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Volume II Spring — 1975 Number II

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Whitehead's dipolar theism avoids this gulf between God and the world and it makes God's involvement in the world a metaphysical necessity.

Dr. Herbert O. Edwards, Sr. does a critique of selected white ethicists showing how their theories have inadequately dealt with the problem of racism and black oppression in America. He argues that this inadequacy in part results from the negative influence that certain theological and ethical doctrines of the reformers had on the major White American Protestant Christian theological ethicists. He contends, therefore, that black ethicists must look elsewhere for data and methodology in order to construct a black ethic.

Dr. Cecil W. Cone does a description of the black religious experience from the perspective of the slaves' experience with the almighty sovereign God. He sees the conversion experience as the key to interpreting the black religious experience.

Miss Barbara C. Harris in “Concern For Spiritual Input” says that the Holy Spirit is the foundation of spiritual input. She argues against compartmentalizing the operation of the Holy Spirit. She calls for an openness in terms of how we understand and respond to the operation of the Holy Spirit.
Christian Education and the Black Church: 
A Contextual Approach

INTRODUCTION

Christian educators in the black church are beginning to recognize some new issues involved in defining their taste. Primary among these questions are not only the standard ones of objectives, content, curriculum, learning, teaching, leadership, and evaluation, but the more insistent and crucial question of the relationship of these to the black experience, the black community, the black church, black theology and black liberation. In other words, the new questions for Christian education as they are viewed by the black church are essentially contextual. From goal-setting to evaluating, black educators in black churches are viewing the educational process in relation to the kind of learning and teaching that considers the black experience as central and the liberation of black people as its focal point. Briefly, then, the new definition of Christian education views it as that process which teaches concepts, attitudes and skills which facilitate meaningful learning in relation to the black experience and the church’s implicit taste of humanization and liberation.

This new definition of Christian education in relation to the black church is not ephemeral. It has a long and deep history. The main outline of that history must be understood if black church members are to be involved meaningfully in the task of liberation in the black church through Christian education. The purpose of this paper, then, is to review that history and to suggest some implications it may have for the theory, practice and design of Christian education in black churches in America.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The earliest efforts toward the Christian education of blacks in America grew out of and centered around Christian evangelization and missions.

There are indications of intention and deed regarding the Christian education of blacks on the part of both Puritans and Anglicans in the first quarter of the 17th century.

“As early as 1620, when the slave trade began, English clergymen had expressed an interest in extending religious training to those in bondage beyond the seas and had made some progress in this direction.”

In 1624, Anthony Johnson, one of the twenty indentured African servants brought to America in 1619, and his wife, Isabell, became the parents of the first black child to be born in "English" America. The child, a boy, was taken to the Anglican church in Jamestown, (Virginia) where he was christened, "William," in the faith of his parents. It is reasonably certain that these black parents were catechized prior to, or during that Baptism.2

Father White (Jesuit) brought two West Indian Negroes (Sousa Mathias and Francisco) with him as personal servants when he came to America (Virginia) in 1634. In all likelihood both of these servants had been Baptized prior to their arrival here and had been given informal instruction by their masterpriest.3

Prior to the institutionalization of chattel slavery which began in Virginia as early as 1667, many examples of Christian education of this kind can be found.

With the rise and spread of chattel slavery the situation alters, radically. Whereas, previously both Baptism and instruction were available routinely, the question of Baptizing slaves raised the issue of his status as a Baptized Christian in relation to his condition of servitude.

Here the Churches compromised both the civil and spiritual rights of the slave by equivocating over the meaning of Baptism and adulterated the content of his religious instruction. For an example, on the issue of slavery, neither the Church nor the Virginia colonists objected when the Virginia Assembly declared that:

"Baptism doth not alter the condition of the person as to his bondage or freedom; that divers masters, freed from this doubt, may more carefully endeavour the propagation of Christianity."4

Between 1619-1666 Baptism and Christian education were available somewhat as ends in themselves. After 1667 they were to be means to the end of maintaining the institution of slavery and placating the conscience of the Church. While this situation was not without some "benefit" to the slave, i.e., it obtained literacy for many, it also corrupted her judgment and compromised her power in dealing with her larger future responsibilities to blacks.

Black Enslavement and Christian Education Missions: 1667-1863

While Christian education among black people in America antedates any other organized effort to improve the slave's condition of chattel servitude and illiteracy, these educational experiences were generally,
truncated to meet the requirements of slavemasters. They were also held on a segregated basis.

**ANGLICAN-PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL**

The first major missionary effort directed toward the elevation of the status of blacks in America was that of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (1701). It was founded for the purpose of

"...supplying the destitution of religious institutions and privileges among the inhabitants of the North American colonies...and...of extending the Gospel to the Indian and Negroes."5

Missionaries from this Society evangelized and taught among blacks from 1702-1819 along the Eastern seaboard from New England to South Carolina.

Following the Revolutionary War mission Christian education work shifted to the local parishes of Protestant Episcopal Churches where scores of rectors conducted “colored Sunday Schools” as a regular part of their parish activities.

**ROMAN CATHOLIC**

Between the introduction of chattel slavery and slave-emancipation thousands of black slaves had become Roman Catholics. The Catholic treatment of slaves, generally, and their education was unique. Unlike most Protestant groups, who conceived of conversion and education as means toward developing a more efficient quasi-human labor machine, Catholics viewed conversion and education more as ends in themselves. In keeping with this, Catholic treatment of slaves was, generally, somewhat more humane. Much of their religious instruction was received in the homes of their masters, where they were thought of as “the family” or “our family.” Barely, were black Catholic families separated or sold without each other.

Christian instruction was given to slave workers on the plantations and to free blacks in the Negro “settlements.” From the very beginning Sunday Schools were established for both free and servant blacks to supplement their secular education. Such classes usually met on Sunday afternoon or during the week.

**CONGREGATIONAL**

The great Puritan divine, Cotton Mather favored both the conversion and baptism of slaves. Together with John Eliot, he also favored religious instruction for them. Richard Baxter in a tract published in London in 1673 is found in agreement with Eliot and Mather.

Stewart found in the middle of the 19th century that the religious education of Blacks in Connecticut Congregationalism

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"...had increased and their instruction in matters of religion was an affair of importance."6

LUTHERANS

From the earliest years of the 19th century, Lutherans in America manifested an interest in the Christian education of blacks. Sunday Schools for blacks were found to have been related to their churches in both the North and South. Of course, these facilities were used on a segregated basis.

THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

Instances of Quaker missionary Christian education activity among blacks are fairly numerous. The women of the Maryland Society protested the lack of education for black children in 1678. In 1679 and again in 1690, George Fox writes to America, “And, also, you must teach and instruct blacks and Indians...”7 The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting required Christian education for their slaves,... during the time they have them...” Anthony Benezet began his evening school for the religious and secular instruction of blacks in 1750. Black Quaker, Paul Cuffe, opened his school for blacks in Massachusetts about this same time. In North Carolina (1815) Quakers were still advocating literary and religious instruction for blacks.

The Society of Friends never attracted large numbers of black worshippers, however, despite their liberal stand and willingness to educate blacks in religion.

PRESBYTERIAN

Virginia Presbyterians initiated efforts toward the religious education of blacks as early as 1747 through the ministry of Samuel Davies and John Todd.8 Presbyterians were also among the first major religious denominations to advocate education for blacks after their Emancipation. In 1800 the General Assembly recommended “the instruction of Negroes, in various parts of the country, who were destitute of the means of grace.”

The United Presbyterians began a rigorous Mission Sunday School Program in the South in 1890 out of which came more than 3,800 Sunday Schools and churches.

MORAVIAN

One of the few religious denominations that came to America, primarily, to evangelize were the Moravians. About 1735 they organized a congregation consisting of Indians and blacks as well as white settlers. In 1738 we find the Moravians attempting to organize missions for blacks. The principal activity in these missions were religious instruc-

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8Jones, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-39, passim.
tion. Nathanael Seidel and Eric Westman itinerated west of the Susquehanna River in the winter of 1747. Later they made their way to Virginia where they catechized and evangelized blacks. In 1749 in Philadelphia, blacks sought out the Moravians for instruction and baptism. Blacks attended the “black” chapel and Sunday School built for them in Salem, North Carolina in 1823. In 1865 the Moravians founded a mission among the emancipated blacks with a “flourishing Sunday School.”

**METHODISTS**

Methodist concern for the Christian education of blacks is evidenced in a General Conference Journal entry in 1785. In answer to the question, “What can be done in order to instruct poor children, white and black, to read?” The answer was, “Let us labor, as the heart of one man, to establish Sunday Schools, in or near the place of public worship.”

In 1785 William Elliott is said to have founded Methodist Sunday Schools in Virginia, one for blacks and one for whites. A Sunday School was held in the home of Thomas Crenshaw (Virginia) in 1786. John Charleston, later to become an outstanding African Methodist Episcopal minister, attended the Crenshaw’s school. In 1787 George Daughty, a Methodist preacher, was drenched with water at the public pump for conducting a Sunday School including blacks. An “African Sunday School existed in New York about 1817. It had possibly been promoted by the black Methodists, probably those who became AME Zions.

**III. BLACKS AND THE SUNDAY SCHOOL MOVEMENT**

The Sunday School Movement in America never effectively related itself to black people. The bulk and center of Protestant education has never shown more than a token interest in comprehensive non-segregated education, nor has it ever really come to terms with its white racism. It is interesting to trace this development.

The vast majority of English and other missionaries serving in America withdrew at the close of the Revolutionary War. This left the missionizing and evangelizing of blacks (and Indians) to the emerging American denominations. While there was no lack of enthusiasm to continue the work of organizations such as the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, the direction of this American development in the area of Christian education in relation to blacks moved toward segregated Sunday Schools.

There are further distressing developments in the Sunday School

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movement in relation to blacks. There was a high degree of sensitivity and concern on the part of some white patrons of Sunday Schools for blacks for the possible consequence of slaves learning more than the restricted and innocuous biblical material requisitioned by slaveholders.

An example of another kind of circumscription in this period is mirrored in Carter G. Woodson's observation:

"The colored pauper children apprenticed by church wardens were prohibited by statute immediately after Gabriel's (Prosser) Insurrection in 1800."\(^{11}\)

Still another example is W.E.B. DuBois' report in connection with the black revolt under Toussaint L'Overture in Haiti, that South Carolina passed a law declaring:

"It shall not be lawful for any number of slaves, free Negroes, mulattoes, or mestizoes, even in the company of white persons to meet together and assemble for the purpose of mental instruction or religious worship, either before the rising of the sun or the going down of the same."\(^{12}\)

Levi Coffin's Sunday School also upset a number of slaveholders. Again Woodson reports:

"In 1821 certain masters were sending their slaves to a Sunday School opened by Levi Coffin... Before the slaves had learned more than to spell words of two or three syllables, masters became unduly alarmed, thinking that such instruction would make the slaves discontented."\(^{13}\)

Despite the racially bigoted character of the Sunday School in the post-Revolutionary years, it still must be emphasized that it was an important factor in Negro education. Woodson reminds us of this:

"Although cloaked with the purpose of bringing the blacks to God by giving them religious instruction the institution (Sunday Schools) permitted its workers to teach them reading and writing when they were not allowed to study such in other institutions."\(^{14}\)

**ORAL INSTRUCTION PERIOD**

The objective of the American Sunday School Union's "Mississippi Valley Enterprise," launched in 1830 was "to organize a Sunday School within two years, in every destitute place in the Valley of the Mississippi." This "Enterprise" never reached blacks. As a matter of fact between 1830 and 1890 little or nothing was done for the religious education of Negroes in the Mississippi Valley, despite the fact that this section compromised one of the most densely populated black areas in the country.

This "by-pass" was characteristic of the operational style of the A.S.S.U., particularly during the slavery era. Laurence Jones suggests the reason for this as he speaks about the A.S.S.U. as well as the

\(^{13}\)Woodson, *op. cit.*, p. 114.
\(^{14}\)Woodson, *op. cit.*, p. 124.
American Tract Society and the American Bible Society and their defections from the Abolition Movement.

“These groups were charged with ignoring the whole issue of slavery in order not to alienate those slave holders who offered financial support.”

The main thrust and dominant motif in the Christian education that was offered to blacks during slavery and especially from 1800 onward was not “religious” or “Christian” basically, but rather sub-Christian and racist.

Prohibited by the “black codes” from gathering or being gathered together as a group to learn to read or write, much Christian education from about 1834 onward was relegated to what Woodson calls “religion without letters” or oral (catechetical) instruction.

The most widely used of these catechisms was the one developed by William Capers (1790-1855). In reality it was a theology of black de-humanization, e.g.:

Q. What did God make man out of?
A. The dust of the ground.

Q. What does this teach you?
A. To be humble.

The slave was not only taught to be “humble” but he was taught that slavery can be justified. In Capers’ catechism the slave read that God “sentenced” man to “labor and sorrow, pain and death.” This is a significant modification of its source—John Wesley’s catechism, which read that mankind was “driven out of paradise and became subject to pain, and death.”

THE NADIR

Following the Emancipation of the slaves (1863), the conclusion of the Civil War (1865) and the Reconstruction Era (1866-1876), black Sunday Schools were generally neglected, especially in the South. What energy and church funds that were available were put into secular schools for the ex-slaves, forming the foundation for a system of denominationally related black colleges. Christian (parish) education was left largely to Northern missionaries or to the black churches that were missionizing in the then “liberated” South. Some few black Sunday Schools were even united with local and state Unions in this period, especially in the larger urban centers of the North.

Generally speaking, however, the era 1863-1893 represented a low point in Christian (parish) education among blacks in so far as the A.S.S.U. and the white denominations were concerned.


In 1893 the International Sunday School Convention meeting in St. Louis, Missouri took an action that created a field-secretariat approach to Sunday School Missions. Between 1895 and 1908 four pioneer black religious educators traveled throughout the South promoting black Sunday Schools and training leaders, particularly in areas where none existed. These men were: L. B. Maxwell, Silas X. Floyd, G. B. Marcus, and James E. Shepherd.

About this time other denominations, especially the Methodists, Episcopalians and Baptists, created denominational field staff positions in the area of Sunday School and in some cases youth work.

The inability of the local black Sunday School Associations to raise their part of the budget for the I.S.S.A. plan caused it to fail.

The Clifton Plan

In search of a more feasible plan to improve Christian Education among blacks, W. N. Hartshorn, President of the International Sunday School Association called together a group of leading religious educators and Sunday School workers at his summer home in Massachusetts in 1908. The 1908 Clifton Conference is notable because it was the first such meeting that included blacks to discuss and solve “their” problem of Christian education.

The “Clifton Plan,” produced at this conference, envisioned courses in religious education and Sunday School administration in the black colleges whose students and graduates would train black lay teachers and Sunday School workers in local leadership training type courses. The Clifton Plan raised the level of performance of thousands of black Sunday School teachers. It was not capable of reaching a sufficient number of teachers, however, especially in the non-urban and non-college town areas.

Summary

Early efforts toward the Christian education of blacks grew out of the mission impulse. This motive was subverted by the equivocation of the churches on the issue of the human and political rights of chattel slaves.

Christian education among blacks antedates any other organized effort to improve the slave’s condition of illiteracy. Much education so received however, was a truncated version of the Biblical message accommodated to the requirements of slaveholders. It also assumed black intellectual inferiority.

The (white) Sunday School Movement did not relate itself to blacks

in helpful or effective ways. It showed only token interest in integrated schools and failed consistently, to come to terms with its racist policies and practices.

IV. BLACK CHURCH MOVEMENTS AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

The main lines of Christian education development in black denominations which originated in the early part of the nineteenth century become highly instructive as we view the current task of Christian education in the black church. Representing as they did separatism occasioned by racial prejudice and discrimination rather than disputes over doctrine, liturgy or polity, they perceived rather early the incompatibility of the “white over black” attitude of their fellow-Christians and opted for a separate development approach. This approach had considerable viability at its beginning, it continued into the present century. Presently it serves as a launching model for contextual learning in black churches, generally.

A.M.E.

In 1795 Richard Allen, the founder and first Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church established in 1816, organized the first black (Church related) Sunday School in America. Charles S. Smith organized the first black Sunday School Union in 1882 and in 1888 became one of the first Black Christian Education executives as Corresponding Secretary of the Union. W. H. Coleman conducted the first Black Leadership Training Enterprise in 1874 while youth work in the form of Christian Endeavor societies started early in the 1880's. Adult work began in the 1850's as literary societies. By the 1920's the denomination had a comprehensive, national program of Christian Education.

A.M.E. Church School literature, “the First ... ever published in this country for the exclusive use of Negro Sunday Schools” has been published since the 1800's. In 1936 a Board of Religious Education was established to coordinate Sunday Schools, Allen Christian Endeavor Societies, and Leadership Education programs. In 1952 this Board became the Division of Christian Education of the General Board of Education.

A.M.E. Zion (1821)

Christian education in the form of Sunday School work was organized in A.M.E. Zion Churches along the Eastern seaboard and as far West

as Pittsburgh a generation prior to the Civil War.\textsuperscript{19} A Sunday School Union was founded in 1889. In 1916 the A.M.E. Zion General Conference elected a General Superintendent of Sunday Schools, and an Editor of Sunday School literature, and created a Sunday School Board. In the 1880's the Varick (Youth) Christian Endeavor Society was organized. Adult education, as in the A.M.E. Zion Churches, began in the form of literacy societies in the 1860's.

Scant records about the first publication of Sunday School and youth literature in the A.M.E. Zion Church indicate that it got underway about 1876, prior to which time it probably used Methodist Episcopal materials.

In 1924 the General Conference combined the Sunday School and Christian Endeavor Department forming the Department of Religious Education. In 1932 this was merged with the Department of Education to create the Christian Education Department, the name of which was later changed to the Board of Christian Education.

C.M.E. (1870)

Sunday Schools existed in the C.M.E. Church prior to its organization as a denomination in 1870. They were organized into a department in 1918. An Epworth League Department was organized in 1902. In 1934 these departments were merged to form the General Board of Religious Education. Between 1934 and 1938 the youth of the denomination were organized and in 1950 the General Conference Board of Education was merged with the Board of Religious Education to form the General Board of Christian Education.

The curriculum materials used in the C.M.E. Church are adapted versions of the materials of the United Methodist Church.

Baptists (1880)

Baptist Sunday Schools had existed among blacks since the 1770's. James D. Tyms, in his volume, *The Rise of Religious Education Among Negro Baptists*\textsuperscript{20} places the beginnings of denomination-wide organized Christian Education among black Baptists in 1895 when the National Baptist Educational Convention met in Atlanta, Georgia. Following an internal struggle respecting the control of writing, editing, printing and publishing printed resources for Baptist Sunday Schools, etc. a National Baptist Publishing Board was established in Nashville under black management. Other administrative-program units of the National Baptist Convention, Inc. were: The Sunday School Congress and The Baptist Young People's Union Board; later the Baptist Young People's Training Union (BYPU).

In 1915 The Convention divided. The National Baptist Convention,


Inc. organized the National Sunday School and B.Y.P.U. Congress, a merger of the former Sunday School Board and National B.Y.P.U. Boards.

V. THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION

The basic components of Black Protestant education today are Sunday Schools and Youth Groups. These agencies, like the black churches, have never reached and are not now reaching more than a minority of black children, youth, adults and families. Also like the black church, the Sunday School and Youth groups have relatively conventional and conservative approaches to Christian education.

Mays and Nicholson (1933) in their singular, if somewhat dated study of “The Sunday Church School” found in The Negro’s Church, more than confirm this hypothesis. In the area of enrollment and attendance they reported that the “…membership of most of the Sunday Church Schools is less than half the church membership.” In their study of 609 urban churches they found that,

“The aggregate enrollment in the schools is 109,865 while the aggregate church membership is 357,169…The Sunday Church School enrollment is 40.7 per cent of the membership in churches with fewer than 1,000 members; 31.3 per cent in churches with between 1,000 and 2,000 members; 20.0 per cent in churches with between 2,000 and 3,000; 15.5 per cent in churches with between 3,600 and 4,000; and 18.0 per cent in churches with 4,000 members or more.”

