THE JOURNAL OF THE INTERDENOMINATIONAL THEOLOGICAL CENTER

Volume III

Spring — 1976

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THE JOURNAL OF THE INTERDENOMINATIONAL THEOLOGICAL CENTER

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Contributions To This Issue

Dr. Robert A. Bennett is Associate Professor of Old Testament at the Episcopal Theological School, Cambridge, Mass. He holds the B.A. from Kenyan College, the S.T.B. and S.T.M. from General Theological Seminary and the Ph.D. from Harvard University. He has widely published in many leading scholarly journals; some of his publications include: "The Biblical Field," "Theological Education," "Black Experience and The Bible," *Theology Today* and "Biblical Hermeneutics and The Black Preacher," *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center*, Spring, 1974.

Dr. Cecil Wayne Cone is Dean of Turner Theological Seminary, which is a constituent seminary of The Interdenominational Theological Seminary, Atlanta, Georgia. His collegiate background includes the B.A., Philander Smith College, Little Rock, Arkansas; B.D., Garrett Theological Seminary, Evanston, Illinois, and Ph.D., Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia. His recent volume includes *Identity Crisis In Black Theology* and is published by the A.M.E. Publishing House of Nashville, Tennessee.

Dr. Edward P. Wimberly is Assistant Professor of Psychology of Religion and Pastoral Care at the Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia. He received the Bachelor of Arts Degree from the University of Arizona, the S.T.B. and S.T.M. degrees from the Boston University School of Theology. He recently received the Ph.D. from Boston University Graduate School.

Reverend Harold A. Jackson is Protestant Chaplain for the California Youth Authority, Chino, California. He also serves as Lecturer in Black Religious Experience at the School of Theology at Claremont and Instructor in Philosophy of Religion at the Ecumenical Center for Black Church Studies, Los Angeles. His collegiate background includes: B.A. Pepperdine University, Los Angeles, California; Th.M. School of Theology at Claremont, Claremont, California and is presently a Ph.D. Candidate at the Claremont Graduate School. Some of his publications include: "Negro Spirituals as Religious Expressions and Historical Experience" *Journal*, Blaisdell Institute Claremont, California Fall/Winter 1974 and "Black Symbols and the Black Experience" *Religion In Life*, Spring, 1972.

Dr. Hubert Danford Maultsby is Assistant Dean of General Studies and Academic Advising, Stockton State College, Pomona, New Jersey. He holds the B.A. from Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey, the S.T.B. from Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., and the Ph.D. from Drew University, Madison, New Jersey.

Mr. Calvin E. Bruce is a doctoral fellow studying theology and ethics at Yale University. He is co-editor, with Professor William R. Jones, of a forthcoming collection of essays on the Advancement of Contemporary Black Theology. The work is entitled *Black Theology II* and is to be published by Bucknell University Press.

Editorial Comment

What is the relationship between black theology and biblical theology? How does black theology bridge the gap between what the scripture "meant" then and what it means today? These and other pertinent questions are dealt with by Robert A. Bennett in a very creative manner. He reviews current scholarship in black theology and biblical theology, attempting to show the proper place for black theology in scripture and vice-versa. Both biblical scholars and theologians will welcome Bennett's contribution. Cecil Wayne Cone continues the concern to find a proper relationship between biblical theology and black theology in his quest to reconstruct the nature and meaning of Christian Theology. He attempts to develop this reconstruction using both Old and New Testaments as paradigmatic models; thus, making the Bible the foundation of Christian Theology.

Edward P. Wimberly in "Pastoral Counseling And The Black Perspective" explicates the uniqueness of pastoral care in the black church: His contention is that the black church, in large measure, employs the corporate approach to pastoral care and counseling. He sees this approach as grounded in an African soil . . . but also in the biblical conception of the nature of man and God's attempt to bring him to salvation."

Harold A. Jackson, Jr. concerns himself with the pressing need to construct a viable hermeneutic that will enable us to more adequately interpret texts. His thesis is that the dialectical approach to a text better allows us to interpret the text in that it tends to minimize ones possibility of coming to the text with preconceived ideas of "seeing the text." Jackson provides a very elaborate and helpful discussion of the meaning of dialectical method and hermeneutics. He then seeks to show the applicability of "The New Hermeneutic" for understanding spirituals. Continuing the concern with hermeneutics, Hubert Danford Maultsby in "Paul, Black Theology And Hermeneutics" searches for the relevancy of the theology of St. Paul, especially Romans Chapter 7, for illuminating God's word for contemporary man. In spite of the criticisms some black theologians have made of Paul, Maultsby methodologically shows how the theology of Paul is relevant for black liberation. When exegesis and hermeneutics are correctly employed, Maultsby demonstrates how the gap between Pauline theology and black theology can be overcome.

Calvin E. Bruce argues for "Black Spirituality" as an essential part of black religion. He makes a valuable contribution to black theological discussion in his interpretation of spirituality in light of liberation.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Henry J. Young". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Henry J. Young

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By ROBERT A. BENNETT

Biblical Theology and Black Theology

I. INTRODUCTION

It is to the credit of black theologians such as James Cone and J. Deotis Roberts that the black religious experience is beginning to receive a serious hearing within the theological curriculum. In some sense it is incorrect to equate black studies in seminaries with black studies programs in the university, for this investigation has a more pervasive role within the theological curriculum than in the university. A college black studies program can be contained within a given department, no matter how diverse the offerings within that department, but black studies within theological education cannot be so contained. Rightly understood as being revelatory the black religious experience must pervade Bible and church history no less than ethics, theology, and practical theology.¹ Therefore, this paper has as its special concern the place of black theology within the area of scripture and vice-versa. Furthermore, of the two major exponents of this emerging discipline a profitable dialogue can take place with James Cone, who has more explicitly tackled the matter of Bible content and interpretation for his theological position than has J. Deotis Roberts.

No doubt because of criticism of aspects of *Black Theology of Liberation* (1970), Cone has made a fuller statement of his approach to scripture in "Biblical Revelation and Social Existence," Chapter 4 of his *God of the Oppressed* (1975). Here he states his position with regard to an interpretative principle for the Bible:

"The hermeneutical principle for an exegesis of the scriptures is the revelation of God in Christ as the liberator of the oppressed from social oppression and to political struggle. . . ."²

It is clear in this chapter that Cone is laying out his case for a *Heilsgeschichte* pointing toward liberation of the oppressed, while at the same time broadening his biblical base to include other elements such as those found in wisdom and messianic texts that also support this hermeneutic of liberation. Thus, not only the parade examples of Moses-Exodus and prophetic texts speaking of God's will toward justice but also David-Zion and Psalter hymnic and even wisdom sayings on demands for societal justice are marshaled (Ps. 72:12-14, Isa. 33:22, Prov. 14:13 and 23:10-11). Great emphasis is placed on "The Social Context of Divine Revelation in the New Testament," in which section the case is made for Jesus' plan for the Kingdom as including liberation of the poor and afflicted. A very long footnote (page 258) restates

¹Warner Traynham, "Black Studies in Theological Education," *Harvard Theological Review* 66/2 (April, 1973): 257-271.

²Cone, *op. cit.*, p. 81; also in *Interpretation* 28/4 (Oct., 1974): 439.

Cone's refusal to separate the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith, no doubt in rebuttal of the charge of being overly Barthian and indifferent to history.³ In any event, Cone's is the fullest explication of an identifiable biblical stance of the black theologians.

William Jones, *Is God a White Racist?* (1973), in what he calls a "Preamble to Black Theology," takes the problem of theodicy, namely the why of black suffering, as a controlling category for any black theology. His use of scripture is limited to the issue of apparently unmerited suffering and clearly shows his own humanistic bent or bias. Albert Cleage, *The Black Messiah* (1969), handles numerous passages but with the aim of establishing that the Hebrews were black. Major Jones, *Black Awareness* (1971), emphasizing the relevance of the theology of hope for a discouraged black community, and J. Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation* (1971) and *A Black Political Theology* (1914), emphasizing black personhood and reconciliation, both focus on New Testament calls to love and to be reconciled. In none of these leading representatives of black theology is there as conscious a dealing with principles of scripture and its interpretation. The Bible is used, is indeed vital to the presentation of argument, but no real effort is given to stating a stance for interpretation as Cone has done in his writings, particularly now in *God of the Oppressed*. For this reason Cone will loom larger in this effort to establish a more incisive dialogue between biblical theology and black theology.

The disciplines of biblical theology and black theology are both at critical positions in their development. Black theology has emerged to the point where it can truly be in dialogue with itself and with other kindred efforts, as in South American liberation theology, African theology (both in the name of indigenization and liberation), and feminist perspectives in theology.⁴ As for within black theology, there is internal debate on questions such as the place of scripture, the politically aggressive versus the more theologically reflective emphasis, or the place of blackness as a racial or theological symbol, the narrower definition or the more universally applicable one. Biblical theology itself has passed from a stage of confidence, as reflected in Krister Stendahl's classic statement in behalf of the descriptive approach (*IDB*, 1962), to one of reappraisal after the trenchant criticism of James Barr, from *Old and New in Interpretation* (1966) to *The Bible in the Modern World* (1973), and Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (1970). The major thrust of the critique concerns hermeneutics and the forging

³ See J. Deotis Roberts, *A Black Political Theology*, p. 123.

⁴ Some representative works are: (African Theology) Kwesi Dickson and Paul Ellingworth, eds., *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1971; Mark Glasswell and Edward Fashole-Luke, eds., *New Testament Christianity for Africa and the World*, London: SPCK, 1974; Basil Moore, ed., *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa*, Atlanta: John Knox, 1974; (Liberation Theology) Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1973; Frederick Herzog, *Liberation Theology*, New York: Seabury, 1972; (Women's Perspective) Rosemary Ruether, ed., *Religion and Sexism*, New York: Simon and Shuster, 1974; Phyllis Trible "Biblical Theology as Women's Work," *Religion in Life* 44/1 (Spring, 1975): 7-13.

of links between what the Bible meant then (descriptive approach) and what it means today (contemporary proclamation), the latter of which is too often ignored or given too little attention. It is at this point, where biblical theology seeks to be able to deal with biblical interpretation and even proclamation, that it must engage and be engaged by black theology whose avowed purpose is to do "God talk" from a contemporary (black) perspective. It is overly simplistic to say that biblical theology needs issues and that black theology needs biblical sophistication, but it is not too far from the mark to suggest that each can learn from the other at this critical juncture of their careers.

II. ISSUES IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY TODAY

It is possible for a particularly fruitful and mutually beneficial dialogue to take place. In biblical theology the search seems to be shifting from efforts to find the "center of biblical theology" to that of bridging the gap between what the text "meant" then and what it "means" today. At the same time black theology is beginning to examine more closely the relevance of the scripture for its agenda of interpreting the reality of God for black Americans today. What is particularly interesting is the quest within both disciplines to recognize the dialectical relationship between the contemporary community of faith and the text, that is, an increasing recognition of the validity of later generations' appropriation and interpretation of scripture with regard to their own needs and understanding of God's will in their time. In biblical theology this is apparently the thrust of scholars such as James Sanders in a call for canonical criticism or even midrash criticism and the provocative exegesis and comment of Brevard Childs, which give new import to the subsequent interpretations of the text up to the present hearers of the word.⁵ Similarly, the debate between Cone and Roberts over the value of christological proclamation for the contemporary black struggle focuses on how the word is most potently communicated to that community of faith called the black church. An attendant discussion, closely related to that over canon, is also being carried out as to whether the biblical text is the sole vehicle for discerning the divine will for black folk today. Here J. Deotis Roberts is joined by those with a more historical and sociological interest such as Charles Long, Gayraud Wilmore, and Vincent Harding, who argue for a broader theological agenda than James Cone is ready to allow.⁶ Within both disciplines the discussion centers on the text or the texts and the validity of later interpretations given them by the faithful.

⁵ Brevard Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical Theological Commentary* (Old Testament Library), Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974. James Sanders, *Torah and Canon*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972, and "The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Quarter Century of Study," *Biblical Archaeologist* 36/4 (December, 1973).

⁶ Vincent Harding, "Reflections and Meditations on the Training of Religious Leaders for the New Black Generation," *Theological Education* 4/3 (Spring, 1970): 189-201; Charles Long, "Perspectives for a Study of Afro-American Religion in the United States," *History of Religion* 2/1 (August, 1971): 54-66; Gayraud Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, New York, Doubleday, 1972.

