations in South Africa, Black Theology needs to become self-reflective and be freed from its own inner demise.

The rising black middle class in South Africa, among them first-generation black theologians, has done extremely well and now shares a commonality with previous and contemporary oppressors. This article questions whether the glamour of this new-found release from oppression had blinded the first-generation black theologians to the plight of those who are still living with the immorality of discrimination and exclusion. Black theology is maintaining an extremely low profile in the face of existing realities which oppress black communities such as the multiple forms of bondage related to social, economic, religious, gender, homophobic, cultural, xenophobic and ecological chains. As observed by Alistair Kee (2005:52) “after the passion and commitment of Black Theology, they (black theologians) now seem anaemic”. This article attempts to ascertain whether the anaemia of Black theology in South Africa is indicative of a deeper ailment?

The Status of Black Theology within Christian Theology

Black theology in South Africa arose from the desperate need of black people to be liberated from the shackles of white oppression. However, Christian theology per se, when adhering to the liberating message of the Gospel, would naturally allow itself to be identified with the suffering of those exploited and demoralised and it goes far beyond oppression that relates only to racism and the colour of people’s skin. During the apartheid years the term ‘black’ was a visible reality which described oppression and separation. Today ‘blackness’ has assumed the symbolic inference that personifies victims of all forms of oppression and believes that the survival of humanity is bound up with freeing people from various kinds of oppressed human conditions. This article is of opinion, that for Black Theology to be faithful to its liberative task, it needs to confront the inbuilt racism, cultural, ethnic, economic, gender and sexual oppressive arrangements of blackness-on-blackness that are sometimes even more oppressive than the oppression of ‘whiteness’ over ‘blackness’. Black theology can no longer be selective in its mission.

The task of Black Theology is not confined to the life and situations of South Africa and neither only to the plight of oppressed black people. This concurs with James Cone (1970:1), who argues that “all true Christian theology is a theology of liberation” since the all-encompassing theme of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is about liberating all the oppressed regardless of what human condition constitute their suffering. The comprehensive argument is, even if Black Theology ceases to be operative as a catalyst for liberation, the mission and ministry of Christian theology will continue to contemplate God’s liberating activity in the world on behalf of the oppressed. The task of Christian theology is to expose, articulate and address every conceivable inhumanity done to humanity obvious in multiple forms of bondage related to skin colour, racial, religious, cultural, gender, sexual orientation or economic conditions. The proverbial silence of Black Theology in South Africa serves as a strong indication that either Black Theology is dead or black liberation theologians are so immersed in the new-found luxuries of freedom that they are deliberately oblivious to current social ills that continue to dehumanise black people in South Africa.

Political Emancipation and Human Emancipation

It appears that Black Theology in South Africa is currently under the distinct impression that since political emancipation has been obtained its mission is no longer required. This perception suggests that Black Theology suffers from an acute delusion since political emancipation is not equal to human emancipation. Black theology has not yet begun to address the essentials of human emancipation in South Africa. Alistair Kee (2005:49)

agrees that political emancipation is not human emancipation and for Black Theology to have narrowly concentrated on race, colour and political emancipation, amounts to 'perverted categorization'.

Mokgethi Motlhabi (1973:119) also claims that "the frontal attack on racism, even if it were to succeed would change society very little". Racism, he says, is evil, but it is only symptomatic of other existing evils in society and the 'other evils' are subversively and overtly alive today. While racism in South Africa was identified as the enemy, the replacement of white rulers by black rulers would not solve the problem. With the termination of apartheid the new black elite crossed the line to join those who held power and privilege. Because the race line lost its colour, should Black Theology be regarded as redundant? Motlhabi (1973:122) is of opinion and this is taken up by Simon Maimela (1987:70) stating that there will always be a need for a theology that sides with the oppressed and by replacing white rulers with black ones would not necessarily eradicate the reality that people at the bottom end of the scale still suffer the consequences of oppression. Alistair Kee (2005:51) asks: "What happened to black Theology? Why has it stalled?" He answers that Black Theology in South Africa has become a bourgeois movement and consequently lacks the critical and analytical ability to determine that political emancipation does not necessarily include human emancipation. Blacks are emancipated and this new-found freedom allows them to engage in "the pursuit of cars, expensive furniture, large houses and finest Scotch" (Kee 2005:52).