Their finding, that, “the larger the membership of the church, the less likely is it to have a school enrollment comparable with its size”, is a sobering fact, if it is considered that Black Protestants in the urban centers particularly, seem inclined to attend large churches. An additional factor causes concern in the constituency-enrollment picture is the attendance factor. Mays and Nicholson report that:

“While the total enrollment of the Sunday church schools is 109,865, the average attendance is only 65,211, or 59.4 per cent of that enrollment. The large number of absentees (about 44,654) presents a problem, in that schools must discover some way of reducing the number.”

As in the enrollment picture Mays and Nicholson point out again that:

“In churches with large memberships, not only is the Sunday church school enrollment proportionately less than smaller churches, but the average attendance is also less.”

A third factor which Mays and Nicholson mention is the preponderance of children and the paucity of youth in the statistical profile of the black Sunday school and youth groups studied.

There are other crucial problems that were highlighted in the Mays and Nicholson study. In the area of curriculum materials it was found that out of the 608 Sunday church schools studied, 94.8 per cent used

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22 Mays / Nicholson, op. cit., p. 127.
the Improved Uniform Lessons, while only 5.2 per cent used graded material. They found that extra biblical material was seldom used and that "little or no account is taken of the teaching values available in history, biography, . . . etc."24

Mays and Nicholson found leadership problems in the Christian education programs studied. Most pastors did not lend outstanding support to their educational programs. Less than six churches had full-time Directors of Christian Education. It was also found that the college and professionally trained blacks were least available for teaching and for assistance in the educational programs of the Churches and that standards for the utilization of teachers were generally lacking.

An outstanding problem in black Churches is that of young people. Mays and Nicholson found that the youth work received comparatively less emphasis, was poorly organized, lacked specificity regarding objective and catered to a basically transient membership. The leadership of youth in the Churches studied by Mays and Nicholson was almost completely dominated by adults.

While this study of Christian education in black Churches is dated and Christian education in some black Churches has improved, the basic problems indicated in the study have dominated the field of this investigation until very recently.

Summary

The basic setting for Christian education in the black Church, the Sunday School and "youth groups", have been widely influenced by white models that in their present forms they are generally inadequate to cope with the contemporary tasks of black experiencing and liberation.

Black Protestant programs of education, limited almost exclusively to Sunday Schools and "youth groups", reach only a minority of black children, youth, adults or families.

The central emphasis in Black Protestant church education must shift from a traditionalist to a liberation orientation.

VI. BLACK THEOLOGY AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Black theology confronts Christian education, especially in the black Church, with the challenge to engage itself effectively in the liberation of oppressed black people. This challenge has historic significance. It marks the first time in the history of Church life in America that a racial minority has aggressively challenged the theological assumptions of the Christian faith on the basis of its own ethic of inclusiveness. Also, it is the first time that a color-minority has articulated such a protest in the form of an alternative system and church style.

In this section of the paper primary attention will be given to some of the implications of black theologies for Christian education. Christian educators who are black must raise at least three questions in attempting to develop an educational design to complement the current movement of Black Theology: (1) rationale, (2) guidelines, (3) design.

The rationale for a church education program developed from a black theological perspective is four-fold. First, it is congenial with and “suggests a felt need to reconstruct a world view as it concerns an entire people”. That world view is a new future that black people can have. It is a future in which black people believe and know that they can be free if they want that freedom enough to suffer, sacrifice and perhaps even die for it. It is the recognition by black people that “we are somebodies”.

Second, the agenda of the black community in America is being reshaped to define what that “somebodiness” means — individually, socially, culturally, economically, politically and theologically. Essentially it calls for the humanization of the dehumanized, the liberation of the oppressed and the empowerment of the powerless.

Third, the Black Church has affirmed this agenda in its historic “Black Power statement”: “We commit ourselves as churchmen to make more meaningful in the life of our institutions our conviction that Jesus Christ reigns in the ‘here’ and ‘now’ as well as in the future he brings in upon us.”

Fourth, the black agenda must begin with black people and black people must initiate the black agenda. Liberation is not something that can be done for a people. In solidarity with others in similar situations, women, Asians, Hispanics, Nadirs, Americans — the “consciences” of black people must be raised, our identity self-affirmed and our liberation claimed. Implicit in any educational effort is the objective of change. Christian education, therefore, fulfills a highly normative function when it seeks to manipulate the teaching-learning process to the end that justice and a new humanity may emerge.

Guidelines for developing the implications of Black Theology for Christian education in black Churches grow out of and center around the experiences, relationships and situations that black people use in their day-to-day struggle for survival in a basically white-oriented society. In the light of this discussion they seem to give several directions.

1. A theoretical and operational educational model that conceptualizes an “empowering process” for a “powerless” minority.
2. A cognitive model of learning that maximizes the biblical, historical and theological sources and images of the Christian faith as authentically “for others” and pro-black without being anti-white or racist.
3. A model of learning that is “holistic”, i.e., it emphasizes the organic or “whole” nature of existence rather than the compartmentalize

aspect thus insuring and guaranteeing a wide frame of reference for the inclusion of differences and uniqueness.

4. A model of socialization that permits free interaction of ideas, concepts, customs and heritages to intermingle without attending prejudices with the result that all are inherited as a result.

5. A model of leadership in and through which parents, teachers, pastors and power figures can see and be influenced by what Carl Rogers calls the development of “fully-functioning persons capable of impacting society…”

In this concluding section of the paper the writer will suggest an educational design to embody the rationale and implement the guidelines that have been suggested above.

First, let it be said that the objective in curriculum and teaching the Christian faith in relation to the black experience can best be achieved if viewed from a contextual prospective i.e., the facilitation of the learning of black persons in such a way that they become aware of God as the God of the oppressed and of his self disclosures in the redemptive and empowering love of Jesus Christ, the liberator that they come to know who they are, and what their human situation means and how they can and may best respond in love and faith through their Black Christian experience, personally and socially.

A CONFLICT — CHANGE MODEL

There are six components in the following conflict-change model for the Christian education experience in relation to the black experience:

1. Conceptualization — the basic step — developing and facilitating a process in which black learners may come to a fundamental understanding of the nature of the Gospel in relation to the concrete situation in which they are and have a sense of God's power through Christ as being with them and for them.

2. Awareness — developing and facilitating a process in which black learners may come to a conscious awareness of the nature and extent of the oppressive forces and circumstances from which liberation (for them) is absolutely necessary for their humanization.

3. Analysis — developing and facilitating a process in which black learners may possess the ability and skill to analyze effectively, the personal, attitudinal, institutional and systemic dimensions of their oppression and make a determinative choice to become free or remain in bondage.

4. Conceptualization — developing and facilitating a process in which black learners are able to conceptualize and announce a new future — their own model of self (personal) liberation and/or social (committing liberation).

5. Praxis — developing and facilitating a process in which black learners come to command the ability to “be responsible” and to enact in some objective way the ideas they hold to be true and to become “free agents” in dealing with the theologizing process as it flows out of their historical situations.

6. Community — developing and enabling persons and groups to initiate, “grow in”, “share” and extend “communities of the committed” for the purpose, support, encouragement, praxis identification and radical change.
Education as Liberation: An Analysis of Paulo Freire

INTRODUCTION

Education as liberation is the interesting and provocative theme of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.\(^1\) This book, written by Dr. Paulo Freire, a Brazilian Social educator, insists that significant political-social change can be effected by educational methodology. A descriptive and analytical examination of Freire’s theory as presented in Pedagogy is the primary purpose of this presentation. This brief study is arranged in four sections. Section one is the introduction and consists of a brief biographical sketch of Freire, and a summary of the book’s main thesis. Section two is a presentation of Freire’s underlying philosophy and section three is an exposition of his theory of education. The final section discusses some problems that may be encountered during the implementation of such a theory.

A. Biographical Sketch

Freire began life in 1921 as a member of Recife, Brazil’s middle class. But as a result of the American Stock Market crash of 1929 he was reduced to a member of the lower class. Even after struggling all the way up to a doctorate from the University of Recife, he was subsequently expelled from his country because of his work on behalf of the oppressed. Both with UNESCO in Chile and as an educational consultant at Harvard University, he continued his work among the urban and rural poor (10-12).\(^2\) Freire has known oppression first hand. He does not therefore, write from an objective uninvolved perspective. His style is passionate and evangelistic. He presents his ideas as an oppressed man to oppressed men.

B. Basic Thesis

*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is the statement of a developing educational theory that has its roots in the philosophy of humanism. Dr. Freire believes that education can be a potent instrument for social reconstruction. The theory’s ultimate goal is the political, economic and social liberation of all people via a dialogical-praxis methodology called “conscientizacao.” This method is built on the conviction that when oppressed people are fully conscious of their plight, and are aware of

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\(^2\) The numerals in parenthesis refer to pages in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 
alternatives to their plight and the possibilities for changing their plight, that they will work with their leaders to alter their oppressive situation.

The dialogical-praxis methodology stresses the necessity of a relationship of mutual love and faith between the revolutionary leaders and the people. The method stresses that the relationship between the leaders and people should be that of Subject-Subject (I-Thou) rather than Subject-Object (I-it) and that the problem-posing method of program-content building should be used rather than the authoritarian, this-is-what-you-need-to-know approach. At every stage of the struggle reflection and action must be carried on simultaneously.

The “end-product” of this educational-political process is the “new man” who is neither oppressed nor oppressor but “man in the process of achieving freedom” for himself and others (30, 33-34).

I. PHILOSOPHY: HUMANISM

Philosophically Paulo Freire is first and foremost a humanist (27-29; 39f.; 61-64). Although his book is liberally sprinkled with “religious” phrases like love, hope, faith, re-born, conversion, new man, etc., one gets the overwhelming impression that he believes that “man is the measure of all things.” He does not overtly deny the existence of God but nowhere does he affirm his existence or attribute to him any active role in the world’s creation or administration. In one negative reference he states that some of the oppressed believe that their circumstances are decreed by God (48), but otherwise he simply ignores divine existence and gives his full attention to man.

In Freire’s thinking man consists primarily of body and consciousness. Bodily, man is a part of nature and shares nature’s basic characteristics. It is man’s consciousness of his distinction from nature and other persons and particularly his “consciousness of consciousness” that makes him a unique creature. This consciousness of consciousness not only distinguishes people from the rest of the world but gives them power over the world. It is this unique consciousness that gives humans the ability to “speak the word,” to “name the world” and thereby “to transform its reality” (75ff.).

Freirean reality (political reality) is of two kinds: subjective and objective. Subjective reality is the situation as it is perceived by the immediate participants in the situation. Objective reality is the situation in its totality. For instance, in Freire’s world there are two classes of people: the oppressed and the oppressors. Each class is aware of its relationship to the other group on a general basis but neither is conscious of the total reality of their situational relationship. Oppressors usually say that the oppressed are in their predicament because they are by nature intellectually less endowed, lazy and generally unmotivated. The oppressed often agree with their oppressors and acquiesce in the “fact” that their lot is the “will of God,” or just the way things are. In both cases, members of each class are experiencing a kind of subjective reality.
They are looking at the situation as it is apparently, and stating reality as each sees it subjectively.

Now Freire states that the objective reality can only be perceived by a critical examination of the total situation from a historical, social, economic and political perspective. From such a perspective the objective reality may be that the oppressors have more (goods, services, opportunities, power, etc.) not because of who they are — in terms of natural endowment — but because of what they have done — in terms of robbing the oppressed. Because they have seized and maintained the power, the oppressors have used that power to name the world and define reality both for themselves and the oppressed. And have claimed this power to name and define as their exclusive prerogative.

Now one of the main points stemming from Freire's humanist philosophical base is that this power to name the world and define reality is not the exclusive prerogative of the oppressors but the prerogative of all who are human. He argues that the power to speak the word, to name the world and transform it is what makes people human, and that any thing, or person or group who thwarts this power is a dehumanizing force that must be overthrown.

Another of Freire's main ideas is that only the oppressed can perform the act of self-liberation. The oppressors have various kinds of economic, social, political and psychological stakes in the oppressed remaining oppressed. Their whole sense of reality is bound up in the oppressor-oppressed dialectic. The oppressor cannot liberate the oppressed because he is dependent upon the oppressed for his perverted sense of reality and is therefore unwittingly bound by the chains of his own oppressive reality. The oppressor is unliberated; therefore, if the oppressed are to be free they must liberate themselves and their oppressors. Freire suggests that this liberation can be achieved by a special kind of education called pedagogy of the oppressed.

II. EDUCATIONAL-POLITICAL THEORY: CONSCIENTIZACAO

The word that Freire uses to summarize his special kind of education is a Spanish term conscientizacaño. Myra Ramos, the translator of Pedagogy of the Oppressed defines the term as “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and (learning) to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (19). It seems to me that this term, transliterated into English as conscientization, encompasses at least three English words. They are: 1) consciousness which has to do with awareness, 2) conscientiousness which is concerned with action, and 3) consecration which has to do with an attitude of dedication, in this case, to certain spiritual qualities that give meaning and impetus to liberating awareness and action. Conscientization is at once a way of thinking, acting and feeling. It is a politically oriented educational theory
dedicated to helping oppressed people think and act their way toward liberation. Let us now look at these three words separately and use them as hooks upon which to hang some of Freire's major ideas.

A. Consciousness

One of Freire's basic assumptions is that freedom is essential to full humanity. He does not enter into a philosophical discussion regarding the matter of absolute versus limited freedom. His concern is with what he calls "limit-situations" in which oppressed people's freedom are severely restricted in political, economic and social contexts (34, 73). He is especially concerned with situations in which one group of persons (oppressors) enjoy extended degrees of freedom at the expense of other groups of people (the oppressed). In such a limit-situation both groups are dehumanized. The oppressed become less human because their access to human alternatives are severely restricted and the oppressor become dehumanized because their dehumanizing activities tend to greatly develop their sub-human qualities. But since the oppressors perceive their freedom not as a part of their basic humanity but as a result of their ability to acquire and possess, they must continue to oppress others in order to acquire more. It is from their sense of having that they receive their sense of being (43-46).

Given this situation, it becomes clear that the oppression syndrome is going to have to be broken by those who profit least from it and Freire contends that the first step in breaking the chains of oppression is to raise the consciousness level of the oppressed. The consciousness raising process is initiated by reflective dialogue with the oppressed, through which they become increasingly aware of the dynamics of their situation. For instance, why is it that those who do the hardest labor in the production of goods and services often reap the least benefit from their labors? Why is it that the poor majority is at the political mercy of the rich majority? Why is it that it is usually the same relatively small groups of persons or families that are in control socially, politically, and economically? If all people are equally human and if freedom is a characteristic of humanness, then why do the great economic, social and political power discrepancies exist between the classes and the masses?

Freire suggests that an important part of the pedagogy of the oppressed is the raising of just such questions by and with the poor. But not in a bookish, classroom, academic kind of educational setting or process. Rather, these concerns should be expressed and dealt with in an in-the-situation, on-the-spot, person-to-person dialogical fashion. He calls it the "problem-posing," versus the "banking" approach to education (57-74). In the banking concept of teaching, the teacher is the depo-sitor, who primarily through narrative, monologue-type "communi-ques," depositories information into the mind of the student. The aim of
this type of education is to fill the student with the “right” information so that at the appropriate time and place the correct data may be retrieved from the student’s account. This kind of education is adaptive. It seeks to fit the student for “his place” in society. It is establishment oriented and designed to maintain a peaceful, don’t-rock-the-boat status quo. It elevates the teacher to a pedestal position from which he talks, thinks, chooses and acts while the student listens, rethinks, accepts and reacts. In such a learning process the teacher is the Subject and the student is the object. Freire states that banking education is antithetical to the revolutionary process and is an “exercise of domination” by the teacher which “stimulates the credulity of students, with the ideological intent (often not perceived by educators) of indoctrinating them to adapt to the world of oppression” (65).

In contrast, “problem-posing” education seeks to stimulate the creative thinking of the students. It does not seek to have him adapt to the world as it is, but to change the world. The teacher does not dominate the learning process but shares it with the student, so that during the educational process the student becomes the teacher, and the teacher becomes the student. And in this relationship of teacher-student, student-teacher, both pose problems that have existential significance and both communicate and experience communion on a conscious-raising level.

The problem-posing method is not easy. It is designed to raise the consciousness of the oppressed by forcing them to think of themselves in relation to their limit-situations. It is a way of inducing a healthy group self-consciousness that will lead to acts of self-liberation. In Brazil, the process was conducted in this general order (see 101-118):

First the educator-politicians go into the area where they wish to carry out the process of conscientization. For an undetermined period of time they talk and more important listen and observe the people in all phases of their daily lives — including work, home, church, community activities, and so on. They get to know the people and the people get to know them. Secondly, they come together with the people of the area in a group meeting to discuss with them what they have in mind (a literacy program, for instance) and ask for volunteers to work with the teacher-leaders in gathering the materials on which the program is to be built. Thirdly, the large community group is broken down in smaller groups, each with teacher-leaders and community volunteers. It is in these groups that problems are posed, discussed and recorded on tape, film, and in writing. After the group meetings, these recordings are transcribed and discussed by the staff composed of the “teachers” and representatives chosen from the community. A psychologist and a sociologist may also be added to the group in order to have the advantage of their professional input. Each member of the group expresses his or her findings in the open staff meeting so that each person’s perceptions can be checked out both by the professionals, the teachers and most importantly by the community representatives who represent
the "grass roots" people of the area. Out of these sessions come a series of problems which represent the crucial concerns of the oppressed people. Fourthly, these problems that the "staff" thinks should also be included. These are then changed into individual photographs and/or recordings sections called "coded" situations. Such a coded situation was the picture of a drunken "peasant." In "de-coding" the situation, the peasants affirmed the man's right to be drunk. They felt that his oppressive situation had driven him to alcoholism. Their consciousness of their oppressive situation was heightened by openly facing this "fact." But the coded situational presentation also raised a further question regarding whether or not this was the most appropriate response that they as a group could make to their limit-situation. The oppressed group was "compelled" to re-examine their responses in the light of possible alternatives. It is in the critical re-examinations of such situations that consciousness is raised.

Now once consciousness is raised by a critical appraisal of the limit-situation, the next step in conscientization is to determine what limit-acts are possible to change the situation. Dialogue between the people and their leaders must continue until there begins to emerge an awareness of realistic possible solutions. After these "untested feasibilities" have been discussed and a course of action agreed upon, the next step is to act.3

B. Conscientiousness

Freire is interested in change and is convinced that change, particularly revolutionary change, will not occur simply by reflection stimulated by dialogue. It must be brought about by "praxis" which he describes as a combination of "reflection and action upon the world in order to change it" (36, 52-53, 66). Freire makes two important points about praxis. One is that in order for praxis to be liberating, reflection and action must become as Siamese twins—they must always go together. Action without reflection becomes activism and reflection without action becomes verbalism (75). In order for praxis to be effective, the oppressed must always be acting on their reflections and reflecting on their actions. They must "confront reality critically simultaneously objectifying and acting upon that reality" (37). The second point that Freire makes is that praxis must take place as a joint venture by the oppressed and their leaders. The leaders must not take upon themselves the responsibility of thinking and acting for the oppressed. They must not succumb to a Messianism. Since only the oppressed can liberate themselves, the leaders must work in dialogical relationship with the people. The leaders must inspire action but must act only with the consent of and in partnership with the people.

Freire does not tell us in Pedagogy how the process of conscientization resulted in learning to read. The main point is the acquiring of political power for self-liberation rather than learning to read as a personal or social skill.
C. Consecration

But not every would-be revolutionary leader can be a pedagogue of the oppressed. There are certain qualities needed that are usually associated with metaphysics or religion, however Freire interprets these qualities as attributes of full human beings without any religious reference. I have summed up these qualities in the term consecration and pictured them as pillars that support Freire's revolutionary educational structure.