Surveys of the history and recent developments within biblical theology are readily available, such as those given by Robert Dentan, *Preface to Old Testament Theology* (Rev. Ed., 1961), Norman Porteous, "Old Testament Theology," in H. H. Rowley, ed., *The Old Testament and Modern Study* (1951), and both Otto Betz and Krister Stendahl articles on "Biblical Theology" in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (1962). What emerges from these studies is the fact of the uneasy merging of biblical study and theological discourse into a discipline committed to exposition of scripture in theological categories. The marriage is between content of the Bible and the fitting of the same into the structures of dogmatic theology — which includes philosophical and cultural matter — aimed at the church's contemporary needs. It was the late eighteenth century theologian, Johann Philipp Gabler, who called for the clear distinction between biblical theology which was historical in character, setting forth what the biblical writers said about God, and dogmatic theology which was more didactic and concerned with what the contemporary age thought about God. Yet even in this distinction, which holds sway to the present, it is clear that a dialectic relationship exists between the two. Each is in dialogue with and exerting some influence upon the other. We are only lately aware of the reciprocal nature of the dialogue, namely, how our thought is shaped by scripture and how our perceptions of what the sacred writers thought reflect so much more of our own perspective than we had acknowledged. It is this new awareness of an inability to fully disrobe when, in the historical-critical process, we would rethink the thought of the ancient writer that has undermined some of the earlier confidence in the objectivity of the descriptive approach in biblical analysis. In a sense Stendahl's statement of a descriptive biblical theology repeats that of Gabler nearly two centuries earlier, for Gabler spoke of three steps which both separate and link the historical-critical task and the interpretative one: first, individual passages of scripture are examined using grammatical-historical principles; second, these texts are to be compared and contrasted with one another; third, certain general principles are formulated on the basis of this analysis. Only then, after the work of the biblical theologian is done, can the systematic theologian begin to erect his system to meet the needs of his contemporary situation. Stendahl would have the exegete (1) describe, (2) interpret, and then (3) relate the results of his historical-critical analysis of the text to his own time.⁷

How then shall biblical theology be defined once its descriptive character has been set and placed in contra-distinction to the contemporary cultural demands of dogmatic theology? While it is clear that the

⁷Robert Dentan, *Preface to Old Testament Theology*, rev. ed., New York: Seabury, 1963, pp. 22-23. Cf. Krister Stendahl, "Biblical Theology, Contemporary," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (1962), pp. 422, 425. History and methodology are examined in Gerhard Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972, pp. 11-47.

term does not refer to the use of scripture within theology, it continues to be debated how it refers to the theological part of biblical study. At a very minimum this discipline can be said to be "the study of the religious ideas of the Bible in their historical context."⁸

Yet even this basic definition points to a continuing discussion of the distinctiveness of biblical theology, as against a history of religion's or comparative religion's approach. Is biblical theology simply a survey of religious concepts and institutions of Israel old and new, judged vis-à-vis the ancient Near Eastern setting? Or is it something else, say, the isolation of key elements in the classic period of religious development? Dentan refers to Eichrodt's expression for this further distinction, namely, that biblical theology is concerned not with "length-wise section" of history of religion's interest in the grasp of generic elements in the growth of a religious system but with the "cross section" in the more systematic task of describing the key, central, or most persistent elements within the religion.⁹ In a sense this distinction marks the difference between the two major Old Testament theologies of this era, Eichrodt's concern for the covenant idea as central (the cross cut) and von Rad's more lengthwise history of traditions survey. This holds for von Rad's Volume 2 analysis of the prophetic tradition as a trenchant critique of previous tradition, making that movement normative for Old Testament interpretation. Note the titles of von Rad's volumes, *The Theology of the Historical Traditions of Israel* and *The Theology of the Prophetic Traditions of Israel*.¹⁰ In a sense we live with a dual definition of biblical theology. One definition is more concerned with a systematic treatment of key religious ideas of the scripture, often borrowing the God-Man-Sin-Redemption schema of dogmatics. Ludwig Kohler, *Old Testament Theology* (1957), is typical of this point of view. The other definition, represented by von Rad and in G. E. Wright, *The God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital* (1952), interprets biblical theology more out of the matrix of Israel's historical development, tracing and highlighting the vital traditions of the people. Both views are wedded to the descriptive historical approach, but one sets forth its results in logical categories, while the other is more reportorial.¹¹

The crisis in biblical theology of which Brevard Childs speaks comes not at the point of the descriptive, historical-critical approach to scripture but at the point of bridging the gap between what the text meant then and what it means for us today. The crisis is not at the point of

⁸Dentan, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 64, 92.

¹⁰Eichrodt and von Rad debate the relative merits of their positions: Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* Vol. 1, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961, pp. 512-520; Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, New York: Harper & Row, 1962, pp. 105-128.

¹¹G. E. Wright, *Old Testament and Theology*, New York: Harper & Row, 1969, p. 62, shifts to a position more supportive of Eichrodt's covenant emphasis, and states in "The Theological Study of the Bible," *Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible* (1971), p. 986, that the Mosaic covenant is the "primary structuring concept in the OT."

exposition, whether one takes the cross-out of biblical ideas using the terminology of systematics or the long-cut, being wedded to the *Heilsgeschichte* and retelling the story of God's mighty acts, but at the point of proclamation — of interpreting the text as divine command for today. The crisis comes at the point of treating the biblical passage as kerygma. The problem is hermeneutical. By what mode or what interpretative principle can the word be effectively preached? The gap between the seminary classroom and the pulpit is not readily closed by exhortation to think things through with the mind of Christ or contemplate what Jesus would do. The focusing of the biblical word on contemporary issues is not achieved by asserting that the God of scripture is active today in the church, that the salvation events are still working themselves out within the community of faith.¹² The linguistic efforts of the New Hermeneutic movement would use the historical-critical approach to free the ancient word so it could audibly be proclaimed, so that with Ebeling, "proclamation that has taken place is to become proclamation that takes place."¹³

Yet in each of these approaches to bridging the gap, there is a forced quality of exhortation without real conviction. This refers of course to mainline "liberal" as against more narrowly conservative stances with regard to biblical interpretation. Nor is there agreement as to the essential validity of either the typological or christological mode of interpreting the word, let alone that of the much maligned allegorical method. These of course primarily refer to efforts to relate the testaments — the quest for the unity of scripture — and only to a lesser degree apply to linking the divine word to contemporary concerns. Yet in the end, if the three-fold definition and role of hermeneutics as mode of translation, interpretation, and transmission is to be met, then effective use of typological or christological — and why not even allegorical? — interpretation must be used. To say God and man are the same within the Old and New Testaments and that their histories are the same means that what holds there can be applied as a span over the chasm separating this witnessing community from the biblical one. The biblical witness to God's commitment to his people, often expressed in the promise/fulfillment or way of promise schema, provides a useful key to the continuity between the then and the now of proclamation.¹⁴

Closely related to the hermeneutical problem is that of identifying the central or unifying theme found in the Bible, especially within the realm of Old Testament theology, that is, the key to the message of proclamation which spans the there/then and here/now communication gap. The

¹² Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, pp. 51-60.

¹³ Gerhard Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963, p. 329.

¹⁴ So we may surmise from the arguments of Zimmerli, Westermann, von Rad, and Eichrodt in Claus Westermann, ed., *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964, and especially in B. W. Anderson, "The New Covenant and the Old," in Bernhard W. Anderson, ed., *The Old Testament and Christian Faith*, New York: Harper & Row, 1963, pp. 225-242.

methodological approach to doing Old Testament theology can be said to consist of two basic types. The cross section or central biblical theme type, which is often expressed in the God-Man-Salvation categories of systematic theology, is represented in Eichrodt's focusing on covenant and the God-People, God-World, and God-Man schema. The long cut or salvation history (acts of God) type, which shuns external logical categories for a simple recital of events, is championed by von Rad, who can be said to be writing on the "theologies" of the Old Testament in his dependence on the tradition-history approach. These representative modes of approaching the text can also be characterized as defining the internal unity of scripture as either "word" (idea or concept of covenant) or as "event" (process of salvation history).

Gerhard Hasel, "The Problem of the Center in the OT Theology Debate," *ZAW* 86/1 (1974), calls attention to the fact that neither focus alone can encompass the breadth of the biblical witness, for as covenant or election ideology cannot adequately handle the testimony to God's universal lordship, neither can any event-centered schema permit the non-*Heilsgeschichte* (as Psalms, Wisdom) portion of scripture to speak. Hasel questions whether the manifold nature of the Old Testament testimony can be systematized, even in a dual use of word and event "center", for both modes of approach represent what he calls an "unconscious philosophical-speculative premise."¹⁵

He argues against seeking any center superimposed on the dynamic of growth, as represented in the biblical witness to "diverse and manifold encounters between God and man" over such a long period. Hasel would break the impasse in the search for a single unifying "center" in Old Testament theology by focusing on the dynamic encounter between God and man, where God becomes the center of both word and event. The emphasis is on God as a dynamic, unifying core rather than on any form of static organizing principle. The critique of both Barr and Childs against OT theology as it is pursued today points to the lack of any agreed upon unity, and those which are proffered fail most noticeably to deal adequately with the wisdom tradition.¹⁶ We shall return to this question as it affects black theology's use of the Old Testament, especially in the area of the scope of the divine-human encounter.

Particularly intriguing are recent suggestions by Childs and Sanders that more attention be given the process of redaction and selection of the biblical material by the initial communities of faith.¹⁷ Tradition criticism, which traces the process of selecting and linking traditions, and canonical criticism — if such can be looked upon as a distinct discipline, which focuses on the final selection process giving us our scripture, both

¹⁵ Gerhard Hasel, "The Problem of the Center in the OT Theology Debate," *ZAW* 86/1 (1974) p. 79. Cf. his *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, pp. 49-63.

¹⁶ Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, pp. 66-70; James Barr, *Old and New in Interpretation*, London: SCM, 1966, pp. 72-76.

¹⁷ See note 5 above.

acknowledge a dialectic process at work between inspired word and community of faith. Could not the reciprocal relationship apparently at work in the midrashic and canonical process give some hint of a vital relationship which continues to be at work between church and scripture? Instead of looking for an elusive central unifying message in scripture and then in dismay being brought to a concept such as that of a canon within a canon in order to separate wheat from chaff, cannot the dynamic process of scripture's growth itself be instructive of the biblical message? As in earlier debates over the nature of revelation as to whether it concerned propositional truth about God or was a process of divine self-revelation, so in this area of discussion it would be useful to shift emphasis away from unifying principle(s) toward the dynamic of the divine-human encounter itself. The focus then would be on the formation of scripture and the community's relationship to it throughout the total process. This is also to say that despite the passage of time, later generations such as ours would continue to stand in a dynamic relationship with the sacred text. Tradition-history points up the very long process by which the received text emerged, the palimpsest idea of subsequent generations rearranging and adding to received traditions. A look at the evolution of canon reveals the criteria and motives for the final fixing of the sacred story. What emerges is a mixture of theological-political-existential motives and criteria for such significant shifts of emphasis as in the movement from

(a) Hexateuch (Exodus-Sinai-Conquest plus Promise to Fathers) to (b) Tetrateuch and Deuteronomic History (Promise-Exodus-Sinai plus Creation) now with Conquest-Kingdom(s) to (c) Pentateuch (Creation-Promise-Exodus-Sinai-Wilderness) and Prophets (Conquest-Kingdoms plus Prophets).

James Sanders, *Torah and Canon* (1972), addresses this issue, treating as well the Writings, that often neglected final portion of the tripartite canon of the Hebrew Bible. Crisis situations — all involving oppression from without — forced upon the community a new relationship vis-à-vis the traditions, a new reading and a new ordering of the story of God's dealing with his people.

E. A. Speiser has written cogently of Israel's election to be both "nation" (*goy/ethnos*) and "people" (*'am/laos*).¹⁸ Thus, it is the threat to the socio-political configuration that poses the trauma of lost identity in the fall of the northern kingdom (impetus for Deuteronomic effort), the fall of Jerusalem and Exile (impetus for Priestly and Prophetic work), and the Restoration adjustment within the Persian empire (formation of incipient Law-Prophets-Writings canon). This is to say that canonical process reflected both political and spiritual realities of the day and, further, that this ought not to be viewed as mere historical accident or contingency but rather as itself part and parcel of the divine-human encounter that makes up the scripture. Saving word and saving

¹⁸E. A. Speiser, "'People' and 'Nation' in Israel," *JBL* 79/2 (1960): 157-163. Cf. Robert Bennett, "Black Experience and the Bible," *New Theology* No. 9 (1972), pp. 176-189.

event that emerge from Sinai covenant and exodus liberation (also prophetic word and Zion — “Day of Yahweh” event) must also be expanded to include these moments of trauma when a still newer and deeper awareness of God’s self-revelation led to re-readings and adjustments of the sacred traditions, to say nothing of several additions to the text from Restoration literature. The discovery and interpretation of the literature at Qumran points not only to the fluid nature of canon near the turn of the millennium but also to the role of questions of identity during oppression in determining what is held to be “sacred,” whether ancient or newly created.¹⁹ Though the person of Jesus is central to the New Testament canonical process, similar factors seem to have given impetus to gathering the Epistles and the creation of the Apocalypse of John, the latter of which parallels Daniel as a punctuation mark for the canon. Though the question of adding to or subtracting from the received canon has not been argued with success, it is clear that subsequent generations of the church (and synagogue) have approached the scripture with different questions from age to age; and they have been rewarded with direction and power appropriate to that age or situation. The Patristic era was shaped by its reading of the text but also brought new ideas to it in its use of philosophical concepts. Protestant Reformation and Bible are yoked together, with subsequent interpretation being marked by questions put to the text by Calvin and Luther. Today two groups profoundly shaped by a new encounter with the Bible are the Catholic Church and the black church, the one more recently after the freeing encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943), the other in its reception of the word in bondage.²⁰

III. THE BIBLE IN BLACK THEOLOGY TODAY

It is at this point where Bible and people encounter one another, the hermeneutical nexus, that biblical theology and black theology must begin their dialogue. Begin is the word because the ensuing interchange will pass beyond hermeneutics to touch the manner in which the exegete performs his descriptive task and the theologian forms his statement on the reality of God in life today. As stated at the beginning, this paper more directly concerns the black theologian, particularly as he engages the theological community. This is because the black religious experience seen as revelatory has a pervasive role within the theological curriculum and hence cannot be relegated to a few electives in church history and perhaps homiletics or pastoral theology. The subject matter of black theology rightfully touches on the entire curriculum — Bible, history, theology, ethics, pastoral theology — and is of consequence for black and white alike. The black theologian will also be touched by

¹⁹ James Sanders, “The Dead Sea Scrolls . . .,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 36/4 (December, 1973).