Black Theology and Human Emancipation

For Black Theology to remain functional it has to address all forms and grades of human oppression. This goes along with Itumeleng Mosala's sentiment that for Black Theology to execute relevance it has to continue with its 'internal definitional' work since it accompanies the equally important responsibility which is to 'do' Black Theology. This implies naming and renaming reality as it forms part of the process of creating a new reality (Mosala in Maimela and Hopkins 1989:143). Anthony Bradley, in his most recent book *Liberating Black Theology* (2010), states that Black Theology is a theology of black liberation and as such seeks to plumb all black conditions in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the black community can see that the gospel is commensurable. While Black Theology is a theology of 'blackness' in its inclusive form it concerns both white and black people. It affirms the humanity of all God's people (Bradley 2010:18) regardless of colour, creed, gender, sexual orientation, religious or cultural persuasion. Authentic liberation is therefore inclusive of all oppressions and Black theology by definition reminds us that God is the God of liberation and liberty (Maimela 1987:91). While this article deems it important to identify the social diseases that still oppress black people it also hopes to point out that Black Theology still has a human emancipative task to perform. However, before Black Theology embarks on a human emancipation agenda, it has, according to Bradley (2010:18), to redeem itself from its own oppressive shackles and one of these Bradley (2010:18) calls the 'Black Theology's victim mind-set'.

Liberating Black Theology from its 'Victim Mind-set'

Anthony Bradley and John McWhorter, both auspicious black academics, courageously show how the 'victim mind-set' plays a role in the rise and fall of Black Theology. By considering their contributions based on personal history and the confirmation of social sciences this article may just be in a position to clarify why Black Theology in South Africa

suddenly came to an unprecedented halt. This article is of opinion that it is the express task of the new generation of Black theologians to further the task of the South African Student Organization of 1967 (SASO) to remove the biggest stumbling block towards the attainment of freedom for Black South Africans namely the attitude and mental slavery of Black people. To liberate Blacks from the “self-incurred mental and psychological bondage” as pointed out by Simon Maimela will remain an ongoing task even during physical liberation (Maimela 1987:67) since this internalized victim-mindset could remain a pathological problem for years to come. In this regard Anthony Bradley (2010:19) claims that the future of Black Theology has been called into question not only because of the identification of the black person as ‘victim’, but because Black Theology functions from within and without the cult of victimology. By operating from this victim identity Black Theology not only generates victimology, but also thereby shoots itself in the foot. This alone puts the onus on Black Theology to first liberate itself from its own *inner* oppression if it wishes to be functional in countering the existing forms of blatant oppression still rampant in South Africa. Since Black Theology has inadvertently become a casualty of its own victim mind-set, the liberation ethic struggles to be reliable since it is trapped in this mental and emotional demise.

McWhorter (2000:xi) is of opinion that victimology serves as a severe impediment and holds black people back, because working within the framework of victimology is to nurture and perpetuate the victim identity of cultural blackness. He says that this victim mind-set has permeated the consciousness of most black people regardless of their background and he describes victimology as extremely seductive since there is an ironic and addictive contentment in under-doggism (McWhorter 2000:29). Like any addiction it debases the performance of any human being and focuses on the negative rather than on the rich opportunities to strive ahead (McWhorter 2000:43). McWhorter believes that this victim mind-set has become so entrenched in the psyche of black people that, in his view, the primary task of contemporary Black Theology is to liberate itself from the debilitating pathological state of existence (McWhorter 2000:31). He claims that it is not only the poor and deprived that are affected by the condition of victimology; it is prevalent, indeed more so, among educated black people despite possessing ample opportunities (McWhorter 2000:31).