The first pillar is love. He does not define love but describes it as "an act of courage" and as a commitment to other people and their liberation. This love is not sentimental and does not serve as a "pretext for manipulation," but rather "generates other acts of freedom." It is a precondition for working in dialogue for liberation. For if one does not "love the world," "love life" and "love men," he cannot enter into authentic dialogue with the oppressed or work with them in the praxis of liberation (77-78). The first pillar of Freire's dialogical educational structure is a consecration to respect, concern and compassion with the oppressed and a dedication service with them for their liberation.

The second pillar is humility. The teacher-leader must be able to listen as well as talk, see other persons as Subjects as well as himself, submit himself to critical self-examination and be willing to admit that he or she needs other people in the cooperative effort to win liberation for all. Without this humility the leader becomes a victim of Messianism, sets up a Subject-object relationship and goes about winning liberation for the people instead of with the people. This practice would be anti-dialogical since true liberation calls for a relationship in which leaders and people are partners in their struggle and victory. Humility on the part of the leaders helps to develop this kind of partnership.

The third pillar is faith. At the heart of the partnership struggle for liberation must be a mutual faith in man's ability to change for the better and his ability to create that change. Freire said that mutual trust between the oppressed and their leaders is an "indispensable precondition for revolutionary change" (46). Given the betrayal of the people that sometimes takes place after the revolution and the betrayal of the leaders that sometimes takes place during the revolutionary process, this mutual faith is often difficult to build and maintain. Too often the revolutionary leaders have been turned over to the oppressors during the struggle for liberation. And too often once the revolution has succeeded the leaders of the revolution have become tyrants over the people they were supposed to set free. Perhaps that is why faith is an absolute necessity. It is demanded in order to struggle on when there is no guarantee that genuine liberation will become a reality. Mutual faith is an indispensable pillar for partnership liberation.

However, Freire warns against "naive" faith (79). The revolutionary should expect no easy surrender of the oppressors, nor should he expect that all of the oppressed shall fight together with him. The oppressors
have a vested interest in the oppressed remaining oppressed and some of the oppressed would rather suffer their immediate miseries "than flee to others that they know not of." There is the fear of freedom and its responsibilities and there is the fatalistic attitude of the oppressed caused by an internalization of some of the ideas of his inferiority held by the oppressors. This internalized oppressor mentality makes many of the oppressed wonder whether or not his oppression is in-the-nature-of-things-as-they-should-be or "ordained by God." But in spite of these fears and negative attitudes, the teacher-leader must believe in himself, in his people and in their joint mission of liberation. He must believe that in spite of history and the present limit-situation that all men were made for freedom and that together the oppressed, their leaders and those converts from the oppressor group who fight with them can achieve authentic liberation (46-47).

The fourth pillar of dialogue is hope. Hope is the sense of expectancy that provides the climate in which faith can survive and grow in spite of history. Hope's quality of anticipation exerts pressure on faith to keep on believing, and the mutual faith of the oppressed group keeps the group working to change its limit-situation. It is very necessary that hope stays alive because when hope gives way to despair, faith disappears and work toward liberation ceases.

And so it is these spiritual qualities to which the oppressed must consecrate themselves that form the foundational pillars upon which Freire's educational theory is built. It is with these qualities of mutual love, humility, faith and hope, combined with clear critical thinking that the dehumanizing, antidialogical actions of conquest, divide and rule, manipulation and cultural invasion can be repelled and the dialogical actions of cooperation, organization, unity and cultural synthesis can be established (133-186). It is by the self-liberating action of the oppressed that the oppressor will discover that his reality does not depend on having someone to oppress, that he can stand tall without standing on somebody's neck, that he can be mobile without riding somebody's back and that his humanity does not depend on someone else's dehumanization.

It is Freire's dream that through conscientization the oppressed will liberate themselves and their oppressors, and that this same old bondage-ridden world will be declared new by new men who are no longer oppressed or oppressors but men "in the process of achieving freedom" for all (34).

III. IMPLEMENTATION: SOME PROBLEMS

I am in basic agreement with Freire's dream. I can readily see the need for the liberation of the oppressed through conscientization, I see the necessity for dialogue with and between oppressed peoples and I see the good common sense of a revolutionary perspective that advocates reflective action and active reflection. I can see how such a method could produce such a self-awareness that the term "new man" or new
person would be appropriate. I can also see with my imagination how if this method is used over an extended time period (perhaps 20-25 years, depending on the size, population and political situation of the country) it might conceivably change the oppressor-oppressed dialectic significantly. I believe in Freire’s dream but I do have a few problems with certain aspects of it.

One problem is the manner in which Freire has opted for a Godless theology. Humanism is beautiful. There is always the need to emphasize the centrality of people in their world. It is particularly necessary to emphasize the fact that people, all people, are ends in themselves, not means to an end, not even God’s end. But to make people the highest beings in the universe robs them of a resource that can be of tremendous assistance in their struggle for liberation. It robs them of a tremendous source of ethical and moral authority which is supra-historical and extrasituation al. It would seem that were Freire to tie in his educational and political strategy to the strong religious (Catholic in this case) orientation and structure of the Latin American masses, he would provide his efforts with a much more secure and universal base. This was certainly one of the “secrets” of the success of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in this country. The civil rights movement was basically a religious movement and this in no small way accounted for its “popular” national and, to some extent, international appeal. Were Freire able to tie-in his efforts with the powerful Catholic church and ground his appeal for political empowerment in Catholic theology, he would automatically have an audience of hundreds of millions and the sympathy of many thousands of religious leaders and adherents all over the world. For Freire to tie his dream to a religious base would not only be politically expedient but also strategically sound.

The many quotes and footnotes in Pedagogy may be interpreted to mean that Freire has already been too much influenced by Communism to consider organized religion as an ally. On the other hand, perhaps his present position with the World Council of Churches in Geneva indicates that he is giving religion the serious consideration that we are suggesting here.

However, the fact that Freire is working for the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland, instead of working with the oppressed people of Brazil brings us to the second problem. It is the problem of the open implementation of an avowedly revolutionary strategy. It hardly seems the height of political sophistication to expect that the oppressors are going to allow educator-politicians to carry out a strategy be it educational or otherwise that is admittedly designed for their overthrow. We know that the Brazilian authorities did not tolerate such a program because in 1964 they expelled Freire from the country (11-12). Freire’s theory is a beautiful formulation of ideas but more consideration is going to have to be given to their implementation under necessarily hostile conditions.
The third problem also has to do with implementation, for while I can see the soundness of Freire’s insistence that liberation from oppression must be self-liberation, I do not see how such liberation can be achieved without the assistance of at least some of those who are in power. I suppose it is possible to overrun a government by brute, bloody force and numbers. But this does not seem to be the kind of revolution that Freire is talking about. His fight seems to be more ideological rather than military. He seeks to win more by changing minds than by burying bodies. Now if this is true, it seems that he is going to have to move away from his radical oppressor-possessed dichotomy and move more toward a stance that appeals to the self-interest of each group and the mutual well-being of both groups. In other words, it would seem that unless Freire is willing to advocate a bloody revolution, he must sell the oppressors on the fact that their future economic, social and political well-being and progress is inextricably bound together with the liberation of the oppressed. Again, my frame of reference is Dr. King, who via his rhetoric and nonviolent demonstrations, was able to influence the government to aid his cause, not completely, but at least to the extent of providing some protection during the demonstrations, passing civil rights legislation and perhaps most important having the President, the country’s official spokesman, give his moral and political support to the cause. With all due respect to the power of ideas and dedication, I do not see how the oppressed of a country the size of Brazil can be liberated without the aid of the church, the government, or both. I may be all wrong, but it seems to me that without the sympathetic assistance and involvement of one or both of these sources of economic and/or legislative power, Freire might remain in exile and for his people, his educational-political theory might remain a beautiful but impotent brain-child with no hands or feet to render itself mobile and useful.

It is my hope that circumstances will make it possible for Dr. Freire to soon return to Brazil where his vision and expertise are badly needed. There is a critical shortage of trained teachers and educational books, buildings and equipment. Over half of Brazil’s 98,000,000 people can’t read or write. If Freire could somehow tone down the political revolutionary rhetoric of his approach, he might be able to re-enter his country and become a major catalytic agent for the educational, and therefore social, economic and political uplift of his people. For even in Brazil where the military is a constant power to be reckoned with, the ballot is still the ordinary citizen’s most consistent political expression. Only Brazilians who are literate may vote. Therefore, Dr. Freire may yet be able to carry out at least a part of his educational-political

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4 All information about Brazil was obtained from the article entitled “Brazil” in Encyclopædia Britannica IV (Chicago: Benton, 1967), pp. 115-132 particularly pp. 127-30.

For further insight into the theory of Freire see his Education as the Practice of Liberty (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1967). For an additional source of bibliography and comment of Freire’s educational theory in English is Paulo Freire: A Revolutionary Dilemma For the Adult Educator edited by Stanley Grabowski (Syracuse, New York: Clearing House on Adult Education, 1972).
design by simply teaching people how to read and write. Once they have the ballot, they may be able to do by a slower and less dramatic, legislative process what Freire dreamed could be done by a kind of Communist-inspired take-over by the masses and their leaders. It may be that a slower, more democratic political process, supplemented by King-like direct action techniques when necessary, will be the most effective means of Brazil’s political progress.

Freire is a pioneer. His theory is not yet fully developed. Neither his epistemology nor his anxiology is fully enunciated in this book. His experiments in conscientization have not been attempted in enough different situations to give them universal credence, but he has made an important step. He has added another “word” to the great conversation. Freire is to education what Cone and Roberts are to theology, what Greer and Cobbs are to psychiatry and what King and Malcolm X were to American race politics. They hewed out a rough path and held up their lamps of truth-as-they-perceived-it. Others will widen the path and brighten the light that we may with our own little lamps of truth-as-we-perceive-it follow along their paths and perhaps hew out paths of our own.

Conscientization is not a cure-all for oppression. It is another idea to be tried and another instrument to be used to give the oppressed a lever by which to gain and to exercise their right of survival and progress as legitimate members of the human family.
BY PAUL R. GARBER

Black Theology: The Latter Day Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.

A significant aspect of the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. more than six years after his death is to be found in the neoteric discipline known as Black theology. King is usually thought of as a civil rights activist and as a devotee of the philosophy of nonviolence. A few writers have taken King seriously as a theologian, but few indeed have noted the significance of his life and message in the emerging Black theology of the 1960's and 70's. The theologically oriented journal, The Christian Century, commenting on the continuing, though diminishing, influence of King in 1973, noted the political involvement of such followers of King as Andrew Young, Robert Brown, and Jesse Jackson as being consistent with King's emphasis on grasping the levers of political power, but no connection was made between King and a young Black theologian like James H. Cone. A recent book devoted to an examination of King as a thinker makes no reference to Black theology and no suggestion that King's thought was in any way relevant to this new intellectual movement. Yet there are very real ties that bind Black theology and King together. To be sure, Cone's relationship with King is quite different from Young's. Cone, who has been labeled a "radical" Black theologian, is no disciple of King, and yet he acknowledges that he found the basic principles of his theological system in the life and message of King. And the genius of King's theology is not simply his dream of the beloved community, but also his commitment to Black liberation and his understanding of God as the divine Liberator.

THE RADICAL KING

King was not initially perceived as the meek and mild Christ figure that White liberals, at least, have subsequently made him out to be. He was criticized not only by Alabama red necks and clergymen, but also by the Washington Post as a troublemaker who created tensions when the time was right for cooling them. It was only after Stokely Carmichael and company raised the cry of Black Power in 1966, calling forth the spectre of counter-violence as a response to perennial White violence that King began to look so good to so many White Americans. The beloved community sounded more congenial, somehow, than Black Power, and nonviolence was more appealing than the call for an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. King came to be perceived by Whites, as

2 Kenneth L. Smith, and Ira G. Zepp, Jr., Search for the Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, 1974).
William Jones, Yale’s resident Black theologian has put it, as a guardian of White values rather than the Black Messiah.4

King did work very hard indeed to win the support of White liberals, yet the earlier perception of King as something of a radical was, perhaps, not entirely in error. Certainly King regarded himself as a revolutionary whose goal was not simply to change people’s attitudes so that Whites might be persuaded to be nicer to Blacks, but also to change the structures of society so that Whites would be compelled to be just and equitable in their dealings with Blacks. While the Symbianese Liberation Army (or what is left of it) would, no doubt, find King’s brand of revolution very tame indeed, many Blacks as well as Whites point to the King era as the time when the Black American began once again to assert himself effectively against White oppression. And frankly, King did not always sound as tame as he did in those passages from his sermons and addresses recited so approvingly by Whites, celebrating the power that emanated from Black nonviolence and love and suffering. This is not to suggest that King ever repudiated the philosophy of nonviolence, though he did, on occasion, warn that Blacks could not be counted on to abstain from violence for ever if White violence continued. But King had fewer illusions about the goodwill of Whites than he is often credited with. William Jones may scorn King’s naivete in imagining that in a racist society White men would ever cease their oppression simply because of the noble suffering of the oppressed. Yet King, with all his talk of persuasion and his undoubted commitment to nonviolence, was also a devotee of Black power. He rejected only the Black Power slogan which he considered unnecessarily abrasive and thus counterproductive. He embraced the concept of Black power in much the sense that the champions of the slogan did. He knew there must be a Black power bloc with economic and political clout if Black men were ever to be liberated. At the very beginning of his civil rights role at Montgomery, he resorted to an economic boycott in his effort to accomplish his goal, insisting that “no one gives up his privileges without strong resistance,” and at the end of his career he planned a campaign of massive civil disobedience in Washington, D.C. and wrote that “we must subordinate programs to studying levers of power Negroes must grasp to influence the course of events.”5

Even King’s rhetoric at times approached the level of the Black Power advocates. On the notion that White Americans considered themselves committed to justice for Black Americans, King wrote that this was, unfortunately, “a fantasy of self-deception.”6 This view of White racism


6 King, Where Do We Go, p. 4.
was not a late development in King’s thought as some have suggested, a concession to the Black Power people of the late 1960’s. In his first book, published in 1958, King noted, as he would again in his later books, that the privileged never give up their privileges on request, but only in response to coercive power. In this context King wrote: “I saw further that the underlying purpose of segregation was to oppress and exploit the segregated, not simply to keep them apart.”7

The genocide theme, associated with the more radical Blacks, was voiced more than once by King. “Since racism is based on the dogma ‘that the hope of civilization depends upon eliminating some races and keeping others pure,’ its ultimate logic is genocide.”8 As early as 1963 King wrote: “For too long the depth of racism in American life has been underestimated. . . . Our nation was born in genocide.”9 (It may be worth recalling that Malcolm X, while deploiring the nonviolent stance of King, quoted with great delight King’s charge of American genocide.)10 King was aware that the problem of racism in America was so grave that there could be no smooth or easy transformation of American society as many White liberals seemed to imagine. He interpreted the words attributed to Jesus, “I have not come to bring peace, but a sword,” to mean: “Whenever I come, a division sets in between justice and injustice.”11 And it was precisely in the courage to stand up for justice in the face of holocaust that King saw the divine image within man. With full awareness of the depth of evil within man, specifically within White American man, and in spite of a very human love of life and fear of death, King was fully committed to justice. He quoted with approval the lines: “Before I’ll be a slave, I’ll be buried in my grave and go home to my Lord and be free.”12 “Even if physical death is the price that some must pay to free their children from psychological death,” he argued, “then nothing could be more Christian. . . .”13 Yet, unlike some of the Black Power advocates, King never sanctioned counter-violence. He did insist that the Black man must stand up fearlessly before the White man, refusing to cringe in the face of death. Even the threat of genocide must not be allowed to rob the Black man of his dignity as a person made in the image of God. Lest it be thought that King was, somehow, infatuated with death, it should be remembered that his constant theme was “We shall overcome.” The threat of genocide was always there, but Black and White men of courage could, in cooperation with the God of the universe, overcome the killers and contribute to the final realization of the beloved community.

Finally, like the Black Power people, King in his later writings in-

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7 King, Stride, p. 113.
8 King, Where Do We Go, p. 70.
9 King, Why We Can’t Wait, p. 130.
11 King, Stride, p. 40.
12 King, Where Do We Go, p. 123.
assisted that the much publicized Black violence, especially the violence of urban rioting, was small indeed in comparison with White violence. Rather than the poor Blacks, it was the policy-makers of the White society who caused the darkness of human suffering on the American scene: "they created discrimination; they created slums; they perpetuate unemployment, ignorance, and poverty." And King concluded that "if the total sum of violations of law by the white man over the years were calculated and were compared with the lawbreaking of a few days of riots, the hardened of criminal would be the white man." 14

King by no means limited his concern to White violence against Blacks in America, but spoke out, to the dismay of many of his supporters, against the continuing American violence in Vietnam, calling the United States "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today...." 15 From a rhetorical point of view, this statement may not be in the same league with such utterances of H. Rap Brown as: "This country is the world's slop jar." 16 Yet King's effort to combine militance with moderation tended to give his words more weight, at least in White quarters, than the less restrained rhetoric of Brown. In any event it hardly sounds as if King were an unambiguous champion of White values.

THE MODERATE KING

If the moderate King who preached and practiced nonviolence is better known and better loved by White liberals than the more radical King, this moderation — if indeed it can be so called — carries very little punch today. King's own Southern Christian Leadership Conference survives as an organization, but with little apparent influence among Whites or Blacks. The all too typical pattern seems to have been repeated. With the death of the charismatic leader, the nonviolent movement died. Monuments may be built for the prophet, but few indeed heed the words or follow in the way of the prophet. The impression one gains even from devotees of nonviolence in the 1970's is that the movement has come upon very hard times indeed. In an interview published in 1973, James W. Douglass, commenting on the argument that the deaths of both Gandhi and King prove that nonviolence will not work, points out that those who make such arguments do not say that war deaths prove that war does not work. But he goes on to confess the pathetic weakness of the nonviolent movement today.

We believe that when we are warmakers, we naturally commit our lives. But when we are peacemakers, a weekend demonstration is the limit of our commitment.... Unless many of us are willing to die for nonviolence and for peace, there can be no peace. The fact that there have been so few is a comment on the lack of seriousness of our understanding of nonviolence.17

14 King, Trumpet, p. 8.
15 Ibid., p. 24.
A few scholars seek to preserve King's philosophy of nonviolence. John W. Rathbun finds it a "serviceable" philosophy of revolution; Herbert Warren Richardson sees it as the only way of dealing with the peculiar character of evil in our time, namely the evil of ideological conflict, by refusing to meet a mindless chauvinism with another mindless chauvinism, but rather with friendship; Warren E. Steinkraus sees in King's philosophy an interesting new development in the ongoing career of personalist philosophy as King officiated at the marriage of personalism and nonviolence. At least two Black theologians also continue to maintain, at least in some measure, King's commitment to nonviolence. Deotis Roberts and Major Jones see nonviolence as the Christian way. Roberts regards nonviolence, as King did, both as a viable strategy in the Black quest for justice and equality in American society, and as being God's will for man as revealed in Jesus Christ. Major Jones weakens this commitment somewhat, arguing that while nonviolence is unquestionably the Christian calling, this calling may be overridden when the going gets rough. In times of terrible stress, the Christian man may have to react in the manner of unregenerate man. While the Christian can never find divine sanction for violence, neither can he be expected to adhere rigidly to counsels of perfection.