²⁰ Robert Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, New York: Macmillan 1963; and Robert Bennett, “Biblical Hermeneutics and the Black Preacher,” *Journal of the ITC* 1/2 (1974): 38-53.

biblical theology because his special constituency, the black church, has a unique relationship with holy scripture. Like the biblical community, this community of faith met its lord in a very long moment of crisis. A very special link was forged during bondage between the God of scripture and the African slave bereft of every other form of identity — homeland, language, religion, kinship. His new life became marked by hope and a profound trust that the God of his enslaver would bring deliverance. The Bible for the slave ancestors was both holy book and primer; and like the African who received the Gospel from missionaries during colonialism, the new religion was a way both to salvation and to a new socio-political existence. Thus biblical and black theologians have parallel tasks, with one moving from the past to the present meaning of scripture and the other moving between that word and the realities of the modern situation. The point is that the cultural awareness and perceptions of the black religious community, as in the Tillichian method of correlation, pose vital questions to scripture and also bring with the question some new insights (revelations) in the encounter.

Since this effort is directed more toward the black theologian than the biblical theologian, it gives more attention to what is happening in biblical theology than in black theology. Since of the theologians, James Cone is more dependent upon and more articulate about his use of scripture, most of the comment about the discourse between the disciplines will focus on his presentation. In that important chapter, "Biblical Revelation and Social Existence," in his latest work, *God of the Oppressed*, (1975) Cone asserts that liberation is the Key to biblical interpretation and is the (sole?) hermeneutical principle. While he has not committed himself as clearly as Cone has to a hermeneutical position, J. Deotis Roberts attacks Cone for his Barthian christological stance, which doubtlessly refers to (a) disparagement of history in the great stress on transcendence and (b) firm denial of any form of natural revelation.²¹ The former puts total emphasis on kerygmatic proclamation and the crucial encounter with God's word where personal decision is required, and the latter rejects any source for revelation save that in the risen Lord. Roberts acknowledges Cone's concern for history and recognition of other forms of revelation but rejects the exclusivity of Cone's stance on blackness and salvation-liberation as limited to the oppressed. Roberts opts for a more universalistic approach and owns up to the influence of his teachers in the British neo-liberal school, John Baille and Herbert Farmer, plus his own black experience in shaping his christological statement.²² His *A Black Political Theology* (1974)

²¹ James Cone speaks of the Bible in black theology in *A Black Theology of Liberation*, New York: Lippincott, 1970, pp. 66-69, passim, as well as in *God of the Oppressed*, New York: Seabury, 1975, pp. 62-83, on the hermeneutical question. In the latter work he also speaks of: biblical revelation, pp. 91-101; Bible and black suffering, pp. 163-183; and of Jesus, pp. 108-137. J. Deotis Roberts offers critique of Cone's biblical stance in *Black Political Theology*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974, pp. 123, 181-182, and in "Theology of Religions . . .," *Journal of ITC* 1/2 (1974): 54-68, esp. 65-66.

²² J. Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971, pp. 142 ff., and in *Black Political Theology*, p. 127.

speaks of the special place of scripture in black theology but seems to take an "anthropological" approach in emphasizing the significant concepts for black selfhood, e.g., "The Bible speaks existentially to the individual black man, but it also addresses black people."²³

There is a more than subtle shift in emphasis when Cone speaks of the Bible among the sources of black theology in *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970): "The Bible is inspired because through reading it, a community can encounter the resurrected Christ and thus be placed in a state of freedom whereby it will be willing to risk all for earthly freedom."

In the same section of that volume, Cone argues that the link between then and now of proclamation is God as revealed in Jesus and that by reading of God's activity in the biblical era, the black faithful can "experience" his work in the contemporary world. The meaning of scripture is not found in its words but "in its power to point beyond itself to the reality of God's revelation; and in America, that means black liberation."²⁴

There is a hint of typology in this use of scripture to find patterns for God's behavior in present existence, but overriding this is Cone's emphasis on Jesus as the true revelation of God.

Using Cone as representative of black theology — not because he is typical but because he has given the clearest statement of his use of scripture — let us now have biblical and black theology converse one with the other. Some major issues within biblical theology have been exposed, so what now can be said about black theology à la James Cone? Cone takes the lengthwise view of scripture, reciting the saving acts of God for the elect community, emphasizing throughout the social context of God's decisions and activity. God chooses to free Hebrew slaves, not their oppressors; he punishes disobedient Israel for its divine and societal covenant infractions but again shows mercy toward the oppressed in the prophetic call for justice. Justice is for the poor and for the disobedient, each receiving his due. "There is no divine grace in the Old Testament (or in the New Testament) that is bestowed on oppressors at the expense of the suffering poor."²⁵

Cone sees this theme as present in the royal theology and in wisdom tradition, namely, special concern and responsibility for the poor and helpless. Exile and return are seen as setting the stage for future events in Jesus Christ. Indeed the New Testament (Matthew 5:17) speaks of itself as the fulfillment of God's "drama of salvation." Cone spends some time on the Gospel accounts of Jesus and the question of history being especially careful to emphasize the historicity of Jesus and its

²³ *Black Political Theology*, p. 38. Roberts states his view on scripture in pp. 36-42.

²⁴ *Black Theology of Liberation*, p. 69.

²⁵ *God of the Oppressed*, p. 68.

importance in relation to the Christ of faith and the Lord's identification with the poor in his ministry.²⁶ The messianic role of Jesus, seen as a linking of royal and (suffering) servant themes, focuses on "the establishment of justice through suffering." It is upon this key affirmation that Cone interprets the divine mission as one of liberation for the poor and outcast. Furthermore, in this day and time the *scandal* of the Gospel is seen as just such a call for a radical transformation of our social and political existence. Cone places this at the heart of the Gospel and rejects Bultmann's emphasis on human self understanding as emerging from the divine-human encounter. The Gospel is bad news for the privileged and good news for the oppressed. Jesus is contiguous with the Old Testament in that his life is the "historical demonstration that the God of Israel wills salvation for the weak and helpless;" he is discontinuous in that his saving grace is more than "historical freedom," that is, the incarnation goes beyond the exodus as a liberation event. The Christ event "transcends history and affirms a freedom not dependent on socio-political limitations."²⁷

The essence of the New Testament story is that in the crucified-resurrected Lord the promised freedom is "now fully available."

Cone concludes this statement on scripture with an examination of the relationship between theology and the Bible in black theology. His statement of a hermeneutical position is made in face of a charge that black theology is too selective, ignoring vital traditions such as David-Zion and wisdom and placing one-sided emphasis on Moses and the prophets. Referring to black theology's use of scripture, he says,

"The hermeneutical principle for an exegesis of the scriptures is the revelation of God in Christ as the liberator of the oppressed from social oppression and to political struggle, wherein the poor recognize that their fight against poverty and injustice is not only consistent with the gospel but is the gospel of Jesus Christ."²⁸

Cone argues that the test of the validity of such a hermeneutic can only come from God; that is, it is to be found in revelation alone. This is to say that the principle of interpretation is given in scripture and is grasped by those for whom the liberation is intended. From this lengthwise survey of God's self-disclosure in event, Cone concludes that the Bible has a message for all of theology. Given the nature of God's self-revelation within history, theology must therefore (a) be itself social and political; (b) be prophetic, daring to speak up in behalf of the helpless; (c) be aware of and itself become a bearer of the tradition of interpretation; and (d) address a word of liberation directly to the oppressed and one of judgment to the oppressor. The encounter with scripture lays a heavy responsibility upon theology — one of reflecting the divine word in both its method and its message.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 258-249, note 4; and pp. 78-80.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82. Cf. *Black Theology of Liberation*, pp. 114-116.

Is Cone right — some may even ask if he is serious — in such an appraisal of the theological task? Cone is here speaking about all Christian theology, not simply black theology. We will not presume to address the matter of his words to the theologian, except to wonder if his recital approach in biblical analysis can or even should be carried over into theology. Cone begins this concluding section of his paper with the statement, "... Christian theology exists only as its language arises out of an encounter with the biblical story. . . ." ²⁹

While he is aware that theology is more than simply repeating the Bible story, Cone seems to lay too heavy a weight here, to the exclusion of the task of communicating the story to the contemporary culture in the logical categories and schema through which it might fully grasp the message and begin to work out its directives.

What of the author's mode of biblical analysis and his hermeneutical principle? Here, let us venture comment and begin by saying the obvious. Cone stands squarely within the salvation-history, biblical-theology-as-recital school. But as noted above, some biblical critics are less confident today in the adequacy of such an approach for dealing with the breadth of the Bible witness. Yet it seems that Cone is sensitive to such an observation in that he has moved to include some royal and wisdom motifs in his presentation. These, however, cannot simply be added by title as it were, but must be worked into his system through an expansion of his view of the divine self-disclosure and the varied nature of the divine-human encounter. Yet just as Cone seems to be "event" oriented in his Old Testament analysis, so his New Testament survey shows more concern for a "word" orientation. Can there be such a shift from God-event in the Old to what might be called Jesus-word in the New Testament? Would not the consistent use of both word and event concepts for both testaments better describe the God-man encounter in both and provide a greater breadth of approach for the black theologian? Wisdom no less than royal-messianic themes augment the God-in-history emphasis in the whole of scripture. In any event, whether one continues the search for a "center" in biblical theology such as Cone's stance reflects or replaces this approach with one allowing for a greater diversity of the biblical encounter with God as Hasel suggests, the liberation note would continue to be essential in any resulting biblical theology. It would seem to me that the impact of black theology should be such as to prevent the liberation element being left out of any subsequent program.

The black theology of James Cone is a contemporary witness to the encounter which can take place between Bible and theology, between the then and the now of biblical meaning. Cone himself, avowedly addressing a black audience, has moved to a position calling for all of Christian theology to become so engaged. The implication is that in using the hermeneutic of liberation others will hear the same contemporary word of God now unfolding in black theology. This is an aspect of the revela-

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

tory nature of the black religious experience. The general context is that of faith addressing faith, of witness in dialogue with witness. The weakness of Cone's engagement with scripture is not so much a matter of substance as one of method. It does not follow that the "language" of theology must be that of the Bible, even if Cone agrees with von Rad's view that biblical theology is fundamentally "telling the story." The New Testament parables indicate that there are numerous ways of telling the story, the language need not in a narrow sense be the very words of the *Heilsgeschichte* or of the prophets or of the psalmist and sages. If we learn anything from Bultmann, it is that there must be a transposing of language for real communication to take place across the ages. Even for a biblically shaped and oriented community like the black community there must be a translation of the message into modern cultural and philosophical categories. One of the messages of biblical wisdom is that Israelites could communicate in what was the lingua franca of pervasive non-Yahwistic cultural forms. This is also testimony of the numerous borrowed forms within Israel's cultic corpus.

Another methodological weakness consists of the use of an assumed "center" within biblical meaning and its use as the basis of a hermeneutic approach to the whole of scripture. The question of whether there is or is not a single central concept or meaning adequate for the construction of a biblical theology is one of methodological approach. It does not affect the truth of the liberation motif and its centrality within the scriptural witness. But being conscious of methodology, of opting for a broader rather than a narrower principle for ordering the material does open up even more avenues for viewing the operation of the liberation theme within the Bible. By focusing on the variety of God's relationship with his creation, that is, with the broad scope of the divine-human encounter, the liberation concept is broadened and deepened and not limited to the *Heilsgeschichte*. Thus viewed it cannot be diluted or pushed aside for some other conceptual word or event. The cultic hymn and lament, the wisdom prudential counsel or critique of orthodoxy, are now opened to be interpreted vis-à-vis God's will to save, and not merely as an appendage to his action in history or dim mirror image of the divine activity. Far from diverting attention from the salvation history, these otherwise non-event elements contribute both a humanizing and a mystical note to the divine-human encounter. The contribution of black theology toward a new sense of God's reality today will be enhanced by taking a broader view with regard to the core of biblical thought. In seeking a "center," such as the idea of covenant, Eichrodt's biblical theology has difficulty in speaking meaningfully about God and his world and that which falls outside the election tradition. Von Rad's theology is also marred by such an exclusive concern for credal affirmation of Yahweh-event and prophetic comment thereon that he must relegate the Writings of the Hebrew canon to a second-class status ("Israel's Response") of something less than revelation. These too nar-

rowly drawn circles present pitfalls which black theology might well avoid, because so many elements testifying to God's liberating grace and to the mystery of that activity are lost in the quest for a central meaning-idea-concept in the Bible.