McWhorter (2000:32) is of schooled opinion that victimology forms a dominant strain among black academics, and black theologians are not excluded. It is used as an incessant manipulation strategy which he describes as “a constant subconscious psychological gangrene”. Victimology has become a cultural and academic tragedy since it infects the subconscious; it renders one incapable of being open to most sides; it seduces young black people as its offer an easy road to self-esteem (McWhorter 2000:39). Victimology is not about change, it is like a virus that is all about keeping itself internally alive (McWhorter 2000:41). To operate out of victimhood, continues McWhorter, is thus self-defeating, since it unfortunately and ironically also serves as a luxury for widened opportunities. Caressing and embracing victimhood for personal advancement is not only a phantom and a sweet balm of moral absolution, but simultaneously an embracement of self-defeatism. By means of introspection Black Theology may become aware of its own intrinsic pitfalls.

In agreement with Anthony Bradley (2010:20), this article proposes that Black Theology should examine its own need for liberation and determine its victim complex. The deprivation syndrome that accompanies the victim mind-set often articulates in the feverish acquisition of material possessions, status and social, economic, political and academic positions. This aspect needs scrupulous examination since it has become an apparent trend

in the new South African context. Seemingly, this is often the way whereby a victim-mindset tries to deal with the spiritual, emotional and psychological impairment deeply rooted within the composition of a victim consciousness – hence, the compelling view in South Africa that deprivation has to be replenished by material embellishments, with social and economic superfluities, and with the right to entitlement. With this understanding it makes sense that the effects of victimology as a ‘mind-set’ are decidedly counter-productive to the mission of liberation theology.

One way to rescue Black Theology from its greatest impasse of choosing life or death, and to break the uneasy silence concerning existing discriminatory scenarios, is to apply an ethic of liberation which will assist Black Theology in identifying the most appalling conditions that still oppress black people in South Africa today. This article selects only three infamous scenarios or concerns where oppressive discrimination is too high and suggests that Black Theology speaks to black homophobia, to black xenophobia, and how to overcome human ecological irresponsibility in South Africa.

Black Theology and Black Homophobia

Despite the fact that post-apartheid South Africa was meant to replace legislated racism with equality, apartheid with democracy, segregation with unity, this is not a reality on the ground. Even though South Africa's Constitution is internationally recognised as one of the most progressive and inclusive in the world, and the government has shown an exceptional commitment to acknowledging and upholding the human rights of all, this is not so for South Africa's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) citizens, particularly for black LGBT persons. On 1 December 2006 South Africa became one of only five countries to legalise homosexual unions. Yet, based on the research done by JA Nel (from Unisa) and M. Judge (from Out-LGBT – Pretoria) (2008:19), the reality on the ground is in stark contrast to policy and legislative guarantees for fundamental human rights, as homophobic victimisation is endemic in South Africa and in particular the engendered nature thereof. The research findings of Nel and Judge, based on self-reported data, indicate a disconcertingly high prevalence of homophobic discrimination in the black community. Exclusive and targeted victimisation is part of the everyday realities accompanied by abusive criminal intimidation.

According to the findings of research conducted in Gauteng province, LGBT persons are not only targets of general violence, but are also stigmatised and discriminated against through criminal acts. The research purports that LGBT people from poor black communities and Black lesbian women in particular, are disproportionately at risk of discrimination since lesbians face violence twice as often as heterosexual women. The malicious phenomenon of ‘corrective rape’ has in particular been documented among Gauteng township-dwelling black lesbian women. Violent intimidation is not experienced equally across class, race and gender lines since women from lower socioeconomic levels are often more susceptible to gender-based crimes such as rape, domestic violence and child abuse.

These experiences have been borne out in the documentaries shown on ‘Special Assignment’ – an SABC investigative journalism programme – in 2004 and updated with renewed evidence in February 2010. They revealed the escalating incidences of homosexual and transgender prejudice in black townships. With empirical evidence they showed that, despite the post-apartheid shift from the prior criminalisation of homosexuality to legislative and constitutional support for the equality of all people, LGBT people in South Africa remain vulnerable to hate crimes. This is significantly evident in many black

communities where a disproportionate number of LGBT persons continue to face oppression, marginalisation, discrimination and victimisation.