For King the trumpet call of nonviolence had a surer sound than this. Even in his moderation, King was bolder than some of his latter day followers. The philosophy and practice of nonviolence is, after all, a strange sort of moderation, for the devotees of this philosophy does not shrink from plunging into the thick of the battlegrounds of this world. He avoids neither violence nor the threat of violence; he avoids only the inflicting of violence on others. And he who indeed walks onto the battlefields of this world armed only with love and with the courage to insist on his dignity as a person and to demand the liberation of the oppressed, is hardly a moderate as that term is usually understood, but an extremist without guns. King was this sort of extremist, and he quoted approvingly the words: "When you are right, you cannot be too radical; when you are wrong you cannot be too conservative." Continuing, he asserted:

The Negro knows he is right. He has not organized for conquest or to gain spoils or to enslave those who have injured man....He merely wants and will have what is honorably his...."If this be treason, make the most of it."21

23King, Why We Can't Wait, p. 146.
THE LATTER DAY LEGACY OF KING

KING AND BLACK THEOLOGY

If King’s strange moderation appears to have won him few disciples, Black or White, hearty enough to charge into the battle zones of the 1970’s armed only with love, his religiously oriented militance has won him some notable followers, though some of these followers may seem an unlikely lot, and they themselves may not claim to be devotees of King. Yet it seems clearly to be the case that insofar as King lives today, he lives in the currently developing Black theology movement. Black theologians, writing in the context of the Black experience in America, understand the God of the Bible, the Jesus of the New Testament, and the continuing work of the Spirit of God in the world in light of the concept of liberation. As God led the captive Hebrews from bondage in Egypt, as Jesus identified himself with the oppressed and not with the oppressors, so God is working still for the liberation of the enslaved. “Black theology is a theology of liberation,” according to the statement issued by the Committee on Theological Perspectus of the National Committee of Black Churchmen. Meeting in Atlanta in June, 1969, the Black theologians asserted that “Freedom is the gospel. Jesus is the Liberator.”

One of the principal draftsmen of this Black theology statement was a young Black theologian by the name of James H. Cone. Cone’s first book, Black Theology and Black Power, which also appeared in 1969, was a theological expression of the Black Power movement that erupted three years earlier within the Civil Rights movement that had largely been dominated by Martin Luther King, Jr. Cone wrote in that book that

Black Theology is primarily a theology of and for black people who share the common belief that racism will be destroyed only when black people decide to say in word and deed to white racists: “We ain’t gonna stand any more of this.”

Yet Cone is more than a Black Power spokesman, for he argues that God is identified with Black men and with their quest for liberation. “The event of Christ tells us that the oppressed blacks are his people because, and only because, they represent who he is.” Blacks, then, are understood as the chosen people, chosen not to be suffering servants, but to be liberated from their suffering.

Cone is an aggressive, abrasive, person who would appear to be far removed from King who with all his considerable powers of persuasion sought to win White support rather than to alienate potential allies. In the introduction to his first book, Cone wrote pointedly: “This is a word to the oppressor, a word to Whitey. . . .” In the final chapter of that book, arguing that Black theology is revolutionary theology, Cone asserted that he did not use the word “revolution” carelessly.

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24 Ibid., p. 118.
25 Ibid., p. 3.
Revolution is not merely a “change of heart” but a radical black encounter with the structure of white racism, with the full intention of destroying its menacing power. I mean confronting white racists and saying: “If it’s a fight you want, I am prepared to oblige you.” This is what the black revolution means.26

Cone was no more irenic in his second book. Referring to “concerned” whites who want to know what they can do to help Black people (“a favorite question of oppressors”), Cone gives the answer of Black theology: “Keep your . . . mouth closed, and let us black people get our thing together.”27

Interestingly enough, it is this same Cone who found the norm of his Black theology in the distinctive leadership of King. “His life and message,” Cone wrote, “demonstrate that the ‘soul’ of the black community is inseparable from liberation but always liberation grounded in Jesus Christ.”28 Cone then proceeded to focus on liberation through Jesus Christ as the interpretive focus of his theology. “The norm of all God-talk which seeks to be black-talk is the manifestation of Jesus as the Black Christ who provides the necessary soul for black liberation. This is the hermeneutical principle for Black Theology which guides its interpretation of the meaning of contemporary Christianity.”29 Cone, of course, does not hesitate to criticize King, notably for his commitment to nonviolence. Yet he sees as the task of Black theology the building “on the foundation laid by King by recognizing the theological character of the black community, a community whose being is inseparable from liberation through Jesus Christ.”30

Both Black and White interpreters of contemporary Black theology have suggested that Joseph Washington’s 1964 book on Black Religion might be seen as the beginning of this movement. It may be, however, that the life and message of Martin Luther King, Jr. will serve more adequately as the beginning point of this movement. While Washington is Black and a theologian, Black Religion was an attack on Black folk religion in general and on King in particular, and it was a plea to Black Christians to enter into the “mainstream” of White Christian theology. While Washington’s book undoubtedly spurred debate on Black religion, from the viewpoint of Black theology, he started it off all wrong. As Cone points out, Washington dismissed Black folk religion, placing it outside the true Christian tradition, yet “the heretics were not the slave preachers [who related Christianity inextricably to social justice in this world], but white missionaries who sought to use Christianity as an instrument of enslavement.”31

The writings and activities of King would seem to be a better starting point for contemporary Black theology. As we have seen, Cone

26 Ibid., p. 136.
28 Ibid., p. 78.
29 Ibid., p. 80.
30 Ibid., p. 78.
31 Cone, Black Theology and Black Power, p. 103.
found in the life and message of King the hermeneutical principle of his Black theology. But the argument need not rest on this fact alone. King is seen by friend and foe alike as the one who aroused the Black community to a new, or renewed aggressiveness. This new assertiveness, which was the platform from which Black power was launched on the modern scene, was based on a theological interpretation of the world. King's words and his deeds were rooted in the conviction that oppression is contrary to the will of God, that liberation is in harmony with the purpose of God, and indeed that God is working in the world in our time, as the Bible insists that he was in ancient times, to set at liberty the oppressed.

King's writings were not, to be sure, books of theology. He wrote sermons; he wrote about the civil rights campaigns that he was involved in; and he sought to analyze the social situation in America, noting its problems and prescribing a cure. Yet every book was deeply theological, seeing injustice not simply as a sociological fact, but as an offense against God, and seeing nonviolence not merely as an effective strategy, but as being in harmony with the Ruler of the universe. And the actions of the civil rights activist were also rooted in the conviction that God was with the Movement and against those who fought to keep men in bondage. King was a working theologian who practiced what he preached. He was, perhaps, the best model for a new style of theologian, working not in leisure on the fringes of significant modern social movements, but in the midst of a people struggling to be free, struggling along with them, and declaring to them the ultimate significance of what they were doing together. It cannot be said that King was the original Black theologian, but his writings and his career serve far better than Washington's Black Religion as the beginning of the present Black theology movement.

THE DEEPER ROOTS OF BLACK THEOLOGY

While the present schools of Black theology are rooted in the King era, there are deeper roots to this theology than the life and message of King. To be sure there is the ancient biblical tradition that Black and White theologians share. But there are distinctive sources of Black theology. These sources are to be found in Black religion as it has been practiced both in Africa and in the New World. Gayraud Wilmore insists that Black Folk Religion in America is a new syncretistic religion with both African and American elements. But the "essential and most significant characteristic of Black religion," according to Wilmore, is not the evangelical conservatism inherited from the Great Awakening in America, but "a fusion between a highly developed and pervasive feeling about the hierophantic nature of historical experience, flowing from the African religious past, and a radical and programmatic secularity,
related to the experience of slavery and oppression."32 This syncretistic religion has regularly been associated with Black radicalism, according to Wilmore. Rather than a quietistic religion, it is and has been a religion of freedom.33 Black theology's focus on liberation, then, is rooted in this distinctive Black religion with its continuing sense of the immediacy of God's presence and its continuing quest for freedom from White oppressors.

Whether or not it can be demonstrated that Black theology does indeed have African roots, it is unquestionably true that the Black liberation theologians have a strong spiritual tie with some remarkable Black preachers of the American Antebellum era. One of the outstanding Black, anti-slavery preachers was Henry Highland Garnet whose "Address to the Slaves of the United States of America" indicates his approach to White racism.

Let your motto be RESISTANCE! RESISTANCE! RESISTANCE! — No oppressed people have ever secured their liberty without resistance. What kind of resistance you had better make, you must decide by the circumstances that surround you, and according to the suggestion of expediency.... Trust in the living God. Labor for the peace of the human race, and remember that you are three million.34

Although Garnet had on one occasion resorted to violence in his own determination to be free — the townsfolk and farmers of Canaan, New Hampshire were met by a blast from Garnet's double-barreled shot gun when they attempted to bring desegregated education to a close in their community on July 4, 1835 — he did not advocate violence in this address directed to Southern slaves from a national Negro convention at Buffalo, New York in 1843. The resistance he counseled was the refusal of slaves to work for their Southern masters.

We do not advise you to attempt a revolution with the sword, because it would be INEXPEDIENT. Your numbers are too small, and moreover the rising spirit of the age, and the spirit of the gospel, are opposed to war and bloodshed. But from this moment cease to labor for tyrants who will not remunerate you. Let every slave throughout the land do this, and the days of slavery are numbered. You cannot be more oppressed than you have been — you cannot suffer greater cruelties than you have already. RATHER DIE FREEMAN, THAN LIVE TO BE SLAVES.35

Garnet did point with pride to the exploits of Black men who resorted to violence in their determination to be free. He celebrated the heroism of Denmark Vesey, Nathaniel Turner, and Joseph Cinque. And he insisted that unless the slaves rose in resistance against their oppressors, they were not worthy of heaven, for God is the God of liberty.

Some Black, Ante-bellum preachers were less radical than Garnet, as for example Richard Allen, who though denouncing slavery as con-
trary to the will of God and withdrawing from a White racist church, called on slaves to trust in God for their salvation, and in the meantime to love their masters. Some were far more radical than Garnet as was Nat Turner in leading an insurrection against White oppressors, killing 57 of them in obedience to God. And of course there were Black preachers like Jupiter Hammon who comforted their enslaved brothers by giving them hope of freedom in a better world than this one. All were devotees of the God of liberation, though they were not all champions of revolution.

UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN BLACK THEOLOGY

Like their forebears, there is a certain unity and a certain diversity among the Black theologians of today. The rallying cry of them all, as we have seen, is liberation. Although not all Black theologians are revolutionaries, they agree that God is a God of liberation, who calls them to freedom here and now and who joins them in their quest. While they do not reject the notion of a blessed future life, they uniformly insist that God’s call is to freedom now.

While Black theologians agree on the liberation motif, they vary in their reaction to other significant themes. The more moderate among them add to the liberation theme that of reconciliation, while the more radical either dismiss reconciliation as a possible or desirable goal, or else they assert that reconciliation is the oppressor’s responsibility. Albert Cleage (now Jaramogi Adebe Agyeman), pastor of the Shrine of the Black Madonna in Detroit, and national chairman of the Black Christian Nationalist Church, rejects the notion of reconciliation with the enemy. A profound admirer of Malcolm X, Cleage sees no possibility that the White man will ever change. There can, therefore, never be any rapprochement with this incorrigible enemy. The Black man must, rather, create his own Black Nation, developing the power to prevent the White man from oppressing Blacks.36 James Cone does not rule out entirely the possibility of Black-White reconciliation if the White oppressor will repent, seeking to become Black—that is, identifying himself with the oppressed Black people of America and the world—not presuming in this new identification to assume a leadership role among his new comrades, but simply and quietly joining the ranks of the lowly and the poor. Through such a thoroughgoing change of one’s way of life, the White man might be saved and might join the company of the elect.37

Deotis Roberts was not satisfied with the place left for reconciliation in Cone’s theology, so in response to Cone’s theology of liberation,

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37 Cone, Black Theology and Black Power, pp. 150-52; A Black Theology of Liberation, p. 176.
Roberts wrote his book on Black theology entitled *Liberation and Reconciliation*. Roberts insists that an authentically Christian theology must bring together these two themes. While Roberts thus devotes more space to reconciliation than does Cone, and gives it a prominent place in his theology, he does not, in fact, differ markedly from Cone in his contention that reconciliation must await the fruition of liberation. There can be no reconciliation as long as White men continue to oppress Blacks. Roberts is a more traditional evangelical theologian than is Cone, insisting that God can yet recreate the White man, enabling him to repent, as he can recreate the Black man, giving him the grace to forgive. Reconciliation begins with this miracle of divine grace.\(^{38}\)

Major Jones goes beyond Roberts in his emphasis on reconciliation. As a theologian of hope whose theology is significantly influenced by the German theologian Jürgen Moltmann, he is more impressed by the possibilities held in store for man in the future than by the frustrations or tragedies of the past. And he notes a "strong sense of messianic mission" in Black awareness literature, concluding that "there is a sense in which black men think they are called of God to deliver black America from its bondage and white America from its lethal folly."\(^{39}\) Major Jones, then, sees Black men not only as their own liberators in cooperation with the God of the future, but also as the liberators of White men. He sees the possibility of a new community of Black and White, not an integrated community in the sense that the two will become one in character and style, thus obliterating old distinctions, but rather an interracial community "wherein every person, race, or ethnic group shall take comfort in the fact of separateness and difference."\(^{40}\) Jones, thus, looks toward a new community of mutual appreciation and respect which will be brought about through the initiative of Black men who both value their own distinctive gifts and recognize the worth of the gifts of others. Thus, while they are one in their focus on liberation, Black theologians differ in their relating of liberation and reconciliation.

Black theologians differ on other significant issues also. Cleage and Cone, for example, as representatives of the more radical wing of Black theology, reject totally the notion of nonviolence. While neither is a thoroughgoing revolutionary, calling for the destruction of White civilization, both regard the notion of nonviolence as unrealistic in the context of a White civilization that is so thoroughly committed to violence. Cleage's Black Nation has as its purpose the achieving of sufficient power to make the coexistence, not the integration, of Black and White a possibility.\(^{41}\) Cone argues that as long as White men practice violence daily in their oppressing of Blacks, Blacks must maintain the option to exact an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Whether or not Blacks should actually resort to violence must not be determined in advance on

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the basis of a perfectionist dogma, but rather in the light of actual circumstances. The question must be whether revolutionary violence would tend to be more or less detrimental to man than the systematic violence of the White oppressors. In a later word, Cone, recognizing the overwhelming odds against the Black man since the “guns, atomic power, police departments, and every conceivable weapon of destruction are in the hands of the enemy,” nonetheless insists: “There comes a time when a people must protect their own, and for black people, the time is now.”

As we noted earlier, Deotis Roberts and Major Jones view nonviolence in a more positive light, both understanding it as the Christian position. Jones insists that violence can never be given Christian sanction, even though he recognizes that there are times when a man must respond to provocation simply as a man and not as a Christian. Roberts, however, like King, understands nonviolence not only as the Christian way, but also as an appropriate strategy for Black men in American society.

Black theologians also differ in their evaluation of the Black church. The more radical theologians are ambivalent in their attitude toward the church. Cone writes of the apostasy of the post-Civil War Black church. While the Ante-bellum slave preachers — or at least some of them — preached liberation and worked to free their people, he considers the later Black preachers as men who sold out their own people, preaching salvation in another world and knuckling under to the White oppressors. Yet Cone does not dismiss the contemporary Black church. “Some ‘ultra Blacks’ discard the Black Church,” he writes, “but I remind them that there can be no revolution without the masses, and the Black masses are in the churches.” Cleage, too, generally disparages the Black church, insisting that the true church is to be identified with the Black Nation or with the Black Freedom Movement, and in the heyday of Stokely Carmichael and SNCC, he offered to ordain the freedom workers as ministers of his Shrine of the Black Madonna, in spite of, or because of, their rejection of White Christianity and the Black Church, so that they might avoid being disrupted from their authentic Christian mission by being drafted into the United States Army.

Deotis Roberts and Major Jones offer a more positive view of the Black church. In the first place, they believe that even the post-Civil War church offered a valid ministry. “The black church,” writes Roberts,

as a social and religious body, has served as a kind of extended family for blacks. In a real sense, then thousands of blacks who have never

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43 Cone, Black Theology and Black Power, p. 143.
44 Cone, Black Theology of Liberation, pp. 248-49.
45 Cone, Black Theology and Black Power, pp. 103ff.
47 Cleage, Black Messiah, p. 46.
known real family life have discovered the meaning of real kinship in the black church.47

Roberts sees the role of the Black church now to be that of leading the White church from its bondage to racism to confession, forgiveness, and finally reconciliation both with God and with Black men. Major Jones also rejects Cone’s view that while the apostasy of the Black Post-Civil War church can be understood, it cannot be excused. Jones rather sees in the Black church’s “strategy of deception” a genius that avoided the very real danger of genocide.48 The contemporary Black church is challenged by Jones’ theology of hope to participate in the development of Black awareness and of the new interracial community that seems to him to be the wave of the future.

The Black theologians are by no means in agreement. And yet in a real sense they are bound together in their effort to come to a new understanding of the Christian faith that is meaningful in light of their own experience as a people in this none too hospitable land. They agree that fundamental to their interpretation of the Christian faith is the notion of liberation. God is the God of the oppressed who identifies himself with them and determines that they will be free. And he calls on them to join him in a quest for liberation. In contrast, White theologians are understood as identifying themselves with the oppressors and as being insensitive to the plight of the oppressed and to the will of the God of the oppressed. They worship and theologize about a White Oppressor God. Their only hope of salvation is to repent and to seek forgiveness.

THE LEGACY OF KING

This Black theology, though it may well have roots in Africa, and though it is surely related to the freedom message of the great Black Ante-bellum preachers, is in large measure the legacy of the life and message of Martin Luther King, Jr. While the Black theologians of today are by no means mere recorded announcements, repeating the words and ideas of King, King is the one who rekindled the faith of the Black fathers of the Black church. King’s life’s work was the work of freedom and his message was that of liberation, but it was liberation through the power of God, the God of liberation, who works through men, primarily through Black men, strengthening them for freedom’s arduous work.

Both the more radical and the more moderate schools of Black theology have built on the foundation of Black theology constructed by King. The moderates add to King’s liberation theme his dream of a great community of Black and White people living together in a system of justice and equality, and in a spirit of mutual appreciation and respect, and they see King’s philosophy of nonviolence as a divinely ordained way of achieving this beloved community. But the more radical Black

47 Roberts, Liberation and Reconciliation, p. 64.
48 Major Jones, Black Awareness, p. 54.
theologians no less than the moderate seize on another theme that King combined with liberation, namely that of power. Almost from the begin-
ing King realized that there could be no community of justice and love simply for the asking. So King used power tactics and he sought better ways of wielding levers of power. Calling himself a revolutionary, he sought to change the character of American society by obstructing injustice through boycotts, marches, and campaigns of massive civil dis-
obedience. He sought also to utilize the economic and political power that Black men had in this country. He was a Black Power devotee without the slogan. And the radical Black theologians are his strange disciples. In both of these schools of Black theology far more dynami-
cally than in the fizzling nonviolent movements, Martin Luther King, Jr. lives. What the legacy of King’s life and message will finally be is not yet known, but it may well be bound up with these developing new Black theologies.
God and The World:
A Process Perspective

Is God involved in the world? In the attempt to protect the absolute¬ness, immutability, eternity, and majesty of God over against the fini¬tude, temporality, mutability and imperfections of the world, tradition¬ally theologians, metaphysicians, and philosophers have created a static God, and a gulf between God and the world; and as a result, they have not conceived of God as being significantly involved in the world. White¬head correctly speaks to this problem when he says, “Undoubtedly, the intuitions of Greek, Hebrew, and Christian thought have alike embodied the notions of a static God condescending to the world, and of a world either thoroughly fluent, or accidentally static, but finally fluent . . .” ¹

We inherited this gulf between God and man, in large measure, from the Aristotelian philosophy of substance and the Newtonian mechanistic cos¬mology. And because of this we have not been able to keep a reciprocal relationship between permanence and change, being and becoming, and potentiality and actuality in reference to God. We have argued that God represents permanence, being and actuality whereas, the world represents becoming, potentiality and deficient actuality. Thus, along with his changelessness God is independent of the world; and, the world along with its fluency is dependent on God. How then can we speak of God in a way that avoids this gulf between God and the world created by traditional theology? And how can we speak of God in a way that makes his involvement in the world a significant aspect of his being?

The purpose here is to show that the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead avoids this gulf between God and the world which philosophy inherited from the Aristotelian philosophy of substance and the Newtonian mechanistic cosmology. After this discussion we will be able to more fully appreciate Whitehead’s contribution in perceiving the world in more scientific terms and in making God more significantly involved in social change.