IV. BLACK THEOLOGY IN THE THEOLOGICAL CURRICULUM

A very brief statement reiterating the broad significance of black theology for theological education is necessary. The word of Childs and Sanders is that we have drawn our circles too closely with regard to the descriptive approach in biblical theology, that exegesis must move to contemporary meaning via the path of the history of meanings given to the text. Our canon is the result of the ongoing process of extended meaning of the text and tradition, and from this we should learn that the process of revelation does not end with the close of canon. Biblical theology, therefore, must not only give statement to that ever-widening circle of encounter with God within the textual tradition but also point to the ongoingness of the process. Black theology, like the great theologies of the past, gives testimony to the ongoing process of the human family's encounter with God within life. As such, biblical theologians as well as systematic theologians and church historians and ethicists should take up the challenge of black theology to examine and act upon its liberation theme. Rather than being seen as a low priority elective for black and some white students, black theology ought to have a regular place within the theological curriculum, and some of its concerns as regular elements within other course offerings.

If we rightly hear what black theology is trying to say, it is that its word is a word for all who would hear the gospel today. Though he does not mention black theology or the American urban unrest, I am sure that Brevard Childs' perceptive commentary of Exodus 2:11-25, Moses' slaying of an Egyptian, represents a digging into the text on the basis of new questions being put to the scripture as a result of pressing social issues.³⁰ From a very different corner of the intellectual sphere, we might do well to look at C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (1961), especially the chapter on the imprecatory psalms, "The Cursings," for sensitive and fresh treatment of anger and its place in the divine scheme. In addition to putting questions to scripture out of contemporary concerns, black theology also points to the hymns and sermons of the black religious heritage as texts giving classic statement to black perceptions of God's saving activity in life. These affirmations are stamped out of the biblical mold, but bring such new perceptions with them as to be compared with that biblical palimpsest process of the new being inscribed upon the old. The black sermon, "Behold the rib," is more than comment on Genesis 2:21-25, for out of the black experience which forged a new relationship between black male and female, there is a profound

³⁰ Childs, *Book of Exodus* (1974), pp. 27-46; *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, pp. 164-183.

new word on the man and woman belonging side by side in everything.³¹ Many a black preacher was able to grasp the deepest meaning of Esther 4:14 despite its apparent silence (non-reference) regarding the source of deliverance.³² Particularly valuable source material and interpretation is found in Howard Thurman, *The Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death* (Ingersoll Lecture) (1947), and *Deep River* (1955), and also James Cone, *Spirituals and the Blues* (1972). These are simply hints of what has been done, recently and not so recently, relating interpretation of scripture to the existential situation of the contemporary culture.³³

Perhaps the greatest challenge of black theology to the theological curriculum is in the biblical discipline, the one committed to searching for meaning and the means to the same for today. Thus, even as this study has been directed primarily to the black theologian, it is also a word to the biblical theologian. That word is that black theology is the most serious effort within the theological community today attempting to grapple with biblical meaning for today. Inasmuch as it is bridging that gap between what it meant then and what it means now, biblical theology can find no more worthy or profitable enterprise than to be in dialogue with black theology.

³¹ Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps, eds., *Book of Negro Folklore*, New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1958, pp. 233-235. Cf. James Weldon Johnson's, *God's Trombones*, New York: Viking 1955. Also, James Cone, "The Content and Method of Black Theology Consultation, Accra, Ghana, December 1974.

"Behold de rib!
Brothers, if God
Had taken dat bone out of man's head
He would have meant for woman to rule, hah
If he has taken a bone out of his foot,
He would have meant for us to dominize and rule.
He could have made her out of back-bone
And then she would have been behind us.
But, no, God Almighty, he took de bone out of his side.
So dat places the woman beside us.
Hah! God knowed his own mind.
Behold de rib!"

³² "And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Esther 4:14b (RSV). While the black preacher uses this text to inspire the favored of the community to aid the distressed, others such as Frederick Douglass speak of the broader black-white situation in America. In his journal, *North Star* (1849), Douglass interprets the black presence in America thus,

"We shall never die out nor be driven out; but shall go with this people, either as testimony against them, or as evidence in their favor throughout their generations."

³³ Julius Lester's review of C. Eric Lincoln, ed., *The Black Experience in Religion in Christianity and Crisis* 35/5 (March 31, 1975): pp. 73-75, criticizes much of black theology for not making more of the "experience of faith" which he finds at the core of black religion. While this is not the last word on the subject, it is significant that one outside of the theological discipline should make such a comment on essays devoted to the black religious experience.

BY CECIL WAYNE CONE

Toward a New Introduction to Christian Theology: Telling the Story

Many people feel that theology is a collection of fancy words and fat sentences that have little to do with the lives of people or the real meaning of Christian faith. Such an impression causes laypersons — and many preachers, too — to ask, “Why bother with theology?”

The answer to the question “Why bother with theology?” is clear when “theology” itself is defined. The term “theology” comes from the Greek words *Theos* (God) and *Logos* (word or reason), so “theology” means word or reason about God. Actually, theology is inseparable from the Christian way of life. Each time a preacher mounts the pulpit to proclaim “Thus saith the Lord,” or a Sunday School teacher confronts her class with words about the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or a layperson testifies on Wednesday night concerning the goodness of the God “who brought me from a mighty long way,” they are making theological statements. The theologian merely takes these statements about God and organizes them into a coherent system to make sure that they are in harmony with God’s revelation of himself in the Old and New Testaments. It is in this way that theology helps the Church understand her confession of faith and regulate her mission in the world.

In this essay, I will look briefly at the Old and New Testaments as the foundation for Christian Theology and then outline the development of theology from the patristic age to the recent appearance of Black Theology.

I. THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS AS THE FOUNDATION FOR CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

The Old and New Testaments are the foundation for Christian theology. They are the source materials that underlie what Christians believe about God. Any interpretation of Christianity, therefore, must be directly related to the Bible.

A. *Old Testament*

The Old Testament is the story of Israel’s encounter with the God who discloses himself in historical events. He introduces himself as Almighty, Sovereign, and Mysterious.

The story of God’s dealings with Israel begins with the Exodus from Egypt. God met Moses near Mt. Sinai in the mysterious form of a burning bush. At first Moses, like most of us, wondered how a bush could burn without being consumed. But his attention quickly shifted from seeing the bush to hearing the God who spoke from the bush: “I have

seen the affliction of my people . . . and have heard their cry . . . I know their sufferings, and have come down to deliver them" (Ex. 3:7-8). In this "I and thou" dialogue, God summoned Moses to take part in this divine act of liberation: "Come, I will send you to Pharaoh" (Ex. 3:10).

However, Moses was uneasy about the divine call and offered various protests in an attempt to remain on the comfortable sidelines of history. He complained that if he were to go to the Hebrews in Egypt and convince them of his experience at Sinai, he would have to know God's name (Ex. 4:13). In ancient times this was a vital question, because the character of God was expressed in his name. In Hebraic thought, the name represented the innermost identity of a person and was filled with mysterious power and significance. Moses' question about God's name, then, was an attempt to know the mystery of divine nature.¹

God Answered Moses: "I AM WHO I AM," instructing Moses to tell the people, "I AM has sent me to you (Ex. 3:14). "I am who I am" is an attempt to translate YHWH (Yahweh), the ancient and most holy name of God (often translated "the Lord" in English Bibles). The name Yahweh suggests not *being* — as in "I am" — but *action* and *causation*. Thus, God was telling Moses in Exodus 3:14: "Say to the people of Israel, 'HE WHO CAUSES THINGS TO HAPPEN' has sent me to you." This meaning of the divine name helps us better to understand God's answer to Moses. Moses had asked for information about the mystery of the divine nature (the name), but received instead the divine demand of obedience and the assurance that he would know who God is by what he brings to pass. That is to say, the question "Who is God?" would be answered in future events brought about by God.

The historical events that reveal who God is took place in Egypt. Moses went to Pharaoh and told him that Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews, said "let my people go." When the Egyptian pharaoh refused, God himself intervened on behalf of that helpless band of slaves and after a succession of suspense-filled episodes overcame the Egyptian pharaoh, the mightiest emperor of the day. However, the real power of God was manifested in the episode at the Red Sea. Pharaoh told Moses to take the people and go but changed his mind soon afterward and sent soldiers in hot pursuit after the children of Israel. He overtook them at the Red Sea, and Moses cried to God for directions. God said to Moses: "Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward." Whereupon, the Lord opened a highway through the Red Sea for the people of Israel and when Pharaoh and his army tried to follow, the Lord caused the sea to swallow them up (Ex. 14:15-18).

Thus the people of Israel were liberated from Egyptian bondage by the mighty acts of Yahweh. He continued to be with them as they made their way through the desert to the sacred mountain of Sinai — providing

¹For a discussion of the "name of God" see Bernhard Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament* (Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1966), pp. 38 ff.

food for their hunger, water for their thirst, and a mighty hand for their protection from the enemy.

After the people of Israel reached Sinai, God established with them a covenant. The covenant that was made with them was based upon the deliverance from Egypt and its sequel, the guidance through the desert. God had been carrying his people, just as an eagle lifts its young on its wings, toward this place for a divine purpose:

You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself. Now, therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all people; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex. 19:4-6).

Now, the people had to respond. God's initiative placed them in a situation of decision. Whether in fact they would be the people of God depended upon a condition: "If you will obey my voice and keep my covenant." If so they would be Yahweh's "private property," his special community whose ultimate aim was to order its entire life according to God's sovereign demands.

Thus, Israel was converted and created into a new people — the people of God. This story of Israel's beginnings, which governs the whole Old Testament, is the story that provides the data for the Christian understanding of God. Indeed, it is the first layer of the foundation for the development of a Christian theology. Everything we believe about God and his purpose for the world and humankind is related to this story. It is in this manner that it is sacred for the Christian. No statement about God is considered relevant that does not harmonize with this story.

But this story is merely the beginning of God's dealing with his people. The story continues throughout the Old Testament and is finally consummated or fulfilled in the New Testament.

B. New Testament

The New Testament is the story of God in Jesus Christ, reconciling the world unto himself. It is the story of God's reign breaking in upon history — of what God has done, is doing, and will do through a man called Jesus from a place called Nazareth.

In this story an angel of the Lord appears to Mary and tells her that she has found favor with God. He tells her that she will conceive and bear a son, whom she should name Jesus.

He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High;
And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,
And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever;
And of his kingdom there will be no end (Luke 1:32-33).

When Mary questioned the angel concerning this matter in light of the fact that she had no husband, the angel informed her that this was a divine affair and that God himself had already arranged for the Holy Spirit to perform the necessary function for a biological birth and that

the power of the Most High would overshadow her, because this child would be God's own Son.

When Jesus grew into manhood he was baptized by John, whereupon "the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him . . . and a voice came from heaven, 'Thou art my beloved Son; with Thee I am well pleased' " (Luke 3:21-22). Later he went to the synagogue in Nazareth and was asked to read from the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to preach
good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the
captives,
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

Everybody was astonished by the way he read that passage and even more so when he declared: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:16-21).

Jesus went throughout Galilee teaching and preaching about a new age that God was inaugurating, known as the Kingdom of God. He called twelve men to be his closest disciples. They had not only heard him talk about the new age, but they witnessed many miracles that he performed, from healing the sick to raising the dead. After only three short years, Jesus caused such commotion that he was accused of sedition, led before Pilate, and sentenced to die on the cross.

Ordinarily this would be the end of the story (since the disciples had dispersed, denying that they even knew Jesus), except for a strange occurrence three days later. Some women went down to the tomb where they had put Jesus' body and to their utter amazement it was not there. They told the disciples about it and some thought at first that the body was stolen. Later Jesus appeared to them and told them that he had arisen from the dead and that he was returning to heaven. He also informed them that he would not leave them alone, but that in due time he would send the Holy Spirit to continue the work he had started with them. They were to wait together in one place for him.

Sure enough, "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:1-4). From that day forward the disciples went forth armed with the Holy Spirit, threatening to turn the world upside down.

This story provides the final layer of the foundation for Christian theology. All statements about God must be related to this story. The theologian must understand the New Testament as the story of what God has done, is doing, and will do in Jesus Christ and that the Old

Testament salvation story is not only continued but finds its consummation in this story. Jesus himself indicated that his presence on earth was not to abolish but to complete the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 5:17). Indeed, the New Testament affirms throughout that the same God who was with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who was with Moses, Joshua, and David was incarnated in the man from Nazareth. This incarnation was not only a continuation of the past but, more importantly, the inauguration of a completely new age.