A Voice among Voiceless Black Theologians

While it is not the objective of this article to theologise on the biblical, theological or ecclesial standing of LGBT persons, there are nonetheless some biblical texts that regard LGBT people to be perceived as sinners and moral deviants in a way that heterosexual people are not. The classic Old Testament texts are Gen 19:1-19; Judges 19:16-29; Lev. 18:22, and the New Testament texts are Romans 1:26-27; 1 Cor 6:9 and 1Tim 1:10 provide the basis for a theology of exclusion and condemnation which no other texts in the bible can be compared to blacks, slaves or women. As pointed out by Garner and Worsnip (in Speckman and Kaufmann 2001:225) “valiant attempts have and are been made to interpret these text in a light, if not favourable, then at least ambiguous to the position of gay and lesbian people.” They state that while this exploration is necessary and important it remains fairly unconvincing. However, this article deems it necessary to bring to notice the astoundingly submissive, voicelessness and slow responses, if any, of black theologians to the alarming and disturbing treatment of same-sex-oriented people. Very few talk to the systemic homophobic prejudice in its varying manifestations except to single out the voice of Archbishop Desmond Tutu. This veteran black theologian has added his name to the fight against homophobia, particularly in Africa. At the launching of the book ‘*Sex, Love and Homophobia*’ (Baird:2004), for which he wrote the forward, Archbishop Tutu affirmed that homophobia is a ‘crime against humanity’ and ‘every bit as unjust as apartheid’. He stated that South Africans struggled against apartheid and were supported by people the world over; because black people were being blamed and made to suffer for something they could do nothing about, namely their very skins. He stated that it is the same with sexual orientation – it is a given.

Archbishop Tutu is of opinion that he could not have fought against the discrimination of apartheid and not also fight against the discrimination that homosexuals endure. He states that he is proud that, in South Africa, when the black people won the chance to build their own new Constitution, the human rights of all were explicitly cared for in the revised laws. He reiterates that South Africa’s Constitution guarantees equal rights notwithstanding sexual orientation, yet, he writes, as happens all over the world, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are being persecuted. “We treat them as pariahs and push them outside our communities. We make them doubt that they too are children of God and this must be nearly the ultimate blasphemy. We blame them for what they are.” He in particular regrets the dominant negative views among his church colleagues, black theologians and ministers. They maintain that the expression of love in a heterosexual monogamous relationship includes the physical and that the totality of love makes each increasingly godlike and compassionate. The Archbishop asks: “If this is so for the heterosexual, what earthly reasons have we to say that it is not the case with the homosexual?” For him these ‘destructive forces’ of ‘hatred and prejudice’ are evil. He argues: “A parent who brings up a child to be a racist damages that child, damages the community in which they live, and damages our hopes for a better world. A parent who teaches a child that there is only one sexual orientation and that anything else is evil denies our humanity and their own too” (Tutu in Baird 2004).

Activating the Black Theological Voice

From the above it appears obvious that all interventions crafted to address homophobic victimisation require a strengthened partnership between black theologians, the state, church and society. Ongoing identity-based discrimination (on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, HIV status and other characteristics) represents a fundamental challenge to Black Theology. To realise lasting social transformation, black theologians ought to boldly confront South Africa's enduring legacy of inequality, discrimination and prejudice. To achieve the Constitution's promise of gender transformation and social justice, collaboration is required to develop an informed and unified strategy towards ensuring that all South Africans are able to enjoy human rights. Black theology needs to build a collective morality that affirms human dignity and non-discrimination in a manner that is felt in the lived reality of all those discriminated against in South Africa.

Considering the historical task the black theologians performed against the cruelty of oppressors and discriminators, it is not unreasonable to expect that Black Theology, as a school of thought, to be in the forefront of the struggle towards overcoming discrimination against all persons. Their significant lack of meaningful reference and support for the black LGBT community speak volumes. Regretfully, there is virtually no reference to a legitimate contribution of black theologians in this regard. There seem to be no overt efforts towards an inclusive Black Theology that makes explicit provision for the LGBT component of the black communities. A possible inference would be that there is uneasiness around the subject among black theologians. The proverbial silence could indicate that Black Theology has fallen victim to its own homophobic preconceptions. Regrettably, this apparent silence on homophobic victimisation has contributed to black LGBT persecution, as well as to the division and discord within the black communities. The Christian churches in South Africa are not vocal enough in opposing the vicious injustices done towards LGBT persons; instead they pronounce condemnatory statements which in the name of Christianity encourage such persecution. This amounts to the same malicious practices whereby apartheid was substantiated by using nebulous biblical references. Where is the voice of Black Theology in the face of this type of victimisation?