Whitehead developed a social conception of reality, meaning that he viewed reality from an organic perspective. To say that reality is organic means that it is interconnected, interdependent and interwoven. All reality is interrelated in that nothing is detached from the whole. The whole means the universe which contains a multiplicity of subsystems. Here Whitehead is accounting for the oneness of reality and the many¬ness of reality. What is reality made of?

Reality is made of actual entities; “They are the final real things of which the world is made up. There is no going behind actual entities

to find anything more real." The word entity is simply the Latin equivalent for thing. Thus, actual entity refers to concrete actuality. Concrete actuality is not macrophysical, but rather, it is microphysical. To treat macrophysical objects as though they are the concrete is to be guilty of what Whitehead calls "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness." The common sense view of reality, however, is to perceive tangible objects as the really actual things in the world. But are they the really actual?

Under the influence of quantum physics, Whitehead realized that concrete reality consisted of quanta of energy, which are subatomic, inedible and microphysical. These are energy events and they interpenetrate each other as wave fields extended throughout space. Whitehead refers to these energy events as happenings drops of experience, actual entities or actual occasions. However, Whitehead is careful not to separate concrete actuality from its becomingness. In other words, concrete actuality refers to the process by which an actual entity or energy event moves from potentiality into actuality. He defines reality in the context of its becomingness, making being and becoming inseparable. "To be" means to become because all reality is caught up in a constant process of becoming. Creativity or process is an ultimate metaphysical principle that underlies the totality of reality. Creativity is contentless, characterless and formless. It is devoid of actuality apart from actual entities or energy events. Therefore, the base of reality is process, change or creativity. Here, as we will now discover, Whitehead has replaced the Aristotelian philosophy of unchanging substances at the base of reality with the notion of process at the base of reality.

According to Aristotle, a substance is "that which is not asserted of a subject but of which everything else is asserted." What makes a substance important for Aristotle is, it can exist separate and without other categories but they cannot. A substance has qualities, but it doesn't depend on the other categories for its existence, whereas the categories depend on it for their existence. It is always the fundamental category in defining what is, and is therefore, always the subject of attributes. Not only is substance the only category which can exist independently but it is also changeless and permanent. Here we can see that substance is the basic category for Aristotle and all else is its attributes.

A substance undergoes or endures change but itself doesn't change. In repudiation of the Aristotelian philosophy of substance, Whitehead

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1. The word microphysical refers to subatomic infinitesimal particles. Macrophysical refers to objects that can be observed.
2. Ibid., p. 27. Very frequently Whitehead uses the terms actual entity and actual occasion synonymously. (Ibid., p. 119).
4. Ibid., pp. 10-11.
5. Whitehead, Process and Reality, p. 11.
6. Ibid., p. 27.
completely abandons the notion of substances at the base of things enduring change. The base of reality is not unchanging substances, but rather, Whitehead argues that creativity itself is at the base of things. Basic to Whitehead's notion of an actual entity is that it is an experiencing subject. An actual entity is not a subject undergoing change in time. Whitehead abandoned this notion and replaced it with the notion of subject-superject.

The term subject in Whitehead refers to the internal constitution of an actual entity and the term superject refers to the effects the actual world has on this experiencing subject. In other words, an actual entity as subject is a drop of experience, and as a superject it is the result of its own experience as the actual world affects it. Whitehead makes this point very clear when he says, "An actual entity is at once the subject experiencing and the superject of its experiences." The term subject is used mostly by Whitehead when an actual entity is considered in respect to its own real internal constitution but he makes it very clear that subject is always to be construed as an abbreviation of subject-superject.

Whitehead says that each actual entity has its own individual purpose, which is internally given. This gives it its own uniqueness and significance. Now, as each actual entity attempts to accomplish its purpose, it goes through the process of what Whitehead calls self-formation, self-determination, or self-creation. Whitehead doesn't think or speak of an actual entity apart from becoming. In other words, we cannot speak of an actual entity on the one hand, and becoming, on the other hand. An actual entity is only defined in the context of its becomingness, which means that Whitehead makes being and becoming inseparable.

When an actual entity becomes, Whitehead describes this process as

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8 Whitehead, Process and Reality, p. 43. H. K. Wells feels that Whitehead, on the one hand, has abandoned the traditional doctrine of a subject undergoing change in time, but on the other hand, has retained the notion of self-identical permanences. He says, "Whitehead has dispensed with the traditional concept of substance as the self-identical continuity underlying changing qualities, and in its place he has substituted process, passage, events. But at the same time he has retained the traditional method which demands self-identical permanences as subjects of thought." See H. K. Wells, Process and Unreality (King Crown, 1950), p. 29. In my response to Wells, at this point, Whitehead refers to a self-identical object as a society of actual occasions and the nature of an actual occasion, for Whitehead, is that it is the subject experiencing and the object of its own experience. Therefore, self-identical objects, being composed of perpetually perishing actual occasions, are not static and are not unchanging substances enduring change. But rather, they are caught up in the perpetual flux of process itself. Therefore, Whitehead is not as traditional in this regard as Wells argues. Raymond Smith helps to explicate Whitehead's non-traditional approach when he says, "Now if the actual thing or actuality itself must be viewed as a process of becoming and perishing, as Whitehead wishes, there is no point in constructing a philosophy of unchanging substances or permanent qualities. The notion of a static philosophy, Whitehead believes, stems from ancient thought," namely, Aristotelianism and Platonism. See Raymond Smith, Whitehead's Concept of Logic (Westminster Md: The Newman Press, 1953), p. 59. See also M. B. Bakan, "The Subject-Object Relationship in Whitehead," Journal of Philosophy, LV (1958), pp. 89-101, and James Hudson, "The Doctrine of the Actual Occasion in Whitehead" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University Graduate School, 1964), p. 22.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., pp. 34-35.
the creative advance into novelty, which is another characteristic of the individuality of actual entities. Whitehead uses the term novel to express the originality and uniqueness of each actual entity. This means that no two actual entities are the same and no two actual entities in their becomingness make the same contribution to the ongoiness of the actual world.

The Novelty of an actual entity also means that it transcends every other actual entity. It transcends every other actual entity in that it is different. Now, this difference doesn't mean that each actual entity is not made of the same thing, namely, a complex drop of experience. But, it simply means that each complex drop of experience has its own contribution to make to the total drops of experiences.

Whitehead calls the process by which an actual entity completes its contribution to the actual world, its concrescence. Concrescence names the process in which the world of many things become the novel one. Each instance of concrescence is itself a novel entity and an original contribution to the world. Whitehead doesn't bifurcate concrescence and the actual entity because “... when we analyze the novel thing we find nothing but the concrescence.” This means that an instance of concrescence is termed an actual entity. And, the word concrescence, as used by Whitehead, represents the growing together of actual entities.

When an actual entity becomes, this represents a movement from disjunction to conjunction or from multiplicity to unity. When an actual entity becomes, many actual entities become unified into a whole. When they grow together into this whole, this is their concrescence. Whitehead speaks to this when he says, “That in the becoming of an actual entity, the potential unity of many entities — actual and non-actual — acquires the real unity of the one actual entity ...” Therefore, the actual entity is really the result of the concrescence of many potentials. The potentiality for being an element in a real concrescence of many entities into one actuality is, for Whitehead, actual and non-actual.

In further repudiation of the Aristotelian philosophy of substance, Whitehead argues, rather than to perceive reality as isolated, independent, unchanging, separate and unrelated substances, in a certain way, everything is everywhere at all times. This is to say that every location in the world involves an aspect of itself in every other location. And, every spatiotemporal standpoint mirrors the world. The key to Whitehead’s notion of interrelatedness is his doctrine of social immanence, which means that actual occasions are united by the mutual immanence of occasions, each in the other. Things are not defined in the context of
their isolation but rather, things are defined in the context of their togetherness. Things grow together, which is the foundation of oneness and concrescence within Whitehead’s organic philosophy.

The thing that enabled Whitehead to perceive reality as being fundamentally interrelated is the philosophical principle of relativity. This means that every actual entity is defined in the context of being a potential for every becoming. He points this out when he says, “... it belongs to the nature of a ‘being’ that it is a potential for every becoming.”20 Whitehead contends that this principle of relativity is applicable to the total of reality. And not only is a being a potential for every becoming but is not defined apart from its becoming. Its becomingness is as fundamental as its interrelatedness.

Another fundamental problem in the history of philosophy and theology that Whitehead attempted to correct was the Newtonian cosmology; it contended that bits of matter in their spatio-temporal relations were located in definite finite regions of space throughout a definite finite region of time. These bits of matter were not related to each other, they existed separate and independent of each other. Whitehead refers to this as the doctrine of simple location.21 This doctrine presupposed the ultimate fact of irreducible matter spread throughout space in a flux of configuration. These bits of matter were purposeless, valueless, mechanistic and followed a fixed law of nature external to their existence. Each bit of matter had its own individual characteristics, such as its shape, its motion, and its mass. The relationship between these bits of matter was only spatial rather than internal.22

It contended that if a bit of matter was alone in the universe, being the sole occupant of uniform space, it would still be that bit of matter which it is. It also argues that a bit of matter could be described without any reference to past or future, because it was conceived as being wholly constituted within the present moment.23

It conceived the world as a complex machine that follows immutable laws which are deterministic. From it emerged the philosophies of determinism and scientific materialism.24 Determinism refers to the predictability of these bits of matter and scientific materialism refers to the fact that these bits of matter were considered as irreducible particles of matter.

In opposition to this Newtonian cosmology which is based on scientific materialism, Whitehead begins his critique by acknowledging the fact that matter consists of quanta energy and vibratory phenomena

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which “... dissolve into the vibrations of light.” These quanta of energy are organic processes of becoming. This leads to the notion of energy as being the fundamental reality consequently displacing matter from that position as is found in the doctrine of simple location. Whitehead calls these quanta of energy events, drops of experience, or actual entities.

Now, since I have shown that the Aristotelian cosmology and the Newtonian cosmology are based on static mechanism cosmologies, it follows that their conceptions of God are also static unchanging and detached from the world.

Aristotle’s conception of God represents the culmination of his static cosmology. He uses the cosmological argument to demonstrate God’s existence as the Prime Mover or Unmoved Mover. He makes God’s unchangingness a metaphysical necessity; he also makes God’s existence, as Whitehead correctly describes, an exception to all metaphysical principles invoked to save their collapse. In order to fully understand this it is important to note that in Aristotle’s metaphysics actuality is prior to potentiality. God, being at the top of the hierarchy of substances and consisting of pure actuality is the uncaused cause of all reality. The world in all of its plurality of substances is the manifestation of potentiality becoming actuality. However, the potentialities of substances in the world could not be actualized without the agency of an eternal uncaused cause to set them in motion and this cause is pure actuality. God is uncaused and unmoved because if he were not then it would have been necessary for Aristotle to posit an existing entity behind God as the first cause.

Aristotle’s God is monopolar, meaning that he only has one pole, which is transcendence. Because God only contains transcendence, he is totally detached and uninvolved with the affairs of the world. Not only is he detached and uninvolved but is also unconcerned with man. He shows no love for the world; in fact, this God tends to be indifferent about the world. He doesn’t move the world because he loves it, but he acts as the object of its desire. Here God is passive rather than active. He only acts as the object of man’s desire and in the sense it is man who is active and dynamic in his love for God.

The theism that emerges from the Newtonian mechanistic cosmology is a God whose existence is external to that which he has made. He is analogous to that of the clockmakers, meaning that once the clock is made it runs on its own independent course. Here God is the architect and designer of the world; he also put it into motion as the clockmaker puts the clock into motion. But God remains the source of the world, meaning that the world, as Newton perceives it, continues to be dependent on God’s power. How then is God related to the world? Like the clockmaker he is only related through intervention. When something gets wrong with the clock the clockmaker then intervenes in

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an attempt to repair it; so it is with the Newtonian conception of God. Whitehead avoids the static monopolar concept of God found in Aristotle and Newton by developing a dipolar concept of God. This means that the being of God includes two natures within his existence. Whitehead defines these two natures as the primordial nature of God and the consequent nature of God. The primordial nature refers to God’s transcendence and the consequent nature refers to his immanence. These natures function interdependently and complimentary; they are not bifurcated. But rather, they represent two interdependent modes of God’s existence. In this way, Whitehead avoids a totally transcendent static, absolute, abstract God, on the one hand, and a totally immanent, relative concrete God, on the other hand. Whitehead's dipolar theism includes transcendence and immanence as metaphysical necessities, thus avoiding the traditional gulf between God and the world.

The dipolarity of God's existence is not unlike other actual entities in the world; for they too are dipolar, meaning that they have a mental pole and a physical pole. The origination of simple causal feelings refers to the physical pole and the origination of conceptual feelings refers to the mental pole. According to Whitehead, “No actual entity is devoid of either pole; though their relative importance differs in different actual entities.” These two poles are integrated at the point of the concrescence of an actual entity. Here God is no exception to this general metaphysical characteristic. The mental pole of God refers to his primordial nature and the physical pole refers to his consequent nature. But how are these two natures related to social change?

In his primordial nature God is the eternal aboriginal accident of creativity, meaning that he is the first instance of creativity. In this sense God is nonderivative. However, in his consequent nature God is involved in time and social change. According to traditional Aristotelian-Newtonian theism God is completely actual and perfect with no potentiality as a part of his nature. In contrast to this monopolar concept of God, Whitehead's dipolar theism contends that God in his primordial nature is changeless and complete but in his consequent nature God changes within the ongoing creative advance of the world, and in this sense He is incomplete in his consequent nature. To say that God changes means that he includes temporality in his consequent nature and therefore, whatever happens in the world whether negative or positive affects God. In the midst of change God remains God because he is a non-perishing actual entity; in other words, other actual entities perish but God himself doesn’t perish. If he perished he would cease to be God. To say that God is incomplete in his consequent nature means that his existence is interdependent and interwoven with the continual growth toward perfect and unrealized possibilities in the world. Here Whitehead is careful not to think of perfection in a static sense; but rather, he thinks

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of it in a dynamic sense. This means that God nor the world ever reach static completion because both are caught up in the ultimate metaphysical principle creativity itself. Perfection in this sense becomes existentialized in an ongoing process.

When an experience, happening, or event reaches its perfection, it becomes actualized, satisfied, intensified, finished, completed, and concrete. This represents a movement from potentiality to actuality. A brief discussion of this process will help illuminate more clearly the relationship between the primordial and consequent natures of God.

In his primordial nature God is the underived home of all possibilities or potentialities; he is the reservoir of these possibilities and apart from him there would be no possibilities for realization in the world. God’s primordial nature provides these possibilities to the world by persuasion rather than by force. When an actual entity or experience accepts one of these possibilities for its actualization in the world, God, in his consequent nature, participates in this process. Because of the relativity of all things there is a reaction of the world on God and a reaction of God on the world. God becomes enriched when the world moves toward intensity of value and toward the actualization of its possibilities. In this sense, God is affected positively by the world. But when the world moves toward the rejection of God’s possibilities then God is affected negatively. Thus, the primordial nature provides possibilities for man and the consequent nature participates in the actualization of these possibilities. This means that, “The consequent nature is the weaving of God’s physical feelings upon his primordial concepts.”

Because the consequent nature of God is affected by the world, God is affected by whatever happens in the world and in turn affects the temporal world.

Along with God’s incompleteness, in His consequent nature, He is also determined. He is determined by the creative advance of the world. Being determined by the creative advance of the world doesn’t mean that God is not free to make His own individual decisions. Because each actual entity in the world is free to make its own decisions and the integrity of its freedom is not violated within Whitehead’s metaphysical system. Therefore, God is determined in His consequent nature because in actuality He derives His physical pole from the world itself. Whitehead speaks to this when he states that God’s consequent nature “... originates with physical experience from the temporal world, and then acquires integration with the primordial side.”

Because God in His consequent nature is determined by the world, He is within time. In His primordial nature He is timeless, meaning that He is not within the temporal order. But in His consequent nature He participates within time as other actual entities do. But, God also transcends time in that He is non-temporal and also in the sense that the past becomes objectified in His nature. The past becomes everlasting in

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28 Ibid., p. 524.
29 Ibid.
God's consequent nature to the extent that it is always present in God. This brings into focus the meaning of objective immortality in God which will be discussed later.

One of the great accomplishments of Whitehead's dipolar theism was the bringing together of God and man or God and the world. No longer does one have to adhere to the strict concept of deity found in Aristotle, Newton and the history of Western Theology. Whitehead destroys the dualistic gulf which existed between God and man. He expresses the interdependence of God and the world in the following famous passages which deserve quoting in full.

It is as true to say that God is permanent and the World fluent, as that the World is permanent and God is fluent.

It is as true to say that God is one and the World many, as that the World is one and God many.

It is as true to say that, in comparison with the world, God is actual eminently, as that, in comparison with God, the World is actual eminently.

It is as true to say that the World is immanent in God, as that God is immanent in the World.

It is as true to say that God transcends the World, as that the World transcends God.

It is as true to say that God creates the World, as that the World creates God.\(^\text{30}\)

The above passages of Whitehead sufficiently demonstrate the interdependence of God and the world. Therefore, as long as man exists within the creative advance of the world he can be assured, according to Whitehead, that God will remain fluent, and that things will remain concrescent. The primordial nature of God assures man of concrescence and the consequent nature of God assures man of fluency. Whatever man creates in the world effects God and god affects everything within the world. In this way we can say that God is in the world and the world is in God.

The consequent nature of God is inseparable from the world. There is no way of speaking of the world apart from God, just as there is no way of speaking of God's consequent nature apart from the world. Whitehead made this very clear when he pointed out that, on the one hand, God in His consequent nature creates the world, and, on the other hand, the world creates God. This means that God and the world function in a complimentary fashion.

Basic to Whitehead's philosophy of organism is the notion that actual entities "perpetually perish." After an actual entity reaches its concrescence it then loses its status as an experiencing subject, which means that it loses its subjective immediacy. The subjective immediacy of an actual entity refers to its living experience. An actual entity is an experiencing subject until it reaches a final cause. When an actual entity reaches this completion, it becomes efficient causation for future actual

\(^{30}\text{Ibid., p. 528.}\)
entities. Therefore, as an actual entity perishes subjectively, it acquires objective immortality.  

Objective immortality is the category Whitehead uses to describe all actual entities after they perish. After they perish they cease to exist as experiencing subjects and become objects or data in God’s consequent nature. Therefore, to perish doesn’t mean to cease to exist but rather, it means to take on the form of objective immortality in God’s consequent nature as a new objective condition added to the riches of attainable actuality.

Whitehead’s notion of objective immortality is his answer to the religious problem of everlastingness or the conservation of value. It also speaks to the religious problems of evil and redemption. In terms of everlastingness, God in His consequent nature preserves all the good in the world as it becomes objectively immortal. This means that after man existentially experiences good in the world, the good is not loss but rather, becomes objectively immortal in God’s consequent nature. After the good in the world passes into God’s consequent nature, it then flows back into the world and participates in influencing future experiences toward the actualization of the good. This notion of the conservation of good is analogous to the Kingdom of God. However, here it is dynamic rather than static. The good that is conserved in God’s consequent nature never reaches static completion because God nor the world reaches static completion. Because both God and the world are caught up in the ultimate metaphysical principle of becoming. Therefore, the traditional notion of the Kingdom of God as being a futuristic eschatological end point to history or consummation is replaced with the notion of an ongoing processual existentialization of the consummation of the Kingdom of God.

As man accepts the multiplicity of possibilities provided by God’s primordial nature, on the one hand, and when he responds positively to good that flows back into the world from God’s consequent nature, then the Kingdom of God becomes existentially consummated within history. It becomes existentially consummated but never completed in terms of future possibilities inherent in God’s primordial nature. This means that there is always new possibilities for man. But what happens if man never accepts God’s possibilities? This brings into focus the problem of redemption and evil.