The biblical story, then, is the foundation for all future talking or speaking about God. In this light, the task of the theologian is to take the statements which the Church makes about God and organize them into a coherent system to make sure they are in harmony with the story of God's revelation of himself in the Old and New Testaments. This function of theology helps the Church to understand her confession of faith as well as regulate her mission in the world. Theology, though not identical with biblical expressions, has its reasons for being grounded in them. As long as theologians are faithful to these biblical roots, their statements about God may be considered Christian. But when the biblical story is ignored, misinterpreted, or distorted, theologians' statements about God are un-Christian.

II. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEOLOGY FROM THE PATRISTIC AGE TO THE APPEARANCE OF BLACK THEOLOGY

Christian theology began with the so-called Church Fathers or the patristic age (about 100-600 A.D.). At the beginning of this period Christians were under attack, especially for two things. First, they were accused of being a threat to the Roman Empire. Christianity was supposedly undermining the government. Secondly, Christians were accused, philosophically speaking, of speaking nonsense. Christianity was held to be a superstition mixed with philosophical fragments.

When this double accusation was answered by the Church Fathers, Christian theology was born. Justin Martyr declared that both parts of the accusation were wrong. Far from being dangerous to the Roman Empire, Christians help to prevent the Empire from falling into chaos. They are stronger supporters of world order than the rest of the population. He also contended that Christianity is not nonsense; rather, Christianity is a philosophy that is both certain and adequate. Prominent in Justin's theology is the Logos principle. This Logos is the universal principle of the self-manifestation of God; it was in Jesus Christ in a unique way. Christianity became so universal in Justin's theology that he maintained that all who lived according to the Logos are Christians, including Socrates and Heraclitus.

The main problem with Justin's theology is that he did not seem to know the biblical story. Anyone who is familiar with the story knows

that the pagan accusation was true on both counts. In the first place, true Christians are totally committed to the Kingdom of God as demonstrated in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. To give one's ultimate allegiance to God in Jesus Christ is to place oneself in opposition to all forces and structures in society that contradict the Reign of God. That is why the first Christians, armed with the Holy Spirit, threatened to turn the world upside-down.

In the second place, according to the biblical story, Christianity is not a philosophical system which can be analyzed by some intellectual process. Rather, Christianity is the gospel, the good news of what God has done, is doing, and will continue to do in Jesus Christ. And the only way to understand the mystery of God's incarnation in the man from Nazareth is to let the Holy Spirit teach you. To depend upon the Holy Spirit is to understand that God himself must take the initiative by disclosing himself to us through his activity in our midst. That is why, according to the story, "the gospel is foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews" (I Cor. 1:23).

It was not so much that the Church Fathers ignored the biblical story, rather they misinterpreted or distorted it because a new and different orientation ordered their lives. They were trying to communicate a Hebraic-oriented faith to a Greek-oriented society. Later, when they allowed the Greek orientation to completely replace the Hebraic one (as with the Neoplatonic theology of Origen), Christianity became the kind of religion in which a person's highest aspiration was to be lifted above sense experience into immediate union with God. In such an ineffable experience individuality fades away, and the self, like a drop of water in a great ocean, is absorbed into the Divine. But, according to the biblical story, God is not some entity aloof from the human scene of travail and oppression. He takes part in human affairs to work out his purpose, making himself known by his mighty acts, which are historical events. This is the very heart of the biblical story.

Eventually the Church became so much a part of the world that Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire — when its Emperor Constantine embraced the Christian faith. He was responsible for calling the first ecumenical council at Nicea in 325. His major concern, however, was the unity of the Roman Empire. The Council itself, having forgotten the story and being guided by the principles of Greek philosophy, was concerned with the *ousia* (substance) of Jesus. They argued for days over the question of whether Jesus was *homoousios* (same substance, same essence) as God or *homooiousios* (like substance, like essence).

This concern to build Christian theology upon the foundation of Greek philosophy continued after the patristic period through the Middle Ages, from the Neoplatonic philosophy of Augustine to the Aristotelian theology of St. Thomas Aquinas. Even the Protestant Reformation with its emphasis on the return to the Bible could not recover the story. When

the Reformers read the Bible, they read it in light of one or the other aspects of the tradition of the Church. This tradition had been so tainted by Greek philosophy that any interpretation of the Bible in that light produced a distorted view of the story. Thus, the reformer Martin Luther was able to identify with the oppressors in society on the basis of his reading of the Bible and to speak of the state as a servant of God while the oppressed were being tortured by the state.

Therefore it is not surprising that the "white" westernized theology of today cannot cut through the Greek-oriented tradition and use the biblical story as the foundation for speech about God. Indeed, the appearance of Black Theology on the American scene is due largely to the failure of "white" theology to deal effectively with the story of God's revelation as expressed in the Exodus-event of the Old Testament and the Christ-event of the New Testament.

Black Theology is a very young discipline. Joseph R. Washington analyzed "black religion" in the publication of his book under that title in 1964.² By 1969 the phrase "Black Theology" was used to express many of the same concerns. Although most black scholars in religion contend that the *meaning* of Black Theology has theological roots stretching back to the pre-Civil War black religious tradition, the phrase itself is an event of the late 1960s.

The appearance of contemporary Black Theology is closely related to the open affirmation of blackness during the late 1960s. In the summer of 1966, Stokely Carmichael, then Chairman of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, defined this open acceptance of blackness with the term "Black Power," declaring that black self-determination by any means necessary is the only appropriate reaction to white racism. In response to the new mood created by Black Power, a group of black churchmen made a theological statement in July, 1966, relating black religion to Black Power and including the following:

As black men who were long ago forced out of the white church to create and to wield "black power," we fail to understand the emotional quality of the outcry of some clergy against the use of the term today. It is not enough to answer that "integration" is the solution. For it is precisely the nature of the operation of power under some forms of integration which is being challenged. . . . Without . . . capacity to participate with power—i.e., to have some organized political and economic strength to really influence people with whom one interacts—integration is not meaningful We regard as sheer hypocrisy or as a blind and dangerous illusion the view that opposes love to power, but what love opposes is precisely the misuse and abuse of power, not power itself. So long as white churchmen continue to moralize and misinterpret Christian love, so long will justice continue to be subverted in this land.³

² Joseph Washington, *Black Religion: The Negro and Christianity in the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press).

³ *New York Times*, 31 July 1966, p. 35.

They not only affirmed Black Power and thus connected themselves with the tradition of Nat Turner, Henry Garnet, and Henry Turner; they also exposed the hypocrisy of white Christianity.

The black churchmen's statement on Black Power created the material and spiritual foundation for the later use of the term "Black Theology" in the first published book on the subject by James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (1969). Although Albert Cleage had published his *Black Messiah*⁴ a few months earlier, Cone's book marked the beginning of the wide use of the term "Black Theology." A year following Cone's book, the editors of *Theological Education* published a supplement to the spring issue on "The Black Religious Experience and Theological Education." This issue consisted of the report from the special committee appointed by the American Association of Theological Schools for the purpose of offering some suggestions on the inclusion of the black religious experience "in the study, reflections and activities of the theological enterprise." The chairman, Charles Shelby Rooks, said:

Within the past three years, theological seminaries have come to a new awareness of a serious omission in their life and program: the religious experience of Black Americans. A good many conferences and conversations have developed in an effort to articulate the inclusion of their experience in the study, reflections, and activities of the theological enterprise. It was the welter of competing ideas and proposals that led the American Association of Theological Schools to form a committee to discuss the possibilities and to offer some suggestions about what has come to be known as "Black Studies." This is the focus of this report.⁵

By the fall of 1970, Black Theology was accepted by most seminaries as a legitimate theological discipline, and courses were offered covering some phase of the black religious experience. In the meanwhile, black theologians across the country were busy trying to analyze black religion in the light of the Old and New Testaments.

Black Theology is a return to the foundation. It uses the Old and New Testaments in its theological analysis. That is, Black Theology takes seriously the importance of the biblical story in theological discourse. Black Theology's use of the Bible as its theological base is a natural outgrowth from the religion which gave birth to it. The biblical story has always played a most significant role in black religion. Since Black Theology is the natural progeny of black religion,⁶ an analysis of that religion will show the place of the biblical story in Black Theology.

⁴James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969); Albert Cleage, *Black Messiah* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968).

⁵Charles Shelby Rooks, ed., Report of the Special AATS Committee, "The Black Religious Experience and Theological Education of the Seventies," *Theological Education* 6, supplement (Spring 1970), p. S-3.

⁶See the development of this thesis and a discussion of how certain black theologians have failed to make black religion, and God, their point of departure in my recent study *The Identity Crisis in Black Theology* (Nashville: AMEC Publishing House, 1975).

Black religion has roots stretching back into the African tradition where story telling was a way of life. Born as it was in the midst of the American system of slavery, black religion was created out of an encounter of African tradition with Christianity in that peculiar setting. While it is true that Christianity was introduced to the slave by his white master, what was introduced to him was devoid of the story, because it is impossible to really *know* the story and presume to possess another as private property. So-called white "Christian" masters were busy quoting passages from the Bible such as "slaves obey your masters"; slaves were busy meeting in secret, learning about the story.

It was very important for the slaves to know the story because his very survival depended on it. Blacks were captured in Africa, placed aboard a stinking ship and sailed to the "land of the free and home of the brave." They were placed on the auction block and sold like cattle with no regard for family ties — wives were separated from husbands and children from parents. Whenever the master deemed it necessary the slave was "made to wear around his neck iron collars armed with prongs and forced to drag heavy chains and weights at his feet while working in the field. Sometimes he was flogged with terrible severity and had red pepper rubbed into his lacerated flesh so as to remind him of the extent and authority of his master. If he did not respond favorably to this treatment, some masters went as far as cutting off the slave's ears, knocking out his eyes, and burning him to death over slow fires."⁷ In such a predicament, there is no comfort in philosophical speculation about the essence of divine nature. But, there is a hope that defies the logic of history in the story about the God who makes highways through Red Seas, locks lions' jaws, and cools fiery furnaces; who causes the blind to see, the lame to walk, the deaf to hear, and the dead to rise. It was this story that gave rise to such spirituals as:

Oh, Mary, don't you weep, don't you moan,
Oh, Mary, don't you weep, don't you moan,
Pharoah's army got drowned,
Oh Mary, don't you weep.

The reason the slave could sing and tell the story about the God who is involved in human history is because he had personally met this God. When he met the Divine, he was converted — transformed into a new creature, a free person, "fearing no man," because God had placed around him "a strong arm of protection." As a result of this personal encounter with the living God, black people in slavery and oppression caught a gleam of insight into the divine purpose for humankind which

⁷Paraphrased from Theodore Weld, "Introduction to American Anti-Slavery Society." *American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses*, ed. Theodore Weld (New York: Arno Press, 1969), originally published 1839), pp. 9-10. Weld was one of the founders of the American Anti-Slavery Society and as one of its agents traveled throughout the country speaking against slavery and gaining converts to abolitionism. The rest of this book was a compilation of the testimony of 1,000 witnesses culled from 20,000 newspapers.

their oppressors could never know. This insight was further informed by scripture, so much so that the Bible soon became the very foundation of black religion. Through the study of its contents, black people interpreted and understood the biblical story to be relevant to the black condition in this country. Because of this divine revelation to the slave, black religion became the *only* mode of expression in America which was consistent with the revelation of God as expressed in the Exodus-event of the Old Testament and the Christ-event of the New Testament.

Thus, black people survived 244 years of slavery and over another hundred years of racism and oppression not only because we know the story, but also because we have our own story to tell. We can tell the story about how God brought Moses and the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; we can tell the story of Joshua at the Battle of Jericho; we can tell the story of Daniel in the lions' den and the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace; but above all else, we can tell the story about how *we* got over.

Black religion, then, is the story about God's activities among black people, helping them to get over. This story has been preserved in the black church and can be heard where two or three are gathered in the name of God for prayer, testimony, song, or sermon.

It remains the task of the black theologian to organize these black expressions into a systematic, coherent theology, consistent with the biblical story. To do this, the black theologian himself must know and experience the black story. In this way he will be able to understand that meaning within black expressions which transcends the language in which they are articulated. Also, he will be acutely aware of the biblical foundation of the black religious tradition. He has merely to call the black church and black people back to their roots, the place where the story of God's revelation in the Exodus and in Jesus Christ was the cutting edge for the black story. This process of analysis not only makes Black Theology Christian, but the *only* theology in the history of Christianity that is.

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BY EDWARD P. WIMBERLY

Pastoral Counseling and the Black Perspective

INTRODUCTION

The contents of this article are an attempt to lift up the unique aspect of pastoral care in the black church. The unique emphasis in black pastoral care is a perspective which has been shaped by the existential, cultural, and historical conditions which are peculiar to black people. This perspective reflects the cultural heritage of black people, its history as a people in a land of injustice, racism and segregation, and its struggle as a Christian people to make sense out of their existence in a hostile environment.