Black theologians possess the historical clout to assist black homosexual persons to adopt and claim their own methods of liberation so to obtain inner and outer human emancipation. Since black homosexuals in South Africa have not entirely adopted their own methods of liberation, and have not yet discovered similar methods of liberation theologies in South Africa, it is precisely in this context that black liberation theologians have a task to perform. With their experiential expertise they can assist LGBT persons in working towards a locally acceptable black gay theology using the liberation ethic as a safeguard in a black cultural context. Nonetheless, before black theologians embark on such a task they need to confront their own cultural, religious, social and personal homophobia since the victim mind-set functions as a disincentive.

Black Theology and Xenophobia

Xenophobia has been dubbed as the 'new pathology' of the new South Africa by Bronwyn Harris (2002:169). With the transfer of political power in South Africa there emerged a new range of discriminatory practices together with their victims. Despite the transition from authoritarianism to democracy, prejudice and violence mark contemporary South Africa and the brunt of the new prejudices and violence are also directed against foreigners and in particular black African foreigners. Harris (2002:169) claims that "the foreigner stands at a

site where identity, racism and violent practice are reproduced". She portrays xenophobia "as negative, abnormal and the antithesis of a healthy, normally functioning individual or society" (2002:169). She states that, currently, it forms an inherent part of the South African culture of violence. In addition, xenophobia is perceived as a socially located phenomenon, characterised by a negative attitude or mind-set towards foreigners which is expressed in a deep dislike, a fear or even hatred towards them. Xenophobia is often connected with violence and physical abuse and for this reason Harris (2002:170) argues that it is more than an attitude – it is also a harmful activity. However, what is curious about xenophobia in South Africa is that it is not uniformly applied to all foreigners, as it is largely directed towards black foreigners, particularly those from other parts of Africa. Black hatred of other blacks, black-on-black violence, is a most fitting description of xenophobia in South Africa. Why black South Africans target their own African black brothers and sisters in such a violent and negative manner remains in itself a strange phenomenon.

Nonetheless, there are various explanations put forward to provide potential reasons for the violent form of xenophobia in South Africa. To provide explanations implies interrogating *why* it is present; identify the people that are targeted and the manner in which they are confronted. It is suggested that much of the hostility towards foreign black Africans emerged from the unfulfilled promises of the new regime in South Africa. This deep sense of disconcertedness is strongly connected to problems related to housing, education, health care, employment, poverty and general deprivation. According to C Tshitereke, also consulted by Bronwyn Harris (1998:171), in situations like these people create a 'frustration-scapegoat' and in the South African context blacks foreigners are the scapegoats.

In addition to the 'scapegoat hypothesis', Morris (1998:1125) explains that the fact that South Africa was isolated during the apartheid years and hardly ever allowed black foreigners into the country had limited South Africans' exposure to foreigners. This attitude of insularity created a space for South Africans to develop hostility and suspicion towards foreigners. As argued by Morris 1998:1125): "...the brutal environment created by apartheid with its enormous emphasis on boundary maintenance has also impacted on people's ability to be tolerant of differences". As a consequence, South Africans find differences threatening and dangerous and xenophobia exists because foreigners are different as well as unknown.

Social disorientation is a known experience all over the world, but in South Africa the violent, criminal component is an added factor. Curiously, this violent form of xenophobia, distinctive to South Africa, is not applied equally to all foreigners. African foreigners seem to be at greater risk than others. The social disorientation experienced in South Africa is associated with criminality and illegality as black foreigners are described as 'illegals', 'illegal aliens' and illegal immigrants together with other derogatory terms. These terms entail both criminality and difference. A more disturbing factor is that xenophobia is not only negative for healthy nation building, but is also exacerbated by South Africa's culture of violence and in this sense it has assumed the sick characteristics of a national pathological condition. African foreigners are victimised with the same violence which was used during the apartheid years as a political vehicle for liberation. The only difference now is that the violence is in fact a tool for criminality.