On the one hand, evil is a natural phenomenon in that the nature of life requires a process of elimination and selection. Here I am not speaking in reference to man’s freedom to accept or reject life but rather to the way in which life itself presents itself to man as a natural phenomenon. When we speak of lost, elimination, selection, or perishing, religiously speaking, we think of evil. God overcomes this evil in the sense that he saves the world from the loss of the good. And also God

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1. Ibid., p. 44.
2. Ibid., p. 340.
overcomes this evil in the sense that he himself is a nontemporal actual entity caught up in the midst of temporality, mutuability, finitude, change, time and imperfection, other actual entities perish but God by the nature of his existence is exempted from perishing; otherwise he would cease to be God. And as the result of his nonperishing existence, he continually remains “our help in ages past our hope in years to come.”

God’s redemption for man refers to his continual offering new possibilities for man whether man accepts them or not. God doesn’t coerce man in accepting these possibilities, man is free to say yes or no to God. If man says no to God’s possibilities and descends into the depth of human inferiorities, oppression, man inhumanity to man and ethnocentrism this doesn’t mean that God will withdraw new possibilities from man. The redemption is the fact that God’s inexhaustible possibilities are always present and available for man’s self actualization but it is man who must accept them. Therefore, when man says no to God, this decision results in moral, social, political, and economic evils. But, on the other hand, to say yes to God means to move toward the actualization of God’s possibilities for man. God, in terms of his relation to the world, is affected by whatever decision man makes whether positive or negative.
Black theology has now reached a point in its development where socio-ethical and strategic-political questions are coming into sharper focus. This is a more or less natural movement in the religious experiences of a people for whom the relationship between what we believe and what we do is considered of critical importance.

The theological thrust of James Cone and others, which suggests the need for black and all oppressed people, to think and believe differently, which is integrally related to the oppression-liberation continuum, leads inexorably toward the question of acting differently.

It seems then, that for those black people who refuse to give up being Christian, the ethical question, raised within the framework of what is and what is not to be done by the Christian, in regard to liberation, is now thrust toward center stage. Consequently, some black theologians are now giving serious attention to the task of providing ethical guidelines for the black Christian who is committed to the goal of liberation.

Those black theologians and ethicists who have attempted to speak to the problems of providing guidance and counsel to the black Christian, either through works specifically written for that purpose, or through criticisms of the works of others, all stand in the Protestant religious tradition.1 Also, the major white American Protestant theologians and ethicists, who have responded to the plight of black people in America and the racism which occasioned their oppression, have stood in the Reformation tradition.

It is the thesis of this essay that the influence of certain theological and ethical doctrines of the major reformers, e.g., “priders of creation,” the theory of “two worlds,” and the “doctrine of sin,” has had a crucially negative effect on the major white American Protestant Christian theological ethicists as they have responded to the historic plight of black Christians in America.2 We shall examine some of the influences of these major doctrines on white theological ethics by looking at some of their responses to “race relations.”

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2 This essay is intended to serve as a warning signal to those of us concerned with the question of black Christian social ethics. We cannot simply take over the categories inherited from the reformation and used by the white theologians who attempted to apply those doctrines to our situation in America.
II

The concept "race relations," suggests that races, as individuals, nations, organizations, have some kind of decisional-center; for relations, seem to require some capacity to relate, to make decisions about, to respond to. It would also seem to suggest an implicit assumption that there is or may be, a basic difference between races, a difference which might justifiably find expression in theological and ethical moral terms.

Dabbs states it in a quite instructive way for our analysis:

In our differential treatment of the Negro, we have assumed that Negroes and whites are radically unlike, and that therefore what is just for one may be unjust for the other; that is, that there are two kinds of justice...whether it is a question of moral or of legal justice, we have defended racial justice on the ground of the supposed inequality of the races.8

Gunnar Myrdal saw race relations as comprising "... all those situations in which some relatively stable equilibrium between competing races has been achieved and in which the resulting social order has become fixed in custom and tradition."4 But the concept of "race relations" obscures and defies individuality and reduces the individual to a member of a category. For, "however we may define them, races do not think, or imagine or create...they do not have a mentality or a gift or an I.Q. Only an individual actually functions in a society and it is the individual's gift, his ability and his contribution to society that counts."5

For Reinhold Niebuhr, groups, racial and others, have a will. He says: "Racial prejudice — the contempt for the other group — is an inevitable concomitant of racial pride; and racial pride is an inevitable concomitant of the ethnic will to live. Wherever life becomes collectively integrated it generates a collective as well as an individual, survival impulse."6

Niebuhr, as well as most of those who have written on the subject, appear to agree with E. L. Long that the "ultimate principle of Christian love rules out a permanent policy of segregation."7 However, most of them also seem to suggest that, although Christian love may rule out a permanent policy of segregation, given the difficulty involved in trying to relate love to various human relations and problems, and the tremendous power and prestige of past practices of segregation, "not-

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permanent” can mean almost anything from “immediately,” to a “hun
dred years,”8 to “this time between the times.”

Edward A. Tiryakian, however, introduces a slightly different note
from Long and others “... with a few exceptions,” he says “most pub
clic statements on racial integration assume or take for granted that
racial integration is a necessary and desirable state of affairs, and con
versely that racial segregation or racial inequality should be con
demned.”9

Tiryakian proceeds to suggest that if any universal and ethically bind
ing grounds can be advanced for racial integration, they can be located
only within Christian theology. The economic and political arguments,
including those of expediency and democratic principles relating to the
latter, are readily dismissed as offering no moral justification for abolis
ing racial segregation. Is this not to divest political arguments of moral
content? Are democratic principles, however defined, merely a set of
a-moral superstructures based on a-moral foundational bases?

Tiryakian then turns to the social scientists, and, drawing upon Waldo
Beach’s article, “A Theological Analysis of Race Relations,” to which
we must turn presently, concludes that the findings and/or declarations
of the social science community concerning the desireability of elim
inating racial segregation, are based on a priori considerations, and not
on scientific analysis.

What about the theological arguments advanced in favor of racial
equality and desegregation? As Tiryakian sees the arguments they can
be summarized in two essential points. Because God has created all men
with equal rights and equal dignity, non-whites should be given their
full rights as given by a common creator and as guaranteed by the Con
stitution.10 Secondly, Christ has taught us to love our fellowman, and
as we are united in the Christian brotherhood, we should seek to end all
feelings of prejudice and friction between any and all racial groups and
to abolish any social system which perpetuates the inferiority of one part
of the Christian brotherhood.11

Tiryakian concludes his article by answering three crucial questions:
1) Have not religious leaders gone beyond Christianity in lending Chris
tian arguments to support racial integration, and have they become fully
aware of the social science community concerning the desireability of elim
inating racial segregation, are based on a priori considerations, and not
on scientific analysis.

2) What is the message of the New Testament and of the Christian Church concerning
equality (or its obverse, stratification?) 3) What should be the position of
the church on the matter of equality, what should be the Christian
perspective on race relations?

8Reinhold Niebuhr, “The historical roots of prejudice have too long accumulated, and
the marks of racial distinction are too obvious to guarantee the triumph over them... all
that may be said is that the beginning of the project has been propitious, and that
the problem will probably concern the nation for at least a century.” Man’s Nature
and His Communities, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1965, p. 105.
455.
11Tiryakian, op. cit., p. 462.
Tiryakian's responses to these questions are predicated upon the assumption that the Christian understanding of race relations is to be equated with the understanding of social stratification in society generally. So he argues: "...the present interpretation of Christianity in regards to race relations and social stratification is by no means the traditional interpretation, especially in the light of either the teachings of the Gospels or of the Early Church."\(^\text{12}\)

It is argued that the other-worldly orientation of Christ formed the basis of his explicit disjunction of the Kingdom of God from the Kingdom of Caesar, and those who are presently attempting to ameliorate social conditions and to do away with social inequalities are attempting to cement the two kingdoms. Therefore, those Christian leaders advocating racial integration have gone beyond the teachings of Christ and the teachings of the Early Church. "If we consider the teachings of Christ as contained in the Gospels, we find no concern with improving social conditions, but solely with improving moral conditions, with preparing man for the Kingdom of God."\(^\text{13}\)

The message of the New Testament concerning equality and social stratification is very clear. "We are all equal in these fundamental aspects: we have all sinned, we all fall short of the glory of God and can only be saved by the grace of God. Equality or extending the notion of religious or spiritual equality to that of social equality is an unwarranted extension of Christian theology.

Consequently, the position of the church on the matter of equality and race relations should be clear. It is to maintain that it is only within the church that racial differences can be transcended. In any event, once the common love of Christ has bound believers together, they can recognize the presence and power of original sin in the social differences that exist in the world. The spiritual realm and the social realm are effectively separated in the best Reformation tradition.

The Christian, then, has no responsibility for transcending social differences which result from the action of social institutions which partake of original sin. In other words, unity in Christ is not to be confused with unity in the social sphere. The racial distinctions which God has established in creation are consistently preserved so long as the intrinsic value of each of the racial groups is maintained and spiritual equality is affirmed without attempting to make that spiritual equality normative for social and politico-economic relationships. Nonetheless, within the fellowship, the Christian can transcend racism.

Paul Ramsey seems to argue that the church, on the other hand, need not feel that it has to be integrated. The transcending of racism in race relations takes place, in the realm of the ideal only, not in the actual church or world.\(^\text{14}\)

\(^{12}\) Ibid.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 463.

In response to the sit-ins and economic boycotts, Ramsey wrote the only full-length analysis of the Black protest against racial discrimination in the light of Christian ethics. The general tone of this work reflects the changing responses of Black Americans to the embodiment of racism in law and custom.

Clearly expressed by Ramsey is the fear that Black Americans will assume that racist practices are sufficient justification for radically changing the social structures; respect for law and order must be maintained; the Christian victim of injustice must learn, not only patience, but the restraining discipline of refusing to exercise a right if to do so will threaten to destroy the “garments of skin” with which God by his own hands has clothed naked human relations.

It is clear that, in this work, “garments of skin,” what ever else it may mean to Ramsey (and undoubtedly it means something else), is also a euphemism for “race” and “natural affinities.” It is also that, in 1960, all of our social structures and institutions were racist. Therefore, any change in the social structures, any willingness to have the structures and customs of this world other than they were, would require an alteration in the garments of skin. The established order was racist and unjust.

In his 1950 work, Ramsey had argued that: “Even the humblest Christian man must rapidly become willing to have the structures and customs of his world otherwise than they now are.”15 By 1961, things had changed for the “humblest Christian man” (and for Paul Ramsey), so then he says: “But in the Christian view, simple and not so simple injustice alone has never been a sufficient justification for revolutionary change. There is always also the question of order to be considered, and a need for restraints placed upon all and upon the injustice infecting even our claims for greater justice.”16

Ramsey uses three instances as being illustrative of the fact that, especially in the legal and social order, a limit must be placed upon the means used to advance the cause of justice. These three examples are: The Neighborhood School and Planned Integration, Integration and the Familial Quality in Churches, and State Action and the Protective Role of Private Property. In all of these instances, Ramsey is concerned to support “law and order” (though at times imbued with charity), maintaining the proper distance between man and man, and limiting state action less it become too oppressive in the attempt to create a more just community.

Ramsey is of the opinion that attempts are being made to extend the intent of the Supreme Court’s Decision against segregation by converting it into a demand for enforced integration without regard for neighborhood, which is risking the destruction of the “natural communities”

15 Paul Ramsey, Basic Christian Ethics, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1950, p. 35.
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which must not be shattered because they represent the foundation on which any social order must rest.

As the discriminatory practices in housing helped to determine the character of the neighborhoods, it seems ludicrous to speak of them as "natural communities" as Ramsey tends to do. One of Ramsey's further fallacious assumptions is that the schools have been expected, in the past, only to serve the function of providing education for the children of a community. He takes issue with those whom he accuses of wanting to use the schools now as an instrument for social reform.

The fact is that, historically, the schools as well as the churches and other institutions, have been used as instruments of social order of one type or another; a child's education includes socializing processes. When black children were sent out of their neighborhoods to other neighborhoods (or towns/counties) because there was no 'black' school in their neighborhood, what was that but using the school as an instrument to help maintain racial segregation?

Ramsey questions whether what he chooses to call "a positive policy of undertaking to provide an integrated education for all children, standing alone in abstraction from other facets of community life, is an ordering principle at all? Did a "positive policy of undertaking to provide a segregated education for all children" stand alone, in abstraction from other facets of community life? Was it an ordering principle? If so, was it because it was a sound and good one; or, was it an ordering principle because all other facets of community served to surround it with supportive (segregated) systems?

There are three main reasons why the church, being now segregated according to the "natural affinities" that constitute this present humanity of ours, must not be forced to attempt integration without respect for the actual situation in which we find ourselves. In the first place, the "... Spirit and the Church He creates are eschatological realities; and that, while oneness is rightly said to be the life of every Christian with and for his fellow Christian, this life is also declared to be hid with Christ in God. (Col. 3:3)." 17

Secondly, the ideal community in Christ remains a judgmental standard, calling for radical criticism (as over against radical change) of any actual church or any actual society. But, we must remember that at the present time the church is militant, but not triumphant. To try to act and live as if it were the latter could likely prove extremely disruptive and cause us to respond inadequately to God's creative, judging, preserving, and redeeming power in the world or in the church.18 This is

17 Ibid., p. 60.
18 Ibid., p. 61. (cf. Kenneth K. Bailey, Southern White Protestantism in the Twentieth Century, New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1964: "In 1866, (white) Methodist Bishops 'decried all sentimental extravagance in the direction of the discolored current of social equality, through the agency of the schoolroom, the congregation, or the conference; for there is no conceivable result that would compensate for the crime against nature this theory deliberately contemplates.' p. 6) and: in 1924-28, in reference to the unification of northern and southern methodists: "Nonsigners, lamenting that Negro bishops would be treated exactly like white bishops, that they may be elected to preside over the meetings of the College of Bishops, and that such fraternization would weaken the foundations of our social structure and impair the fabric of Southern civilization." Ibid., p. 57.)
very much in line with Reinhold Niebuhr’s views: “... We cannot deny the ethnic particularity of all men. We are not universal men and we build communities according to the forces of ethnic kinship which are operative in history. But these communities of nature are always subject to divine judgment.”19

In the third place, we need to remember, when we feel inclined to condemn the white Protestant church for its racial exclusiveness, that the “… factors buttressing exclusiveness in the white Protestant churches are components of the very Protestant concept of the very nature of the church.” They are:

1. voluntariness of church membership;
2. complete freedom of the individual to attend the church of his choice rather than the church appointed for his geographical area;
3. the democratic and representative character of church government;
4. the social and familial functions of the church;
5. a sense of solidarity as a requisite of church life;
6. the church as Koinonia rather than Ekklesia;
7. the freedom of the churches from episcopal edict which more readily can achieve a less worthwhile integration;

Unless one has already assumed that being black automatically precludes one’s capacity to voluntarily join the church of his choice, exercising his freedom, participating in the government and social and family life of the church, and feeling a sense of solidarity with the other members, one is hard put to see wherein the integrity of the Protestant concept of the nature of the church is violated if some of its families are Black. Is not a racially exclusive church a perversion and violation of that Protestant concept since it denies the very individuality and freedom which it supposedly exalts?

Finally, in good Reformation, Neo-orthodox and realistic fashion, Ramsey appeals to the character of the world as fallen to justify and explain the distinctions between persons, and the need to keep some distance between man and man and groups and persons and the state. Consequently, the victims of injustice must be careful about making appeals to the state for action which may result in giving the state too much power and/or tend to contribute to disorder.

We turn now to a discussion of race relations based upon Waldo Beach’s theological analysis of the problem. After an illuminating discussion of the relationship between theology and the social sciences, crediting the latter with having shown more genuine interest in and concern for the problems inherent in America’s race problem, Beach nonetheless concludes that “… In sum, the problem of race is at its deepest level not a factual problem nor a moral problem, but a theological problem.” Therefore, Beach turns to a ‘theological analysis of American racial beliefs and practices, to assess how the findings of the students

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of society, in fact do honor to the wisdom of Christian doctrine."  

Beach discusses race relations under the rubrics of Creation, Fall, Judgment, and Redemption. Because of the Creator's action, "race" is given ontological status. The clear consensus of Christian theology is to affirm the doctrine of the unity and equality of 'racial' life in creation; but the variety of the order of creation is as much a given as the unity. Hence, unity does not mean sameness, identity, but a community of diverse selves and diverse races who stand on the common ground of creatureliness.

In support of the idea of reading the concept of 'race' back into the mind of the Creator, Beach quotes from the Oxford Conference Report of 1937:

The existence of black races, white races, yellow races, is to be accepted gladly and reverently as full of possibilities under God's purpose for the enrichment of human life. And there is no room for any differentiation between the races as to their intrinsic value. All share alike in the concern of God, being created by him to bring their unique and distinctive contribution to his service in the world.  

The Christian doctrine of creation in regard to racial differentiation seems to find support among contemporary social scientists who seem to posit an a priori order of equality as ground for distinguishing the essential from the unessential. However, in contrast to Beach's view and that of the Oxford Conference Report, social scientists who have discarded the notion of innate biological differences between races, also seem to assume that 'race' itself is a sociological and legal, not an ontological, category.

Although the Creator apparently intended that equality should obtain in the primal community of diverse selves and races, according to Beach, the Fall in race relations was occasioned by pride, the determination to exalt one's race as a substitute sovereignty displacing God as sovereign. The Christian doctrine of sin gives us insight, supported generally by sociological analysis, into the nature of racial prejudice resulting from the Fall.

It is assumed that racial prejudice is often unfairly classified by some as hatred. Actually, although it is recognized that the evil results of prejudice (exploitation, discrimination, lynching), may seem to the casual observer to be the fruits of hatred, they can best be explained as perverted love. Beach, Henderlite, Gardiner, Tiryakian, and, in some respects, Reinhold Niebuhr, seem often of the opinion that if an evil is differently described, or more profoundly explained, somehow the victims should view it differently and, may suffer a little less. Or, at the very least, the black victims of race prejudice in America ought to be more willing to accept a share of the responsibility for their plight.


21Ibid.
The universality of sin leads to the not so evident conclusion that "moral responsibility for prejudice is in greater or less degree a responsibility shared by the aggressors and the victims. For the minority often mirrors and retaliates with prejudice the prejudice shown to them." If the minority recognized that the prejudice that comes their way really stems from "mistaken love" rather than from hatred, they could perhaps respond with something less than bitterness! Curiously enough, however, although the majority is really responding or succumbing, to the sin of pride, one gets no hint that the minority is responding to the sin of pride. Is there an assumed basic and fundamental difference, in creation, between the two groups at this point?

The sharpness of this question is further pointed up in Beach's understanding of the judgment of God in race relations. Conceding that the sociologist would have difficulty following the theologian at this point, Beach nonetheless maintains that the judgment of God is evident within the empirical order.

On the one hand, the judgment of God is felt at the point at which the very intensity of the contradiction between creed and practice appears, resulting in troubled consciences, the formulating of cliches and phrases to justify segregation, and other forms of self-justification. On the other hand, the judgment of God is found in outer ways.

The sensitive white Christian can see God's hand in the power of Communism as a judgment on the sins of capitalistic democracy and colonial imperialism. He can also see and acknowledge the chastisement of God upon the white community in the recent demands for justice and equality coming from a more aggressive Negro leadership. This implies the "chosen" character of white society. The black man's unequivocal assertion of his right to be, may be inspired by God or used by God. However, it is not in order that the black man may gain justice and freedom; it is rather, that God is using black restiveness under the yoke of oppression, to chastise his chosen white people in order to redeem them.

It seems clear that Beach is viewing the situation, theologically and sociologically, from the perspective of the white Christian and white society. The white Christian must recognize that, although his church has capitulated to the segregation and prejudice of the world, God will redeem even as He judges. The redemptive process will free men from pride and guide them into an integrated community of mutual respect and service like that originally intended in creation. So we have come almost full circle. As the social theorists view integration as the morally normative form among the viable options of racial relations on their

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22 Ibid., p. 213. (cf. Rachel Henderlite, "The Christian Way in Race Relations." Perhaps a strange and yet undeniable fact should be pointed out here as part of the complexity of our situation. It is love, albeit a mistaken love, that prompts much of the conflict that has arisen in the South in recent months. It is not hatred of the Negro that stirs to violence.... it is not even pride of race that is the primary impulse to violent action, but love - love of family, loyalty to community." Theology Today, Vol. XIV, no. 2, July, 1957, p. 201).
own grounds, the Christian theologian supports integration because it was what God intended in the beginning.