What, then, is this distinct emphasis that makes a black perspective in pastoral care and counseling unique? This distinctive emphasis is the corporate nature of pastoral care and counseling in the black church. Of course, there are white churches in Protestantism that have had a corporate emphasis in pastoral care and counseling, but the emphasis in white Protestantism has almost been exclusively individual, not corporate. It must also be added that many of the white Protestant seminaries are attempting now to bring the corporate emphasis into pastoral care, because the biblical emphasis is upon the corporate dimensions of human growth. It is also important to acknowledge that the history of American psychiatry shows a pendulum swing between the individual and corporate emphasis in the 19th century.¹ However, the emphasis upon the individual and his self sufficiency has been the dominant theme for most Americans including the psychological and religious communities. On the other hand, the corporate emphasis among black Protestants has remained constant in their behavior, if not in attitude, due to the nature of black society and its cultural heritage from Africa.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the corporate nature of pastoral care and counseling in black Protestantism, which has its roots not only in African soil and racial discrimination in this country, but also in the biblical conception of the nature of man and God's attempt to bring salvation to him. However, there is no attempt in this paper to give a systematic explanation of the biblical contribution to pastoral care and counseling in the black church. First, one goal is to establish the corporate function of pastoral care in the black church, and, secondly, to discuss pastoral counseling in the light of the historical-social conditions of the black Christian.

¹ Ruth Caplan, *Psychiatry and the Community in the 19th Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1969).

CORPORATENESS

The nature of pastoral care and counseling in the black church is corporate for several reasons. We mean by the term "Corporate" that the care of the individual is the function of the total community rather than the function of the pastor or any other specially designated person who possesses specialized skills. The two outstanding influences that have historically contributed to the corporate nature of pastoral care and counseling are segregation and unconscious African survivals.

Segregation, which is the direct result of a rational attempt to justify slavery upon the innate inferiority of black people, excluded the black person from participation in the total life of the community. It excluded him from the social life, the religious life, the economic life (except to the extent that he was allowed to be on the producing end of the economy rather than the consumer end), the educational life, and the political life. He was systematically excluded from normal access to participation in the community which would lead to the fulfillment of his potential as a total person. The consequence of all of this is the fact that many of the political, social, educational, recreational, economic, and social needs of the black person had to be fulfilled within the black church, his only institution. This was also true for the medical and mental health needs of the black person. Often it was the black church that took care of the needs of the neglected sick and mentally ill. Because the hospitals and mental institutions were segregated, it was the black church that had to fulfill this function. These persons were cared for by a caring community, because they could not be isolated from the community like the white sick and mentally ill. In fact, it was through the efforts of the black church that the hospitals were established in the black community.

Also, segregation forced the black community to see mental health as a problem related to their external condition. Beginning with slavery, the main concern of the black Christian was his own freedom, but not only his own freedom, but the freedom for his friends and his people. Yes, for some freedom was in the world to come, but for others, freedom was something that would come sooner or later here on earth. The point is, much of their psychic energy went into thinking about freedom, freedom from injustice and slavery. As a result, the black person never saw mental illness or health as an individual matter, but he saw the context in which a person lived out his life.

The second influence that contributes to the corporate nature of the black church is the unconscious survivals of Africanisms. Indeed, there are many African survivals which are present in the life of the black community today. The writer relies heavy on the theory of the hereditary collective unconscious outlined by the imminent psychologists Carl Jung for his theoretical support for African survivals.² Moreover, Melville

² Carl Jung, *Psychology of Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938).

Herskovits, a noted American anthropologist, has spent his career developing the theory of the survival of Africanisms while doing comparative field research.³ The Africanisms for prime consideration in this paper, then, are the African philosophical concept of unity with nature, and the ritualistic symbolic ceremonies that support the person in the crises of life.

The Africans believe that man exists in harmony with Nature.⁴ In this context man is not the manipulator nor controller of the forces of nature, but man is to cooperate with nature.⁵ The result of this philosophy is that the African sees himself and his community as an integral part of nature and both have a mutual influence upon the other. Thus, a person recognizes that his own identity is the result of the interaction with nature and his environment.

To the African, not only is man's identity based upon the interaction with his physical environment, but it is also developed in relationship to the community. Mbiti points out that a child must be born, named, initiated, married — which are all the function of the community — before he can be thought as a complete person.⁶

The implication of the concept of unity with nature and with the community is obvious. The collective unconscious of black people lends itself to the corporate concept of pastoral care and counseling. The corporate concept emerges from the background of the African emphasis upon unity with nature which forms the basis for an open systems approach to black psychology. Black psychology sees man's identity developing in interaction with his environment, as opposed to a closed system equilibrium model, which forms the basis of some individualistic adjustment model of psychology.

Another important factor in African religion that is of interest is the corporate nature of the symbolic ritualistic ceremonies through which the African adjusted and coped with life crises in the past and survives in some of Africa today. Through the ritualistic ceremonies surrounding birth, child rearing, initiation at adolescence, harvesting time, and death the African found himself in an ethos of ideological and emotional supports that helped him overcome the crises of life. The same kinds of support surrounding the life crises of black people, which became part of the black church, is an inheritance from the collective unconscious reaching back to Africa. This support system is evidenced in the way the black church has been a real value in helping the black person deal with the insanity of racism and injustice. Along with an ideological support system based upon the experience of black people with God and

³ See Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Gloucester, Ma.: Peter Smith, 1970).

⁴ John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Garden City, New York, Doubleday and Co., 1970), p. 20.

⁵ Cedrick Clark, "Black Studies or the Study of Black People" in *Black Psychology*, ed. Reginald Jones (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 11.

⁶ Mbiti, p. 154.

Jesus Christ — a support system reflected in the Negro spiritual — the African past has helped the black person and his community deal with the crises of life.

PASTORAL COUNSELING AND THE BLACK PERSON

From the preceding section one would perhaps conclude that pastoral counseling, a specialized area of pastoral care focusing on the individual, is irrelevant to the work of the pastor in the black church. But it is conceivable that along with the corporate dimensions and methods of black pastoral care, pastoral counseling can be used by the black pastor. In fact, there is increasing evidence supporting the need for more training of black pastors in the specialty of pastoral counseling to meet the needs of his parishioners.

One source of evidence concerning the aforementioned need of black pastors to be tooled in counseling skills is a study done by Thomas Pugh and Emily Mudd. The study focuses upon the attitudes of black women and men toward using community services.⁷ One of the conclusions of the study is that many black people turned to the family, kinfolk, and friends for help with their marriage problems, but most of the respondents felt this did not help them, and they said they would seek out professional help if it were available at a reasonable fee. One of the largest deterrents in seeking out professional help for the respondents was the cost factor, and perhaps a trained clergymen could help bring this needed service at low cost.

Another source of evidence was a study done on the black middle class in Philadelphia.⁸ The study reported the high degree of use by black people of medical caretakers as opposed to non-medical caretakers as well as a sophisticated knowledge of mental illness. Although the study reports the extensive use of medical personnel rather than non-medical personnel, it does appear to me that a pastoral counselor with skills and reputation could utilize this mental health sophistication to great advantage.

However, the evidence is not just limited to the black middle class. Perhaps the most convincing evidence concerning the viability of pastoral counseling in the black community comes from a study published in book form by Barbara Lerner called *Therapy in the Ghetto*. Her basic thesis is that individual psychotherapy, under appropriate conditions, is an effective method of helping not only the classical middle class, highly verbal, intellectual client, but it also is a value to the so-called "non-classical untreatable" clients, such as the poor, the black, and the severely emotionally disturbed. These "untreatables" were thought to be poor prognostic risks because of class distinctions. The treatables were

⁷ Thomas J. Pugh and Emily Mudd, Attitudes of Black Women and Men Toward Using Community Service," *Journal Of Religion and Health* 10 (July 1971), pp. 256-277.

⁸ Stephen Ring, "Attitude Toward Mental Illness and Use of Caretakers in the Black Community," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 40 (July 1970), p. 711.

the young and attractive who possessed a high degree of ego-strength, who were well educated members of the upper class with the absence of deep characterological distortions and a willingness to communicate, and who had a value system congruent with the therapist. Lerner's whole study was to find out if psychotherapy — an attempt by one human being specialized training to establish a genuinely meaningful, democratic and collaborative relationship with another person in order to put his special knowledge and skills at the second person's disposal for such use as he chooses to make of it — had any results with the so-called "non-treatables."⁹

The first conclusion of the study is that measurable results of the treatment of non-treatable clients, when compared to the same changes in the classical clients, have been achieved in less than 30 hours of treatment, or less than 9 weeks.¹⁰ It was found that 10-25 sessions were the normal length for improvement to take place.¹¹ Not only had improvement been accomplished, but it was done in a short enough period of time to warrant the use of psychotherapy in the local church where the pastor has time only for short term and crisis intervention counseling.

The counselor variables were measured to ascertain what effect the counselor had upon the outcome of therapy. The four variables measured were counselor empathy, experience, expectation, and counselor's use of democratic values or respect. The conclusions were that all these variables were significant factors in the improvement of the clients.¹² However, the empathy variable failed to show any results, because of the inadequacy of the measurement instrument according to the author of the study.

It can be concluded from the study that the obstacles hindering the use of individual psychotherapy on the so-called "non-treatables" are neither unchangeable nor inherent in the client. A trained counselor, pastoral or otherwise, with empathy, respect, and the expectation that the client can grow as the result of his intervention, is a person who can help the so-called "untreatable" person.

Goals of pastoral counseling with blacks. The pervasive influence of racism, segregation, and injustice upon the black personality cannot be underestimated. These sinister forces have left their unmistakable imprint. The impact of these forces on the black personality has been evidenced in the black person's belief that he does not possess the power to effect change in his own life and in the lives of others — indeed, that he is powerless. In fact, it is only the rare black person who can escape this feeling of powerlessness. Thanks to the efforts of Dr. Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement as well as the black power movement that the black person has begun to assess his real power. It is nonetheless

⁹ Barbara Lerner, *Therapy in the Ghetto* (Baltimore: The Hopking University Press, 1972), p. 10.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

¹¹ *Ibid.*,

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 144.

clearly evident that the powerlessness the black person feels as well as the current black power movement have significant implications for pastoral counseling with blacks by the black pastor.

The first implication is that pastoral counseling with blacks must focus upon the liberation of the black personality from any belief in his own powerlessness as a person to determine the direction of his own life according to his own internal frame of reference rather than helping the person adjust to an oppressive society.¹³ The adjustment equilibrium model of dynamic psychology is an inadequate goal of pastoral counseling with blacks, because it means adjusting to a society which must be changed to allow the black personality to grow to fulfillment of its potential.

Secondly, the goal of pastoral counseling with blacks must be action-oriented based upon an analysis of each individual's powerlessness. Often the goals of psychotherapy have been intrapsychic insight into the client's past, but there has been little emphasis upon the steps that a client could take to correct his own difficulties in the present. Pastoral counseling with blacks cannot afford the luxury of inaction and backward looking by itself. It must focus not only upon the past, but also upon the present. Its focus must be upon the black person's ability to act on his own behalf and in concert with others in order to change his own condition. It must help him to see that he is not totally powerless; there are some things that he can change. Consequently, the goal of pastoral counseling with black is action, insight, and growth, in the present rather than intrapsychic insight into the past.

Process and pastoral counseling with blacks. As pointed out, by Barbara Lerner in her study, there are certain core conditions that must be met for therapy to be effective. In reviewing these conditions, four elements will be considered. The first element is counselor empathy. A pastoral counselor, black or white, must be able to enter into the experience of his client and be tuned in on the wave length of the client. This has often proved difficult for white therapists.¹⁴ Secondly, the counselor must have the expectation that the person can grow as the result of his intervention if therapy is to be successful. Certainly, the counselor's expectation, whether positive or negative with regard to the client's ability to grow, will be communicated to the client through his attitude toward the client. This is particularly crucial if the counselor is white, because lack of expectation of growth toward the black client is historically related to white racism.¹⁵ Thirdly, it is emphasized that the counselor must have respect for the client's potential to be a responsible person who makes responsible decisions. This means helping the client to be convinced himself of his own ability to make decisions based upon

¹³ Edward J. Barns, "Counseling the Black student: The Need for a New View," in *Black Psychology*, ed. Reginald Jones (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 215.

¹⁴ William Banks, "The Black Client and the Helping Professionals," in *Black Psychology*, ed. Reginald Jones (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), pp. 205-212.

¹⁵ Kenneth Clark, *Prejudice and Your Child* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), pp. 85f.

his own internal frame of reference. Finally, counselor experience and training are important in the outcome of therapy. All four of these core conditions must be present at the same time if therapy is going to be useful for blacks.

It is the latter concept of experience that will occupy the remainder to this paper. Beyond satisfying the core conditions of establishing a relationship based upon empathy, positive expectation, and respect, the counselor needs adequate experience in order to appropriately assess the problem of the client and to select the approach which will best help the client. For example, in the case of those clients who feel powerless, the pastoral counselor needs to be able to touch the motivational source of change that exists in the black client's psychic; that is, black rage. Black rage is the deep anger resultant from a realization that the control of one's life rests in the hands of others.¹⁶ The counselor's experience with and his ability to reach this affect is crucial in helping the black person move toward growth. But more than this, he has to move back and forth between the existential and behavioral modalities of therapy so that the client can not only experience his own anger, but also use this anger to do what he can to change the circumstances of his own existence. On the one hand, the existential approach to affect helps the client to experience himself as an angry person while at the same time helping him to discover his own internal meaning and value system. On the other hand, the behavioral approach will help him act upon his value system discovered through the expression and exploration of anger. To accomplish this, the counselor clearly needs training and experience.