Harris (2002:180) maintains that: "Xenophobia is a form of violence and violence is the norm in South Africa." Violence, she argues, is an integral part of the social fabric of the 'new South Africa' although it is belied in certain quarters. Harris continues by suggesting that xenophobia as pathology is not only central to national discourse, but that it functions

within the culture of violence to give definition to the 'New South Africa' and the forms of identity that accompany this discourse (2002:180). To read xenophobia as a national pathology, because local black national identity seems under threat, is an area where Black Theology is called upon to be seriously at work towards a national cure for a national disease.

Liberating South Africans from this National Illness – Xenophobia

If there is an impression among blacks that they had arrived at freedom square and they can now relax and concentrate on other things (Mothlabi 2008:15) then in the light of xenophobia, this is indeed a false impression. Xenophobia, as a barefaced social illness, has infested South African society with dire consequences. This article holds the opinion that Black Theology is renegeing on its task by not applying liberation as an ethical principle in this context. An appeal can be made to the traditional values of African morality. Since "the ultimate goal of African traditional morality, indeed of all morality, was seen as the promotion of human welfare" Motlhabi (2008:56), Black Theology can appeal to these values in a socially oriented manner. He explains that good moral principles, according to African traditional morality, are those which befit the welfare of the human being. Goodness, says Motlhabi (2008:56), was described in terms such as kindness, faithfulness, compassion, hospitality, and peace lovingness. These qualities in turn were to bring dignity, respect, contentment, posterity and joy to all people within the community. This was all done to promote human life and human life was the supreme good toward which morality was aimed in the traditional African context.

As explained by Motlhabi (2008:56), traditionally in Africa the quest for human welfare was embraced by the value of *good neighbourliness* and this in turn was instrumental in the creation of good relations among people. Motlhabi (2008:56) continues stating that good neighbourliness was in effect the practical implementation of the value of *ubuntu*, which means humanness or personhood. The concept of *ubuntu* placed an emphasis on the person as the highest and most intrinsic value of Africanism. Traditionally, some of the manifestations of *ubuntu* were mutual respect, harmonious social and interpersonal relations, kindness, gentleness, cooperation and conformity to accepted communal customs. It was believed that the person who possessed all the above qualities not only possessed *ubuntu*, but is real *umuntu*, that is, a person indeed (Motlhabi (2008:56)). On the other hand, the person who did not possess these human qualities, that person is not a human being, not a person. In addition, says Motlhabi (2008:56): "good interrelationships among people following from neighbourliness implied a good standing with God." It is understood that what generally promoted human welfare and social harmony is that which is ethical and morally good and that which was detrimental to a human being's welfare was regarded as evil.

It appears that a possible antidote for black xenophobia is to revisit traditional African values. The question is: Is Black Theology prepared to stick out its neck and become involved in addressing these oppressive and discriminative social ills? Or is it prepared to declare itself obsolete and indifferent, ready to bury the hatchet?

Black Theology and Ecological Injustice

Ecology, says Steve Bishop (1991:14), means that we understand ourselves and our environment as being part of nature and there is an inseparable link between humanity and the earth on which we depend. To take social responsibility for planet earth implies that

there ought to be an assurance that the poor and working class will not get damaged by the irresponsible use of the earth's resources.

Traditional liberation theology gave much attention to the salvation of society since the liberation of people was of primary importance. The ecological crisis caused by the irresponsibility of human beings has affected the earth's atmosphere, the rivers and seas and all life forms and urgently demands the wisdom and involvement of the entire human community. This does not exclude the proponents of Black Theology. Denis Edwards (2001:xi) is of opinion that "some theological attitudes have contributed to exploitative attitudes and to heedless disregard for the good of the planet". Both the biblical and theological traditions own resources that can be retrieved and developed as an ecological theology. In theological circles there is a conviction that theology, and this includes Black Theology, can make vital contributions towards the healing of the planet. In fact, to respond to the serious nature of the ecological crisis is not an option for any theologian as the damage done to the earth and its resources has reached such alarming proportions which excuse no one. The extent of human exploitation and abuse of the earth is mostly felt and experienced by the poor.