As over against amalgamation, on the one hand, which would absorb all differences into one 'racial' type, or segregation (parallel cultures), on the other, integration would mean a relationship of equality and mutual- ity, where every man, woman, and child shall be free to enter into, and contribute to the welfare of all, without any restrictions or disabilities based on color caste.23

Here is spelled out part of the agony of white ethicists in regard to race relations. On the one hand there is a felt need to preserve "racial integrity" by opposing amalgamation; on the other hand, there is the felt need to affirm an individual freedom which is neither based upon nor limited by, prior group identification. Tribute must be paid to the white aversion to so-called 'inter-racial' marriages, and in the same breath, tribute must be paid to the claims of justice based on individual freedom of action.

The same built-in contradiction emerges in regard to responses to the Reconstruction Era which was followed by the creation of legal barriers to most forms of 'inter-racial' contact. Beach describes the situation thusly:

With the master-slave community smashed by the Civil War, the Reconstruction era saw the slow development of segregation in Southern custom and law. At its best, this legislation represented a feasible transitional arrangement, which, in theory at least, by substituting a wall for the ceiling of slavery, proposed to lift all restrictions upon Negro development and enable both Negro and white to achieve peace and concord by separation and mutual respect... By the process which corrupts even good custom and the idolization of an ephemeral institution, this segregation which was partially redemptive has now become the enemy of Christian community, the occasion for the sin of inhumanity of man to man, and the judgment of God.24

On the fact of it, this is a clear attempt to re-write the history of the post-Civil War period. The clear object and intent of the brutality inflicted upon the Black communities across the South was to take black Americans out of the political process which they had entered in significant numbers during the Reconstruction period. The developing 'good custom' of segregation in the South was not conservative; it was reactionary. It was a clear attempt, not to provide for a 'transitional period of separate and mutual development,' but to devise and maintain an acceptable substitute to the master-slave relationship which would keep it intact in all but name.

III

The responses to race relations reflected a willingness to adopt certain positions of the classic reformers, especially Luther, even if under other names, in regard to the structuring of society. The reformers claimed to

23 Ibid., p. 220.
24 Ibid.
be able to perceive essential and stable forms of human society which were permanent norms reflecting the divine will. Of course, the forms which were perceived and which became tantamount to "orders of creation" just coincidentally happened to be the forms prevailing in society at the time which favored their position.

Although the term "orders of creation" used by the reformers, is not used in regard to problems of 'race relations,' clearly something comparable is to be understood. Ramsey clearly uses 'race' as one of the garments of skin woven by God within which man is to dwell with his neighbor. Niebuhr designates race as belonging to the essential nature of man. "To the essential nature of man belong, on the one hand, all his natural endowments and determinations, his physical and social impulses, his sexual and racial differentiations, in short, his character as a creature embedded in the natural order."25

The positing of the creation of races, as we understand them, by Beach and others, coupled with the clear willingness if not the desire, to preserve the 'integrity of the races,' by these spokesmen, clearly bespeak something closely akin to a concept of "orders of creation."

The reformers are also appealed to in support of a "realism" in regard to the creating of a just order because of the nature of sin. Henry Bellah's critique of 'Christian Realism' is very instructive in this context:

The greatest danger of the Christian realist and liberal position is that one may be forced into the defense of established interests on the grounds that after all, human nature being what it is, this is the best that we can expect.26

Consequently, any concepts of "racial justice," of "racial brotherhood," of an "integrated society and an integrated church," are placed in the eschatological and ideal realm. Thus, the black Christian and the white Christian must understand that their togetherness is hid with Christ in God. "The ideal of racial brotherhood is the law of God in which we delight after the inward man, but racial arrogance is the law in our members which wars against the law that is our mind."27

The sinful nature of man, the need for institutions to preserve society against sin, the awareness of the universal and inevitable character of white racial pride, all mitigate against the hope for the establishment of a community beyond caste. The unity which would be a prior condition for such a community is the very fact that the presuppositions and the theological ethics of the reformers, eliminate as a possibility on the historical plane.

IV

It is clear that Black Christian ethicists must seek elsewhere if they would provide insight and assistance for the black Christian. Reforma-

tion ethics and its interpreters are all but bankrupt if one is looking to fashion a liberation ethic. Black Christian ethicists must destroy the 'two-world' myth of Luther and his followers; they must refuse to accept the notion that it is either logically or theologically sound to attempt to read back into the mind of God the socio-economic and political arrangements of a white racist western order.

Black ethicists must also rescue the discipline of Christian ethics from its enslavement to prevailing social science and psychological theories. Rigorous honesty must demand that the truth be told about our history. The lies which white ethicists have told about the past in regard to racial problems in America must be exposed and laid bare with pitiless rigor.

It should now be palpably clear that the unjust, undesirable and no longer tolerable concept of race relations which reformation-oriented ethical analysis has supported, no longer has any appeal for anyone with even the barest acquaintance with and/or sensitivity to the minimal demands of justice.
The Black Religious Experience

Listening to Gwen Neville makes clear why we blacks have had so many problems all these many years. I am going to give a statement on the black religious experience in an effort to put in focus what that experience is all about.

Black religion is the product of African culture and the cultural environment of the American slave system. It was created out of the encounter of African religion with Christianity. These elements were woven together as the black slave underwent a conversion experience in the presence of the Almighty Sovereign God. This experience provided the slave with a historical possibility for existence in a situation of contradiction. It opened up the slave's inner being, enabling him to discern levels of reality not known before. The Almighty Sovereign God became the very foundation for every dimension of the slave's life.

Having encountered the Almighty Sovereign God in the midst of servitude, symbolized in the auction block and the slave codes, the slave experienced a knowledge of the divine will and purpose for humanity that his suppressors could never know. The slave developed religious forms in accordance with this insight. Although his religion took on the outward appearance of the Christian religion as it was given to him by the oppressor, the essence of his religion had little to do with white meanings associated with Christianity.

The essence of black slave religion was not a set of beliefs or doctrines to be memorized, nor was it an ethical code of do's and don'ts that the slaves learned. Rather, the essence of black religion was a black religious experience. The slave's encounter with the divine in the midst of slavery and the consequent recognition of his sinful condition was the first step in the dynamics of the black religious experience. The black religious experience is a depth experience of the Almighty Sovereign God from way down yonder, emerging out of the crucible of suffering. It is that experience of the divine wrought out of the slave's encounter with the absurdity of his condition and his meeting with the Almighty Sovereign God in the midst of that historical reality. Reality for the slave in America, in a historical sense, presented itself as immutable, impenetrable, and impossible. In the midst of this awful situation, the Almighty Sovereign God forced himself upon the slave as a highly exceptional and extremely impressive Other — the Wholly Other — radically different from everything known in this world. He was the God of power, whose existence was more real and more terrible than the absurd situation of the slave's life. The black religious experience, then, is meeting God in the depths of the despair and loneliness of slavery.

Although the slave was in rebellion against the system of slavery, and his meeting of the divine definitely had political implications, this
meeting was not, as such, a political encounter. To start with politics as if political resistance were the distinctive characteristic of this experience is to misunderstand black religion. In black religion, God, not politics, is the point of departure. When the slave met the God of radical transcendence in the midst of the extremities of slavery, it created in him a sense of his own limitations — the sense of weakness and sinfulness related, not primarily to politics, but to the wholly otherness of God. God's reality and power became even more manifest through the involuntary and transformative effect it had upon the slave who was already in an involuntary, but nontransformative situation. This potency of the divine was regarded as sublime by virtue of its creative process. This creative process produced in the slave an experience known as conversion, the key to the black religious experience.

When the slave encountered the Almighty Sovereign God, way down yonder where the slave was at the threshold of death, the Divine forced himself upon the slave in such a manner that the slave recognized at once his own state of sinfulness. From this point onward, the slave was in the hands of the Almighty Sovereign God. After striking the slave dead, the Divine exposed him to a level of reality not known before. When the slave emerged from this experience he was a new creature, completely transformed. This event, which is so keyed to the black religious experience, denoted fundamentally a rather definite and somewhat sudden change in the dominant beliefs, attitudes, subtleties, allegiances, and aspirations of the slave. The drama of the conversion experience for the slave centered in the birth of a new selfhood. It is for this reason that the slave emerged from the event singing, "Looked at my hands, they looked new. Looked at my feet, and they did too." It was this kind of encounter with the Almighty Sovereign God that constituted the uniqueness of the black religious experience.

When the slave emerged from his conversion experience, he was free. And this freedom which he experienced signified that the slave's life was no longer determined by the slave system. It meant that through his black religious experience the slave underwent such a change that his life was totally committed to the Almighty Sovereign God. Because he was free, the slave sang: "Oh, freedom, oh, freedom, oh, freedom over me. Before I'd be a slave, I'd be buried in my grave, and go home to my Lord and be free." The freedom of which the slave speaks is the present reality. He does not accept the designation given him by the oppressive society. A close examination of this spiritual reveals that the slave is very careful in what he is not saying, as well as what he is saying. He is not saying, "Before I'd be a slave any more," or "Before I'd accept being a slave very long..." He says, "Before I'd be a slave in the first place!" In the mind and heart of this man of African descent there existed a freedom that could not be denied. According to his own understanding of the situation surrounding his life he never was a slave: Furthermore, death would be his lot before he ever is one.
The freedom that the slave experienced in his heart and mind was a product of the black religious experience; but it did not cause him to ignore his everyday life. Far from causing the slave to bury himself in the kind of religious faith that is escapist and narcotic, the black religious experience gave the slave the necessary strength, fortitude, and character to fight against the legalized form of slavery. That is to say, the slave's involvement with the Almighty Sovereign God caused the slave to experience freedom at once internally, while it gave him the assurance that if he participated in the struggle with the divine against the institution of slavery, freedom would eventually become an external reality as well. The outcome of such a black religious experience was that a majority of the slaves participated in one form or another with the Almighty Sovereign God in the destruction of slavery. This participation that led to the black grapevine telegraph system ranged from collecting information, seeking outlets, lecturing against the system, and plotting and planning, to outright rebellion. But the key to this whole business was the slave's encounter with the Almighty Sovereign God — a black religious experience.

By Barbara C. Harris

Concern for Spiritual and Moral Input

If we do, indeed, have a concern for spiritual input, then we must acknowledge that such input comes into our lives not just by our profession of Christian faith and our acceptance of Christian teachings, but that it comes in more vivid and tangible form as the result of the living, moving operation of the Holy Spirit.

There are those who would like to say how, where, when, under what fortuitous circumstances and through whom the Holy Spirit can and does operate.

In my own Episcopal denomination, many say that God does not call women to be priests. The corollary of that is — if He does call them, we don't have to acknowledge that call. To me such reasoning seeks to proscribe and limit the operation of God the Holy Spirit, and that kind of vain effort has to come down hard on the side of sin.

There are those who would talk to you of a Godly, righteous and sober life — and this is no small thing to be discounted. But it is not all of life in reality, nor does it speak entirely to the various avenues and sources of spiritual input.

Eleven days ago, I participated in a service of Ordination of an Episcopal deacon — the final of several steps before becoming a priest. As you may know, with checks and balances along the way, one first becomes a postulant, later a candidate and later, satisfying certain stringent requirements, is then ordained deacon, then priest.

Not only was this ordination historic in nature, it constituted an emotionally laden moment because of the multiple dynamics operative in the total situation.

The service took place in the cold and antiseptic setting of a prison chapel with the ever present symbols of man's authority — bars and guards — more visible than God's authority. But I assure you, not only that chapel, but the whole of Graterford Prison, outside Philadelphia, was on fire that day.

Along with a priest, and on behalf of the clergy and people of the Diocese of Pennsylvania, I was privileged to present to the Bishop, for ordination, a young man — 32 years of age — who is serving a life sentence for the bizarre murder of his wife eight years ago. In the tradition of apostolic succession, the Bishop layed his hands on the young man's head and prayed: "Oh Father, through Jesus Christ your son, give your Holy Spirit to Vaughan: fill him with grace and power and make him a Deacon in your church." And those of us who have known this young man over his years in prison and had witnessed his unordained ministry to his fellows, were well aware that he, indeed, had been filled with grace and power, even before the Bishop invoked God's blessing upon him.
In the sermon preached that day, my own pastor, the Rev. Paul Washington, reminded the young man and the church present that: “Even as God called Moses, whose hands were responsible for the death of another, so He has called you, Vaughan, whose hands were responsible for the death of another, to be an instrument of deliverance, a vessel of love, a channel of grace and a source of life.”

Father Washington went on to say that the occasion might be confusing to some and for others, blasphemous, but that it was right if we believe in repentance, forgiveness, redemption and salvation. And how right it is if we can accept the fact that spiritual input, like grace, is a pure gift that comes down from the Father of lights. Can we accept that the wind bloweth where it listeth and that the spirit can call forth to ministry even one whose hands have destroyed the very gift of life?

Think on this spiritual input to his life and to ours. Spiritual input that is often ignored is resident input — that which is all around, but is frequently overlooked. If you will permit me another reference to my young friend in prison — I had a letter from him a few days after his ordination and I would share some of his words with you.

“The following day the chapel was full and Rev. Williams called on me to preach. It was unbelievable! The Holy Spirit was operating at full capacity, just as on the day before. The brothers were so attentive and their response of full acceptance of my new role was made evident. Can you imagine how that felt?

“Oh how wonderful it is to know of God’s love, grace and forgiveness through Christ. . . . I have never been this happy in my life.”

Can you imagine how the lives of some of those inmates are being impacted by this resident input? Can you also imagine what spiritual input they are offering themselves in affirming this ministry; what kind of witness some of them are making as they minister to each other?

What think ye of Christ? Those are proclaiming Christ and the good news of His gospel — what kind of spiritual input are you receiving and, in turn, giving?

Many of you are already like Joshua. Surrounded by the rebellious nature and cantankerous complaining of the Israelites, he confronted them with his own firm commitment saying; “Choose you this day whom you will serve. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

A fine commitment, obviously reflecting spiritual input and totally acceptable to all of us.

Last week I went to see the rock drama Jesus Christ, Superstar and I watched the character Judas wrestle with his honest doubts about Christ’s role, mission and ministry. In this respect I think Judas was being very honest. He tried to weigh the input he got against reality and the reality he saw and confronted, as despicable as it was, won out.

Judas is dismissed in a few sentences in most of the gospel accounts. Only in something like this rock drama does he come alive for some of
us: grappling and struggling with a mind-blowing concept (my kingdom is not of this world); looking for a Saviour, a liberator and a relief from oppression; questioning that incomprehensible sacrifice that was about to occur and that we now very joyfully accept. The input and the reality he got was hard to deal with.

And some of the input and the reality we get are hard for us to deal with. How do you love the unlovable? How do you accept a murderer into the fellowship of the club? And that’s what some of us have in the church — a club. (I once heard a minister say: the church should be a hospital for the sin-sick, not a rest home for the redeemed. I sometimes think it is a country club for the ecclesiastically elite.)

As you assume your roles as spiritual leaders, I hope you are prepared to wrestle with the spiritual input that comes to you and prepared also not to discount the quarter from which it may come. Because it can come from anywhere and from anybody.

God does, indeed, choose the weak to confound the wise. Be mindful also that the stone rejected by the builders, indeed, becomes the head of the corner.

To accept this, and I think we should, is to fully accept the second part of the Summary of the Law — Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. It is also to remember the parable of the good Samaritan which points up dramatically who is our neighbor and, conceivably, from where spiritual input can come.

I am reminded of one of the familiar hymns of the church, common to many denominations, which holds a key clue for us all: “Vainly we offer each amble oblation, vainly with gifts would His favor secure. Richer by far is the heart’s adoration, dearer to God are the prayers of the poor.” Not only the poor in substance, but the poor in heart, the poor in spirit, the poor in hope, the morally poor, the poor in quality of godly, righteous and sober living, the poor in ability to distinguish good from evil, the emasculated poor in manhood, the prostituted poor in womanhood.

We need to have concern for the validity of spiritual input from wherever it comes.

If you wonder when you are receiving or giving spiritual input, just think of time past, time present and time to come when something washing over the soul like a giant wave moves you to reach out to these the brethren and from the inner reaches and secret places of the heart comes that still small voice of calm that says: “Lord, I just come from the fountain, His name so sweet.”
DOING THEOLOGY IN A REVOLUTIONARY SITUATION
by Jose Miguez-Bonino
pp. xxviii plus 179, $3.95

and

THE POLITICS OF HOPE
by Andre Bieler
GRAND RAPIDS: EERDMANS, 1974
pp. 152, $3.95

These books join a growing number of important contributions being made to theology and the life of the church by the so-called "third world theologies." Jose Miguez-Bonino, long an important figure in Protestant theological education in South America as president of Union Seminary in Buenos Aires, has recently become dean of a post-graduate institute launched jointly by Protestants and Roman Catholics. As an observer at Vatican II and consultant to many Roman Catholic leaders, he has had a chance not only to watch, but to contribute to, the revitalization taking place in Latin American Catholicism today. Miguez-Bonino provides us with lucid insights into the genius of the emerging theologies of Gutierrez, Segundo, Alves, Assmann, and others, all of whom are influenced by the Marxist critique of the contradictions inherent within capitalist society. All insist that the church must shake loose its identification with wealth and power and take up the cause of the poor of this world as the appropriate way in the 20th Century of following Christ.

Especially helpful is Miguez-Bonino's discussion of how theology must be reflection on actual concrete praxis, both in the church and in society, if it is to avoid the sterility of abstraction or, worse yet, actually to reinforce those elements which oppose change. Theology defined in this way will serve as a constant critical principle, never satisfied with anything short of the Kingdom of God itself.

Andre Bieler is not Latin American but Swiss. Nevertheless his book comes out of his contact with the seminaries of Brazil, and is prefaced with a stirring introduction by Dom Helder Camara, the indomitable champion of the poor and Archbishop of Recife. Bieler makes use of three major social pronouncements by the churches in recent times, Pope Paul's Popolorum progressio, the report of the ecumenical Conference on World Cooperation for Development, held in Beirut in 1968, and the report of the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Uppsala. With an eye toward these documents Bieler develops a theology of human responsibility out of a Christological understanding of creation. It is obvious that Christians cannot longer live in peace or toleration with systems that are destructive of human dignity but must join God in the process of re-creation. The church must take a conscious leadership role in shaping a more human future and exhibit in its own life the first fruits of a new humanity.

The similarities between these approaches and developments in Black theologies in this country are obvious. The Latin Americans are, if anything, more radical since they generally assume that the achievement of their goals is not possible apart from major political revolutions. Bieler is more realistic than Miguez-Bonino in analyzing the persistence of evil in the world - one would expect that of a Calvinist - and espouses a "tragic optimism" grounded in the certainty of the final victory of Christ. Miguez-Bonino is not any less appreciative of the eschatological dimension, but he wants to realize some of the first fruits of the Kingdom now!

Theodore Runyan, Jr.

VALUE CLARIFICATION AS LEARNING PROCESS: A GUIDEBOOK
by Brian P. Hall
(The Paulist Press, 1973)

Value Clarification as Learning Process: A Guidebook is a practical handbook that springs from its theoretical counterpart, Value Clarification as Learning Process: A Sourcebook. More and more educators are seeking to develop materials and approaches to education that enable students to deal not only with objective facts but also with feelings and values. Hall's Guidebook is made up of exercises, games, group dynamics, and tests to help students in the process of decision making, creativity, and celebration.