This paper is primarily addressed to the black pastor. Through my contacts with whites it is clear to me that black rage is the single factor with which many whites have a great deal of difficulty. This would be true for the white counselor also, especially, because the rage would be directed toward the white counselor. It would be hard not to take it personally. Thus dealing with black rage may be an area that should be left to the black counselor.

There are specific implications for the preparation of the black pastoral counselor, which deal with his own anger and value system. The black pastoral counselor's ability to deal with the anger of the black client depends upon the extent to which he has dealt with his own anger. If the pastoral counselor has not dealt with his own anger, chances are that he will not be able to facilitate the discovery and exploration of his client's anger. A black pastoral counselor must necessarily be aware of his own rage toward white society, because, if he denies his own rage, he will not let it come up in the therapy with his client. Secondly, the black pastoral counselor must have explored the implications of his own rage for his own meaning and value system and for his own behavior in the world. Finally, the black pastoral counselor must feel sufficiently at

¹⁶ William Grier and Price Cobbs, *Black Rage* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1968), p. 27.

home with his life style based upon his own internal value system. When the black pastoral counselor has achieved some degree of success in these personal areas, then he might be effective in helping the black client or parishioner to move toward growth.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article has been to explore the corporate dimensions of pastoral care in the black church from a historical vantage point. Also, there has been an attempt to explore the relevancy of pastoral counseling as an additional method of the black pastor alongside the corporate methods of pastoral care. The conclusion is that pastoral counseling can be a viable method for the black pastor's work with black parishioners, especially when the core elements of empathy, experience, expectation, and respect are present and when the pastor has faced the implications of his own anger for his existence.

BY HAROLD A. JACKSON, JR.

The New Hermeneutic and the Understanding of Spirituals

I

Palmer, in his book *Hermeneutics*,¹ lists several hermeneutical approaches and then says that no hermeneutical approach as listed should be thought of as an absolute approach to the problem of understanding and interpretation.² It is my contention that Palmer is right in his observation, but not necessarily correct in his conclusion that Gadamer's approach to the hermeneutical problem is the best. I see, however, the Gadamerian approach to be the foundational step in the new hermeneutic; all the rest has been a prolegomena.

Hence, in this paper, I shall try to show that the dialectical approach to a text is probably the best way to understand that text, because it lessens the tendency on the part of the individual to come to the text with preconceived ideas of "seeing" the text. The dialectic is an approach in which the subject matter interrogates the would-be questioner. Thus the questioner does not interrogate the object, but the subject-object syndrome becomes the object-subject factor. Therefore, we do not see a world *in* the text, but *through* the text. The object puts to us the question of what called it into being. "When we see a great work of art and enter its world, we do not leave home as much as 'come home.' We say at once: truly it is so! The artist has said what *is*."³ However, this raises a question: Is it really true that we understand the new world which is opened to us by art, or a text, since we are already participating in the structures of pre-understanding which can make it true for us? Put another way: In our dialog with the text, how do we understand questions put forth by it when we have been pre-conditioned by our past as to what is true or not true?

This question will be dealt with in this paper, but I am not sure that it will be solved to the satisfaction of anyone — not even the author. Perhaps we can find part of the answer in Heidegger's approach to the hermeneutical problem.

1.

Heidegger looks at man as finite transcendence: finite because of his own specific being, and transcendence because he realizes that his possibilities can always transcend what he at any given moment realizes.

¹Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics* (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1969), chap. 3.

²*Ibid.*, p. 66.

³*Ibid.*, p. 168.

Because of his potentiality of being able to transcend himself within his own finiteness, he categorizes his thinking in order not to come to terms with non-being. "Objects" are placed under the power of him, the "subject," which cuts off dialog and never allows the "object" (text) to put the question to the subject. Categorical thinking "is no longer a matter of open responsiveness to the world but of restless efforts to master it."⁴ Hence, man wants to objectify his existence and seeks logical empirical solutions to clarify his being. He does this because he does not understand that his finite being is "thrown" into the being in which he participates. This is the being which allows man's finite being to be kept from non-being. Only when man tries to transcend being in order to control his destiny is he confronted with the threat of non-being. Not until he realizes that his categorical thinking is a manipulation of ideas and concepts will he be able to participate in being — not as one who controls his destiny, but as one who freely participates in that destiny. This latter participation Heidegger would call the participation of the "authentic man." Therefore, in answer to the question, we must say that a man who clearly

understands his prior relationship to reality, the clearer it will become to him that the understanding he has achieved needs further clarification as an interpretation of his relationship. Thus, understanding, as the interpretation of the prior relationship, allows one to see that relationship in a new light, which leads to a reinterpretation of it, which sheds still more light on prior relationship, which allows the need for further clarification, and so on.⁵

So, a man who brings the structured pre-understandings of only his world will not truly understand the new world that the text opens up to him. Pre-understanding is important, but it is the pre-understanding of the text; it is with this pre-understanding that one can ask the text the proper questions and in turn be interrogated by the text. Of course, the interrogation by the text is most important, and our pre-understanding of the text allows us to understand the question.

One can readily see that if a dialectical approach is made to a text, the involvement of language is very important — the language of the interpreter and the language of the text itself. Palmer says that "language shapes man's seeing and his thought — both his conception of himself and his world (the two are not so separate as they may seem). His very vision of reality is shaped by language."⁶ He stresses that language is something which must be heard rather than seen. Naturally, we cannot go back to the oral transmission of the word, but we must remember that the "primordial expressiveness of the spoken word" helps us to better understand what is meant.

But although there is a certain primordial power in spoken language, we must in many cases be content with the written word. Yet, this

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁵ Paul J. Achtemeier, *Introduction to the New Hermeneutic* (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1969), p. 35ff.

⁶ Palmer, p. 9.

written word "fixes" in history an event which has happened in time. Within this "language-event," language has saved for us the cultural experience of the text-makers; it is through this language-event that, as we open ourselves to the questioning of the text, we become *existent in it* and begin to *understand through it*. In this process of trying to find out what is the "hidden meaning" of the text, we come into conflict with other worlds; "it means reorganizing the problem of a conflict of horizons and taking steps to deal with it, rather than sweeping it under the rug. . . ."⁷

In trying to get to the meaning of a text through its language, there are three structural elements of existence which must be understood: world, understanding, interpretation. "World is not the whole of beings but the whole in which the human being finds himself already immersed, surrounded by its manifestations as revealed through an always pregrasping, encompassing understanding."⁸ In other words, "world" is that part of the world which man comes into contact with and which influences him.⁹ Palmer says that according to Heidegger "understanding" is "the power to grasp one's own possibilities for being, within the context of the lifeworld in which one exists."¹⁰ It is the basis of *all* interpretation. This self-understanding can be actualized when it realizes the potentiality of the self. That potentiality is to be able to stand in the NOW open to the possibilities that the future offers which are based on the traditions that the past has given us. However, this cannot be done if the self allows its world to tell it what it must do and be. When this happens, the self loses its being among beings and is not aware of non-being. There is no anxiety, but only tranquility. We know from Paul Tillich that when anxiety is a structural element in the human existence of man, man becomes aware of his total being. In that total self-understanding man can actualize himself in his openness to being and awareness of non-being. By being aware of non-being, man knows that his ontic self-affirmation is threatened "relatively in terms of fate, [and] absolutely in terms of death."¹¹ Hence, we find in understanding a historical stance, because self-understanding actualizing its potentiality is in essence temporal; thus, all potentiality is history — past, present, and future.

As for interpretation, it is grounded in the reality that comes to meet us. That is, we do not analyze the text, but rather it analyzes us. Consequently, when we approach a text, the text brings forth its own being and manifestations, and does not, cannot, rely on the meaning projected by our own being.

Thus, we can see that the three structural elements of human existence are interlocutory. Also, they all point to an ontological process of understanding and interpreting and not to an anthropomorphic one. This

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, Achtemeier, p. 33.

¹⁰ Palmer, p. 131.

¹¹ Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), p. 41.

process goes far beyond the metaphysical systems of reason, freedom, love, or other expressions of will. Normally, these systems are simply interpretations of correctness or "rightness," but hermeneutics is concerned with revelation — hidden meaning. Therefore, language is the key to revealing the hidden meaning which lies behind the text. "Language is not an expression of man, but an appearance of being. Thinking does not express man, it lets being happen as language event."¹² It is the key because language-event is a historical process and as historical "... is life with a meaning, and language is the reality through which the brute process of events gains and perpetuates the meaning which makes it history." Carl Michalson maintains that language is historical; therefore, "historical language is history interpreting itself."¹³

Now we see that the three structural elements of human existence — world, understanding, and interpreting — cannot ontologically take place without language, and we find that language is historical; therefore, we can say that they are mediums of human existence through which our "world" is understood and interpreted. But, if language is also an appearance of being, then being is also a medium of human existence. Hence, we see that language, history, and being are very much related. Thus, we can agree with Gadamer that they are mediums which are interrelated and interfused.¹⁴

2.

Although language, history, and being are interrelated and interfused, we should deal with each in order to understand that interrelatedness and interfusion. Let us first consider being itself. Being is that life-force in which all beings participate and get their being. Within this being, non-being is also a participant.

Nonbeing is not a concept like others. It is the negation of every concept; but as such it is an inescapable content of thought and, as the history of thought has shown, the most important one after being-itself.¹⁵

Because man's finite being participates in being-itself, man is ever aware of his transcendence and strives to overcome the threat of his nonbeing and control the power of being-itself. Inasmuch as this is not possible, man becomes alienated from being and plunges into the labyrinth of further alienation. Since this is alienation from being-itself, it is also alienation from the self and true understanding. Paul Tillich in his book *The Courage to Be* says that the existential products of man's unawareness of nonbeing are fate and death. The threat of nonbeing ontologically is absolute in the threat of death and relative in the threat of fate. It is in fate that the self responds to the "they" of the world and never seeks

¹² Palmer, p. 155.

¹³ Carl Michalson, *Theology Today*, Vol. 19, No. 1, p. 1.

¹⁴ *Vid.*, Palmer, p. 177.

¹⁵ Tillich, p. 15.

to transcend its present to reach the possibilities which the future might offer. In this kind of situation, being is brought to expression by the event of language. And it is *through* language that one finds the "self-affirmation of [his own] being in spite of the fact of nonbeing."¹⁶ Language opens up the world of the essential self and allows that world to interpret itself so that the self may understand the world in which it participates.

As we look at history, we find that it is based upon events that have taken place in the past — near or distant. It is an accumulation of statistics and facts which can never "come into being" without the aid of language. Because history is the bedrock in which tradition is embedded, "... language is the reservoir and communication medium of the tradition: tradition hides itself in language, and language is a 'medium' like water."¹⁷

Finally, there is language itself. Although language is an appearance of being, it is within being that language is housed. Only by being a participatory element in being is language able to bring forth the "historical consciousness" of being. The same is true with history. Unless language is a participant in history, the coming into being of neither language nor history could take place. But because of the historical consciousness (prestructure of understanding or preunderstanding that we were talking about — historical consciousness is Gadamer's term which we shall use from now on) of being, we are aware that we stand in tradition and exist through it. On account of this awareness, being calls forth language in order that it (being) can come to appearance in the fullest affirmation of itself. When language comes to expression an "event" takes place, which means that history is made. Thus, history participates in language and language participates in history.

3.

Is there anything more that we can say about the hermeneutical approach and how we apply it to the text? There is certainly much more we can say, and we shall. But first, let us outline some pertinent things which we should be aware of as we go about our task. When dealing with a text, we should be aware that the text might have (1) a hidden meaning. We must remember that there are no "presuppositionless interpretations." When the text was formed, that present moment was seen and understood in light of the "preconceptions bequeathed from the past."¹⁸ Thus, the New Testament concept of Jesus as the Christ is hidden in the scriptures of the Old Testament. Hence, we must be aware that a text could be saying more than its manifest content reveals. We must be aware that not only was a historical consciousness present by the text-maker in the formation of the text, but we must take into considera-

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Palmer, p. 176.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

tion (2) our own historical consciousness. The "meaning" of the past is predicated on the questions the present puts to it. The past is not *in toto* of itself. Every event stands beside, under, and/or above any other event, as well as interacts with it. Thus, it not only gives meaning to itself but contributes meaning to other events — past and present. Hence, in this relatedness, the future takes on meaning. Therefore, it is impossible for us to approach any situation with completely open and unprejudiced minds. Our world causes us to bring preconceived ideas to every situation which, in turn, causes us to interpret any situation with a pre-understanding of our history. This historical consciousness is brought about by historical research, philological exegesis, and aesthetic consciousness. Another thing that we must be aware of is (3) the sociological and psychological factor. Why was the text written at a certain time in a particular situation and what was the mind-set of the people? Historical research can help us answer this question, but it can never tell us why such-and-such an event happened to some people and not others, yet all were from the same milieu. Lastly, we must be aware that (4) the text does the main part of the interrogating. We must have the same relationship with the text as the disciples had with Jesus. You remember that the disciples asked Jesus who he was. The reply, "Who do you say I am?" The answer, "Some say that you are . . ." The reply, "But who do *you* say I am?" We must expect that in questioning the text, we will be questioned; and we will have to give an answer before we pose another question.