Black theology needs to be involved in a redemptive theology of the earth and in the creation of a radically different ethos that would offer all peoples an ecologically sustainable future. Caring for the natural world is no longer an optional extra since concern for the environment is not confined to environmentalists and scientists. Environmental justice is situated at the heart of the guardianship of God's creation and should form part of the agenda of the black theological enterprise. Black theologians are called on to operate as earth stewards of ecological and environmental health by applying and advocating the ethic of liberation and, specifically, in terms of the irresponsibility of rich nations' impact on poorer nations in Africa. As the poor carry the brunt of environmental injustices, Black Theology already has a utilitarian focus. No one can turn a blind eye to the ramifications of the ecological crisis since the life-support systems of humans, all species and the planet itself are threatened.

Abuse of the earth comes in various forms and it is akin to human beings ill-treating each other. In a similar sense, caring for the earth ought to be a non-violent process and humane goals generally cannot be achieved by inhumane measures. Advocating sustainable development implies that humanity can be sustained without exploiting all the earth's resources. This implies getting in harmony with nature and treating the earth and its ecosystem with reverence and respect (Steve Bishop 1991). Pollution of the environment, the destruction of valuable trees, the burning of fossil fuels, the contamination of the rivers, the greenhouse effect, the depletion of the ozone layer, poisoning of water, air and land, hazardous wastes and oil spills all form part and parcel of the South African situation and weighs heavily on the poor, who become even more dispossessed and suffer additional repression.

Neither can Black Theology rescind on its important responsibility to be involved in protecting and affirming the intrinsic value of nature. To develop a new ecological consciousness among people and to assist in establishing an earth society that is peaceful, just and sustainable, Black Theology needs to assist other disciplines in their efforts to avoid placing additional stress on the earth system. This can be done by addressing the relationship between humanity and nature. To bring to realisation that nature is not the slave of the human landlord and that ecological problems cannot be solved by the inherent exploitative, domineering anthropocentrism of human beings. Black theology needs the conscious awareness of environmental discrimination in the sense that shack-dwellers often dwell adjacent to dumping grounds.

It is therefore the task of Black Theology to develop a human alertness to our interconnectedness with the earth. Humanity and the earth are inextricably bound together and redemption does not only pertain to humanity, but to the entire creation. Black theologians are therefore called upon to integrate environmental issues into the pattern of concern for justice. For black theologians to remain relevant and in service of humanity and creation there is a need to cultivate a culture of caring for the earth and its resources. Black theology is in a prime position to inculcate environmental ethics in people and there is enough biblical and theological evidence to substantiate ecological approaches to 'social justice'. Our ability to enjoy, use and survive on this planet is irrevocably interconnected with creation and while creation is not divine, it is nevertheless considered sacred, and therefore needs to be treated with balanced care and respect. Will Black Theology remain insensitive in the face of this very important relation to the earth?

Conclusion

In the last twenty years, Black Theology has short circuited its liberative task in South Africa. Its proverbial voicelessness apropos the blatant oppression still active in South Africa and so apparent in the face of existing poverty, xenophobia, gender discrimination, homosexuality, ecological disasters, women and child trafficking, women and child abuse, cultural abuse as well as corrupt leadership and management is reprehensible. If the second generation of black theologians are to take note and attend to the critical issues that still need the attention of Black Theology there will be no need to make funeral arrangements as the prophetic voice of Black Theology will be task oriented.

The critical question to ask is similar to that asked by Bradley (2010:167): "With whom does Black Theology side today, who are the victims of oppression today?" For Black Theology to be appropriately functional today it needs to voice its ethical engagement with the oppressed and look intensely through the lens of those who are oppressed, discriminated against, and marginalised. The principle and practice of liberation ethics deals with the aspect of *being in relation*: being in relation to God, being in relation with others, being in relation to nature, being in relation to self and being in relation to this new found freedom in South Africa. It is the task of Black Theology to labour sedulously against the dehumanisation of all oppressed people and oppressive situations. Black theology and black theologians should therefore serve as a kind of moral cynosure in putting forward moral incentives for the liberation of those still in bondage. The verdict: the task of Black Theology is far from complete.

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