The book is divided into four parts, the first of which deals with the guidelines for using the book and contains definitions of concepts. On defining "values," the author says: "A value is something that is freely chosen from alternatives and is acted upon, that which the individual celebrates as being part of his creative integration in development as a person." Value clarification means a process which we use to help someone discover values in his behavior and through the choices he makes in his life. Other categories such as value-ranking, value indicators, values and environment, primary values, work and leisure, and dimensions of process are defined and dis-
cussed in Part One. This section ends with instructions on how to use the book, as well as indications of the audience for whom the book is written. Hall suggests that it is to be used by an individual or in collaboration with a friend or group of people. In addition, the book is written for students and teachers for use in high schools, colleges, or adult classes; it is designed basically to help all grow in the process of clarification of values.

Part Two deals with exercises in value clarification. These exercises are for the use of students, teachers, and professional trainers. Some of them can be used up to three full hours. The exercises fall into the categories already mentioned under Part One.

Part Three deals with conferences that can be used for introducing and training people in value clarification. Conference formats are suggested and detailed outlines are given to provide ways of having meaningful conferences.

Part Four presents value-clarification strategies in the classroom. It contains the approach to value clarification in classroom situations, exercises that can be employed, technique formats, and pedagogical methodology. This is an excellent book. It contains photography and designs that enhance the exercises. It is like a book of recipes that can be used to fit any situation where training in value clarification is desired. Furthermore, it is an instructive manual and should be used in conjunction with its companion volume, the Sourcebook. In short, Hall's is a much-needed volume in a time when we are seeing that valuing cannot be exempted from the educational process.

Jonathan Jackson

JOHN WESLEY: A THEOLOGICAL BIOGRAPHY

by MARTIN SCHMIDT

Nashville: Abingdon Press

Professor Martin Schmidt of the University of Heidelberg has completed, in erudite German, John Wesley: A Theological Biography. Norman P. Goldhaw made the English translation of Volume I and Volume II, Part 1. Denis Inman translated Volume II, Part 2. [Would references not have been simplified by designating Volumes I, II, III?] Dr. Schmidt, a distinguished Lutheran, has made a significant, ecumenical contribution to Wesleyus Germanicus, a work sorely needed and now manifestly essential for the student who desires a full orbed interpretation of that remarkable personality of the 18th century. "The English heritage and the German contribution," claims Schmidt, "formed in John Wesley, a true and authentic alliance." (I, p. 309) Nonetheless, this reviewer questions Albert Outler's assertion, "the best biography of John Wesley since Southey's and Tyerman's..." — as we shall see, biography poses something of a problem.

In format, Schmidt's modus operandi is singular (albeit an author is entitled to his own gestalt). Volume I follows a conventional chronological order: a brief prolegomenon "The Task" and proceeding with Ecclesiastical and Historical Background; Ancestors; Childhood and Youth; Oxford; and a lengthy chapter on Georgia, which includes a somewhat extraneous reference to Beat Ludwig von Muralt, the Swiss who described prison conditions in England, "and in this way combine[s] pietistic questionings about the new man with concern for the natural man, typical of the Enlightenment." (I, pp. 124-125) Ergo we encounter Pietism, dragged into the text, and it will continue for three volumes. Why attempt to relate almost every event to a pietistic source? Schmidt concludes with the Conversion, considerable attention being given to the trip to Germany, June 14—September 16, 1738 (Journal II, pp. 3–63), a milestone in Wesley's career and masterfully presented. Volume II, Part 1 proceeds along a semi-chronological lineatie—extensive use made of Wesley's Journal and Letters and German data—blocks of historical time periods employed: Beginning of the Evangelical Movement; Progress; Wesley the Organizer; Wesley's Relation to the Church of England; Opposition. Schmidt here becomes less the theologian and assumes the role of historian.

In Volume II, Part 2 there is a complete change to a thematic approach, depicting Wesley as Preacher; Theological Writer; Pastor; Educationalist; concluding with "Take Him For All In All"—with special observation by the translator that Schmidt "does not devote a chapter specifically to Wesley as a theologian" deciding against it, in part, to existing studies on specific doctrines, i.e., Lerch and Lindstrom on sanctification and Deschner on Christology, "...on the grounds that it seemed to him so typical of Wesley that his utterances on matters of doctrine were made in sermons, in devotional writings and cautionary tracts, and in the cut and thrust of polemical and apologetic debate, in which he invariably spoke pungently, to the point and to the immediate situation." (p. 7)
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Schmidt, very wisely, regarded it “... misleading if a biographer were to diffuse this inherent concreteness by generalising abstractions.” Schmidt’s work must be viewed as a unit, not compartmentalized, otherwise one is apt to miss the point: and what, precisely, is the aim? A biography? Not in the customary sense of Tyerman or Simon, yet, “A Theological Biography” appears somehow inadequate. Theological, yes indeed—heavily so—but it is more! Any writer on Wesley is faced with the dilemma of biography v.s. a partial history of Methodism. Schmidt ingeniously employs both, plus his own thesis: the relationship between German Pietism and Wesley—the influence of Herrnhut on the Oxford don. In bringing valuable findings from research in the archives in Halle, Herrnhut and Budingen, Schmidt makes a tremendous contribution. Strength becomes a weakness at this point: he tries to make Wesley a German Pietist. By contrast, and in interesting parallel, V. H. H. Green’s The Young Mr. Wesley (1961), makes him the Englishman.

Does Schmidt expound the obvious, as in “Age and nationality, historical circumstance, and mental equipment, all made him different from the great German, French and Swiss reformers, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Huldreich Zwingli”? (I, p. 9) Or, when discussing Wesley’s “massive literary enterprise” A Christian Library, he lists the various writings, including a biography of Luther, which “... proves that he [Wesley] considered the German Reformer, to whose doctrine of the Law he took vigorous exception, to be one of the key figures in the entire history of the church”? (II, 2, p. 104)

At the outset of any biographical study it is imperative that one take into consideration the Zeitgeist under which the particular individual lived. Does Schmidt come dangerously close to forgetting that Wesley was ordained an Anglican; that he was far more English than the Hanoverian George II? Does Schmidt forget that Wesley learned German after he received his M.A. and that he delivered a solar plexus against Zinzendorf, “Is not the Count all in all? Are not the rest mere shadows, calling him Rabbi, almost implicitly both believing and obeying him?” (Letters I, p. 258) which Schmidt interprets, “Behind this criticism of Herrnhut, and in sharp contrast to such an attitude, lies the great word he wrote to James Hervey... ‘I look upon the world as my Parish’”? (I, p. 302) Again, “John Wesley derived the impulse towards the organisation of the classes and bands, as well as their names, from Herrnhut.” (II, 1, p. 98) Or “...for he [Wesley] was disposed to acknowledge like the Moravians the primacy of the Count in his community.” (II, 1, p. 45)

Is Schmidt being realistic when he affirms:

The message of the justifying grace of God remained for Wesley and Methodism at the centre of their preaching. This would not have happened apart from the association with Herrnhut, for there were no influences in the theology or ecclesiastical life of the Anglican Church of the time to encourage it? (II, 1, p. 60)

A number of queries need to be addressed to Schmidt, who maintains that “John Wesley’s course remained constant after his conversion of 24th May, 1738.” (II, 1, p. 7) Are we to conclude there was scant substantial theological growth during 1738-1791, especially since, “His sermons themselves developed into doctrinal statements of principle. This was possible only because he conceived of preaching as a theological task”? (II, 2, p. 9)

What of Wesley the reformer? “One group of his writings still remains outstanding: namely, the ethical ones, in which he declared himself clearly and concisely on contemporary society... He also did not take slavery for granted, as his contemporaries did... he attack it root and branch.” (II, 2, p. 112) Alas, other than reference to the Samuel Hoare letter, and a footnote on Thoughts Upon Slavery, of 1774, no mention is made of the incomparably letter to Wilberforce, written February 24, 1791, a week before Wesley’s death. (Letters VIII, pp. 265-266)

The author teases with “...how would events have turned out if Wesley had been offered a bishopric in the Church of England?” (II, 1, p. 144). Or a reference to the Scottish Kirk, “...Presbyterian service...in contrast to the Anglican...seemed to him poor and tedious, like weak new wine, which the taste of the genuine old article renders insipid.” (II, 1, p. 87).

Intriguing phrases appear in translation, as “...a highfalutin sense of prophetic mission...” (I, p. 247) regarding Law and Wesley, or citing the italics in Coke’s use of Wesley contra mundum. (II, 2, pp. 199, 287).

The study is refreshing and stimulating. It dispels parochialism and is a marvelous answer to those who regard Wesley as “cult hero” or “theological featherweight” and it is a corrective for those who vaguely recall Moravian influence as a trifle more than the voyage of the Simmonds or
Bohler’s “Preach faith till you have it; and then, because you have it, you will preach faith.” (Journal I, p. 442). We are grateful to Dr. Schmidt. We are reminded of the phrase attributed to Hans Leitz- mann, “Only love can write a biography.”

W. Thomas Smith

LEO SCHAYA, THE UNIVERSAL MEANING OF THE KABBALAH

tr., NANCY PEARSON


pp. 180. $1.50

The Jewish contribution to the religious literature of mankind extends beyond that of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament and Rabbinic awareness into those writings under the title of the Kabbalah. Kabbalah, derived from the Hebrew word meaning “to receive,” refers to the secret “tradition,” namely, Jewish esoteric, mystical literature. This speculative outpouring, especially during the Medieval period, has many parallels with Christian mysticism, such as in the symbolization of the close union between the soul and God by the marriage figure.

Leo Schaya, a Swiss-born Jew, provides a highly readable introduction into the meaning of the Kabbalah. The author places special emphasis upon the biblical origins of this literature by focusing on the starting point of all kabbalistic specula-
tion, namely, God as infinite, unlimited being. This is the doctrine of the Sefirot or the ten principle aspects of God, presented schematically in a series of triads. This speculative mode of viewing the divine characteristics includes the concepts of: (1) crown (lordship)-(2) wisdom-(3) intelligence; (4) mercy-(5) justice-(6) beauty; (7) victory-(8) glory-(9) foundation; and (10) kingdom. These represent the manifold aspects of the one God, for in the first triad God encompasses knowl-

dge, the knower, and the known respectively. These Sefirot are the starting points in the mystical speculation upon God.

Schaya emphasizes the universal aspects of such thought and points to Christian paral-

lels, such as found in Meister Eckhart's mystical treatises on God.

Of particular contemporary interest is the author's clear exposition of the kabbalistic linking of divine mercy or grace with divine justice and power. The one is seen as an extension of God's love into the world, while the other — the divine rigour — represents the negation of all which is a denial of God. Grace is God's right arm, but law is his left, or as Schaya notes, “. . . grace would not be affirmative without its negative possibility, rigour.” (p. 49)

Thus in our present concern for the relationship between God's mercy and judgment this book provides yet another dimension of this two-sided biblical concept. In the mind of this reviewer Leo Schaya's work does indeed expand our knowledge of God via the insights of Jewish mysticism as set forth in the Kabbalah.

Robert A. Bennett

POLITICAL THEOLOGY

by DOROTHEE SOELLE


pp. xviii plus 107, $3.50 (paperback)

Political Theology represents a theological statement/proposition for "shaking the foundations" of the status quo. There are three precise divisions to this work: first, the introduction by John Shelley, who also translated the work from German to English — this division will receive greater treatment in my critical assessment of this volume; second, chapters 1-4 which reflect the analytic-descriptive task as assumed by the author, in which there is an attempt to show "that a political interpretation of the gospel is not antithetical to the essential notions of Rudolph Bultman's theology"; third, chapters 5-8 which reflect the critical-constructive task as assumed by the author, the attempt therein is to reflect systematically, from a theological perspec-

tive, upon the relation between faith and politics.

The supposition posited in this volume by Dorothee Soelle is that political theology represents the essential formulation of the theological problem for our time. The thrust of this work is to engage in such a program "in the form of a critical conversation with the theology of Rudolph Bultman". The theological program en-
deavored therein represents an attempt to take account of the theological roots re-

flected in the Bultmanian paradigm and to relate them to the next stage, political theology, 'which seeks to bring faith and action together more satisfactorily.' The point of departure in this critical conver-
sation with Bultmann is developed from three different elements: first, the historical-
critical exegesis of the New Testament; second, the dialectical theology of the early twenties; and finally, the philosophy of existence.

Soelle contends the historical-critical method, as employed by Bultmann, repre-

sents a viable possibility toward theological emancipation. The explication being that historical criticism is employed not to es-

tablish casual dependence but rather the method of self-reflection, as endless ques-
tioning which ultimately leads to questions
that demand a decision of us. That is, the historical-critical method does not lead to the truth of faith but it poses for us the question of whether to decide for faith or despair.

The historical-critical method is not without its problems as portended in the implicit limitations reflected as it is used in the Bultmanian paradigm. The author in her critique of this facet of the Bultmanian approach sees it as being threatened by its own characteristic inconsistency. It is the contention by the author that this inconsistency is discernible in a three-fold manner: first, it limits itself and does not include present day ecclesiastical and social structures and their ideological suprastructure; second, it over looks the historical mediation of the contents of Christianity; and finally, because it exempts apparently invariable and always valid structures of faith and their appropriation. The cognizance of this limitation opens the possibility for the utilization of the positive potential latent in the historical-critical method. The essential features of the latent positive potential are criticism, analogy, and correlation. At this point the author proceeds to the second essential factor in Bultmann's paradigm-dialectical theology. (The author acknowledges that there is some difficulty in any attempt to properly assess the impact and significance of dialectical theology relative to Bultmann's thought because of changes in his thought itself and also because of the eventual triumph of Barthian orthodoxy that developed in the kerygmatic neo-orthodox wing of the Bultmanian school.) The positive significance of dialectical theology, in the Bultmanian synthesis, is "the insights into the dialectic of existence". More specifically the role of dialectical theology in the Bultmanian paradigm (and its possible significance for political theology) is inferred in his treatments of the authority of the text, as this authority is a consequence of his understanding of it as a historical claim in a particular situation; of kerygma as an absolute claim, which consequentially requires a worldly/political interpretation of the Bible, in at least theory; and of reference to the historical Jesus which serves as the corrective to the dogmatic Christ.

The third factor reflected in the Bultmanian synthesis thus treated by the author is the significance of existentialist philosophy. The author attempts to convey the significance of this factor via a discussion of the Bultmanian understanding of existence and history. Man finds himself in the understanding of his own radical historicity; in the Bultmanian paradigm this represents an individualistic constriction—this is imperative to understand as it represents the criticism of this understanding of Bultmann by Soelle. In the context of this individualistic understanding of existence history represents a referent to possibilities which reflect precedences indicative of the potential for transformation. The fallacy of this orientation is that "if one wants to deal with existence one cannot speak purely existentially".

The raison d'être for this critical conversation with the theology of Rudolph Bultmann is that, in spite of the fact that the Bultmanian paradigm is manifestly individualistic it is latently political. The intention of the author was to show that a political interpretation of the gospel is not antithetical to essential intentions of Bultmann's theology.

The relevant/prominent themes adopted from Bultmann in the critical-constructive task assumed by Soelle are as follows: the need for criticism (chapter 2); the claim for absoluteness (chapter 3); and the orientation toward personal self-understanding (chapter 4). These represent the presuppositions in formulating the political theological discussion endeavored by the author.

The discussion begins with a clarification of the concept: political theology is rather a political hermeneutic, which..., holds open a horizon of interpretation in which politics is understood as the comprehensive and decisive sphere in which Christian truth should become praxis. "Political theology begins with a modified preunderstanding. Its guiding hermeneutical principle is the question of authentic life for all men. That does not mean that the question about individual existence must be suppressed or thrust aside as not essential, but surely even that question can be answered only in terms of social conditions and in the context of social hopes. No one can be saved alone." This notion reflects a cognizance of the fact that the failure or attainment of life is governed by social presuppositions and as such belongs to the political dimensions of existence.

The essential resolve as presented in Political Theology is to reflect upon the relationship between faith as theory to action/politics as praxis, in the context of the preunderstanding of political theology, i.e., man's social existence. In this context faith is understood as unconditional affirmation. Liberation becomes 'the act of faith'. From a political theological perspective faith must necessarily represent a reflection upon the social situation of those who are brutalized and thereby uncover the social roots of that brutalization. Actions/
praxis consonant with faith/theory reflects the movement from apathy to creating "new anguish", i.e., movement toward transformation. Political theology stresses the inseparable unity between praxis and theory; thereby precluding a theory of faith as a superior component, from a praxis of love. It is at this point that the author proceeds to a discussion of what she perceives as two critical theological elements requiring reformulation: sin and forgiveness.

In light of the politically informed understanding, what is problematic relative to man's existence is infringements upon his personhood emanating from the social situation. Thus, for political theology sin must be understood as apathy toward and collaboration with "life-denying" forces in the context of existence. Therefore based on the social-political conceptualization of sin the notion of forgiveness must likewise be extended into another dimension. Forgiveness manifest represents confrontation and transformation while extending the option for a new beginning. It portends forgiveness without qualification and without reservation.

Political Theology represents an attempt to relate, cogently, the difficulty and future task of political theology. This requires speaking appropriately of the gospel. Soelle discerns this as giving a political interpretation of the New Being, which one does not enjoy for themselves alone; what is involved is giving credibility to the possibility for the liberation from oppressive structures, what is involved is an induction model for becoming truly human.

In the introduction John Shelley's analysis and description of the critical task assumed in Political Theology is "helpful". In his assessment of the constructive task he exhibits the same theological bias (or constriction)-i.e., theology as "Lord-Lord" talk-to which Soelle is responding. It is my opinion that Soelle in this work attempts to relate that, theology represents the introspection of existence from the perspective that the God/man relationship is the context of existence. Thus, theology by its nature is an anthropocentric enterprise. Shelley's assessment does not represent a response to this intention.

The analytic-descriptive task assumed by the author is veritable. The isolation of the components which comprise the Bultmann paradigm is creditable. The incorporation of all of several themes explicated from the Bultmannian synthesis-the need for criticism, the claim for absoluteness, the orientation toward personal self-understanding-into this political theology is presumptuous. This valuation is based upon an understanding of the theme, the claim for absoluteness as reflective of the process of demythologization, in light of the unresolved polemic relative to the process of demythologization. Critics have contended, and rightly so, that Bultmann's definition of mythology because it would cover not only myth but all types of symbolic and analogical language represents a tacit admission that demythologization does not succeed in its intent. Thus the credibility of the notion-the claim for absoluteness-and this theology becomes a pertinent question in light of the primacy given it in the development of this political theology; which portends to represent 'the' appropriate response. For obviously, where there are major conceptual problems-this has epistemological implications-fitting answers to the prominent questions become difficult, to say the least, if not impossible.

Other critics, viz., Fritz Buri, responding to the process of demythologization contend that it represents an existential contradiction in that it presupposes, erroneously, that there is an unique or special word of God that is inaccessible to human reflection in general. Therefore a pillar for theological construction would more appropriately be "dekeymatization". The critiques must be answered, this polemic requires resolution if the intent to present a cogent and consistently liberating theological alternative to the apolitical theology of the status quo is to be accomplished.

Relative to the constructive task the author discusses her intention as, on the one hand, bringing faith and action together more satisfactorily and, on the other hand, as discussing the relationship. For clarity and consistency the task might more appropriately be stated as the explanation of the relationship between faith as theory and action/politics as praxis. At that point the necessary thrust might be more clearly in focus. Because of the "radically" different preunderstanding informing this statement the crucial/essential task appears to be a proposition for a faith consonant with the existential requirements for liberation; i.e., the need for a relevant faith.

Political Theology as a theological statement is provocative. It is accurate in discerning 'a' response to 'a' question of today; that question being liberation. (Although I would raise the question whether political theology-with the focus on liberation-as a rubric for the discussion of the human experience is specific/inclusive enough to relate to the breadth and depth
of the human experience. For even the author acknowledges the multifarious nature of existence.) Creditably it does offer a focus for meaning and protest against injustices. Political Theology reflects a contemporary, and rightly radical, theologians attempt to lead the theological community from the “mountain peak of transfiguration to the valley of decision and action”.

Charles Richard Stith

Books Received


TO DIE WITH STYLE by Marjorie Casebier McCoy. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974. $5.95.

SYSTEMS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING by Robert Filbeck. Professional Educators Publications, Inc., 1974. $2.25