One final thing we should think of, which is related to awareness, is temporal distance. Gadamer believes that ". . . it is the function of time to eliminate what is not essential, allowing the full meaning that lies hidden in a thing to become clear."¹⁹ Negative prejudgments are eliminated by time and the prejudgments which lead to a true interpretation is able to come forth. "Only with the passage of time we can grasp 'what it is that the text says'; only gradually does its historical significance emerge and begin to address the present."²⁰

4.

It is always good to talk about the theoretical aspects of hermeneutics, but how do we make the theory applicable to the text? Heidegger says that we must have inner violence and struggle with the text before we can reach the "meaning" of the text. He maintains that this is so because the truth that is concealed in the text creates a paradox; it at the same time reveals and conceals meaning and places the interpreter on the boundary between what is said and what is unsaid. Consequently, the hidden meaning involves a process of constantly reinterpreting what is continually being disclosed.

Rudolf Bultmann, in dealing with the New Testament, views the

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

kerygma of the scriptures as the key in unlocking the hidden meaning. He says that the kerygma is the proclamation that "Jesus Christ is Lord." Then he goes about demythologizing the scripture.

... demythologizing is directed against the shallow literalism in the modern way of seeing, the tendency of laymen and even theologians to regard language as merely information rather than as the medium through which God confronts man with the possibility of a radically new ... self-understanding ... it does not seek to strike down and destroy the mythical symbol, but regards it as a window to the sacred. To interpret the symbol is to recollect its original, authentic, but now hidden meaning.²¹

I believe that both things must be done. I believe that every text has an underlying message, which can be called the kerygma, but I think that violence must be done to some texts in order to get to this underlying message.

In order to illustrate more fully what I mean, I would like to deal with black expression in Black American experience. That expression is found mostly in the Negro Spiritual. Naturally, the expression is also found in the sermon of the black minister: In the black minister's preaching, the peculiar black experience in America comes to expression in a special way; the sermon constantly calls the black man to make a decision concerning his *de facto* enslavement. The decision calls for the freedom of the soul by accepting God's word, but it strikes close to the liberation of the whole man — body and soul. But this paper will not be concerned with the sermon of the black preacher, but rather the slave songs of black people.

II.

It has been claimed by some scholarship that the American Negro was influenced by the rural religious music of America; he took the tunes and the texts and fashioned them to his personal use, e.g., "To hide yourself in the mountain top, to hide yourself from God" becomes "Went down to the rocks to hide my face, the rocks cried out no hiding place."²² This might be true in some instances, but one must truly analyze black music in America before a statement such as the above can be made. William Edward Burghardt DuBois says that there are three stages in the music of Negroes in America. The first stage was that of pure African song: the African brought with him the song of his homeland, but it became meaningless to future generations of blacks who had no immediate contact with the homeland. This was especially true when the African language disappeared and was replaced by the language of the New World. The second stage was that of slave songs: the songs in this era were distinctively Afro-American in character. Because of the acquiring

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

²² Sterling Brown gives several examples of these in his article, "Negro Folk Expression, Spirituals, Seculars, Ballads, and Work Songs," *Phylon*, Vol. XIV, No. 1 (March 1953), pp. 45-61.

of a new language and the remaining vestiges of the old African cults, the black songs were new expressions of being which found birth in the American slave society. They told of exile, death, and searching for meaning in life. The third stage is that in which Negro songs *were* influenced by the songs of the New World. DuBois says that there is another stage which can be mentioned, that is, "where the songs of white America have been distinctively influenced by the slave songs or have incorporated whole phrases of Negro melody, as 'Swanee River' and 'Old Black Joe.'"²³ He thought that the best songs were from the slave era and calls ten selected songs from this era "master songs." William Arnis Fisher, writing in 1926, agrees that the best songs are from the slave era. He says,

The best of these songs had their birth in the slave era when heartstrings were taunt, when in some sections all gatherings, even religious meetings, were forbidden and in darkness with secrecy and danger each must 'Steal away to Jesus.' In both texts and music the post-war Spirituals lack the elemental vigor, directness, naturalness and spontaneity of the earlier songs. The texts have become sophisticated and the music debased by the hybrid white American product — the gospel hymn.²⁴

William Fisher gives some reasons why the Spirituals degenerated into the debased hybrid gospel hymn. First, the slave songs and slavery were so interwoven that the music brought to mind the era of bondage; second, the new "freeman" turned his back on the past, thus the music of the past was forgotten; third, the new black songs took on the character of the white hymns and revival songs because the younger generation of freedmen took up white people's ways; and lastly, the newly freed black was ashamed of the music of his ancestors because he thought that it was a sign of an unprogressive era. William Fisher then quotes from Miss Lucy McKim's "Songs of the Royal Contrabands" in *Dwight's Journal of Music*:

. . . they are valuable as an expression of the character and life of the race which is playing such a conspicuous part in our history. The wild, sad strains tell, as the sufferers themselves never could, of crushed hopes, keen sorrow, and a dull daily misery which covered them as hopelessly as the fog from the rice swamps. On the other hand, the words breathe twisting faith in rest in the future — in 'Canaan's fair and happy land,' to which their eyes seemed constantly turned.²⁵

From Miss Lucy McKim's quotation, it is difficult to understand why such "soulful" music as the Spirituals started to degenerate to the hybrid gospel hymn. Fortunately, however, that degeneration did not take place completely and the Spiritual is preserved for posterity; but, because of the language of the Spirituals and the religious expressions which came forth, they were misunderstood by white Americans who sought to

²³ William E. B. DuBois, "Of the Sorrow Songs," *The Souls of Black Folk in Three Negro Classics* (New York: Avon Books, 1965), p. 382.

²⁴ William Arnis Fisher, ed., *Seventy Negro Spirituals* (Boston: Oliver Ditson Co., 1926), p. viii.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

preserve this indigenous music. The Spirituals are not the happy songs of religious experience but songs of sorrow and blues. Wayman B. McLaughlin says that

The spirituals are sacred folk-music born out of the aches, pains, and joys of existence. The soul-life of a people is here woven into a testament of mystery and holiness. Nymph-like, amid shadows and echoes, the singers of this music weaved out of the matrix of economic, social, and religious circumstances a web of being which was ultimate and personal. Thus, these songs reflect light and darkness in the heave and flow of a personal reality.²⁶

McLaughlin goes on to say that "... one of the most fruitful ways of thinking about spirituals may be in terms of symbolical language and mystical meaning."²⁷ In black singing one cannot always get at the meaning of a song except through the symbolic and mystical aspects which underlie that meaning. This brings us to the aspect of the hermeneutical process as it relates to the Spiritual and its text.

1.

When we approach the text of a Spiritual, we find that the language of the text is the most outstanding thing. And the moment we are aware of that language, we sense that it ought to be heard rather than seen. However, we cannot always take advantage of hearing a Spiritual sung (and rightly sung); therefore, we must resort to the printed word.

Written language fixes in history an event. In the case of the Spiritual, that event is the whole episode of the slave experience. The language of the Spiritual allows us to become alive in the text, which further allows us to participate in the event of slavery itself. Thus we are able to see and understand the world of the text-makers *through* the text.

But before we are able to come to a full understanding and an adequate interpretation of the text, we must become aware of some of the previous things we said about the text. One of these things is the aspect of the hidden meaning. You remember that we said that there are no presuppositionless interpretations — all preconceptions are bequeathed from the past; the text can say more than it reveals; a writer has a historical consciousness. An illustration of hidden meaning can be found in the Spiritual, "Steal Away to Jesus."

Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus
Steal away, steal away home
I ain't got long to stay here

My Lord, he calls me
He calls me by the thunder
The trumpet sounds within-a my heart
I ain't got long to stay here.

²⁶ Wayman B. McLaughlin, "Symbolism and Mysticism in the Spirituals," *Phylon*, Vol. XXIV, No. 1 (March 1963), p. 69.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

As one makes a superficial observation of the text, he would think that the slave, in moments of religious ecstasy, was saying that one should meditate on Jesus because death will catch up with him sooner than he thinks. The stanzas indicate that all of nature is calling him to the Lord.

This is a superficial reading of the *Spiritual*, but let us look at it more carefully. First, there is an experiential memory which comes from out of the past that helps form certain preconceptions. One such memory is the African practice of secret meetings where children were taught the morality of the African cult.²⁸ Also, an African tribe would hold "camp meetings" in order to demonstrate the solidarity of the tribal morality structure. These meetings were religious, because every aspect of African life was religiously oriented whether it involved the medicine man or small children at play. This memory never left the newly planted African, and for the generations which came after him it took on intrinsic value. Secondly, as we look at this particular *Spiritual* for its hidden meaning, we find that the writer has a historical consciousness which gives special meaning to the text.

Because large assemblies of blacks were prohibited by law in the South, the slave leaders had to resort to all kinds of insidious ways to convene secret meetings. The religious song was one such device. It was this fact of history which was in the mind of the author of "Steal Away." There is evidence that Nat Turner was the author of the *Spiritual*. Miles Mark Fisher asys that

Negroes stole way from numerous plantations to African cult meetings just as Nat Turner of insurrectionary notoriety convened his companions by the ironical singing of 'Steal Away.' The external evidence of Turner's revolt against slavery concides with the internal evidence of this song. He knew that should he be caught meeting with other Negroes the oft-repeated burden of the song would be true: 'I hain't got long to stay here.' Yet, he was in a quandary how else to act when his personal Lord was calling him like a patrol officer with a trumpet by 'the thunder,' 'by the lightening,' 'by green trees' bending at will and by signs of the judgment. He who sang so sweetly stood 'a-tremblin' as he understood full well that he was a 'poor sinner,' to say the least. . . . The circumstances all point to Nat Turner of Southampton County, Virginia, as the author of 'Steal Away,' about 1825, the time of his call to be a prophet.²⁹

With this kind of evidence in, preconceptions bequeathed from the past and the historical consciousness of the writer, we can see that the text says more than it reveals.

The *Spiritual*, "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," is another text in which there is hidden meaning. Unless one does violence to the text, the meaning will remain hidden and it will never be able to be understood in the same historical consciousness of the text-maker. Thus, in order to get behind the text, we must attack it with all the tools at hand.

²⁸ *Vid.* Miles Mark Fisher, *Negro Slave Songs in the United States* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1968), p. 9.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

Therefore, if we understand that the writer of a text has a historical consciousness, we must assume that that consciousness takes place within some historical process. We have already said that language is a historical process where history interprets itself through language-event. However, in order for language and history to take place, the life-force of being must be present. And it is when all three of these interrelate and interfuse with each other that interpretation occurs.

Thus it is through language that we come to a text, and it is through language that a text is interpreted. And it is the text that brings forth its own being, and does not depend upon us for an interpretation. Being is brought forth because the text as language-event stands in history where interpretation occurs.

Therefore, language is the tool with which we do violence to the text. As we understand that the writer of the text has a historical consciousness where preconceptions are formed, we must understand our own historical consciousness. Then we must formulate a dialectic with the past and the present in order for the text to come forth with its truth. This dialectic takes place in the form of research in which every aspect of the language-event is brought into its proper perspective as to the relationship of the practice of the present with the tradition of the past. In our research we find that every event interacts with another event and the way in which we interpret that event depends upon some presuppositions from previous events. Thus, we learn that every future interpretation is dependent upon past interpretations, and past interpretations point to the way in which the future can be interpreted. Because past interpretations influence the future, it is inevitable that some traditional things in a culture are constantly carried over in the historical process. This is especially true in some linguistic practices, e.g.,

in language, the African tradition aims at circumlocution rather than at exact definition. The direct statement is considered crude and unimaginative; the veiling of all contents in ever-changing paraphrases is considered the criterion of intelligence and personality.³⁰

Miles Mark Fisher relates an incident of seventy-six priests who were executed because they talked in ambiguous terms about the death of a certain king instead of saying unequivocally that he was dead. Fisher also relates the *bo akutia* custom in which an African who was aggrieved with another took a friend to the house of his adversary. "The offended person then vilified his friend in the presence of the adversary for whom the abuse was really intended."³¹ Indirect statement was further accomplished by substituting fictitious names in stories of real persons or by allegory where certain words were fitted to objects described.

Such is the Spiritual "Swing Low." Under ordinary circumstances where we do not attempt to carry on a dialog with the text, we think that the song is expressing some other-worldly desire. The first thing

³⁰ Le Roi Jones, *Blues People* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1963), p. 31.

³¹ Miles Mark Fisher, p. 9.

that we say is that the slaves were looking toward heaven as the place where they could escape "de trouble of dis worl'." But as we stand in this present moment and realize that the events of the present are conditioned in what took place in the past, we discover the text in its total being. We put to it the question: What are you saying? And the question is put to us: What do you say I am saying? According to what answer we give, the text will either say: "How can you say that when your present dilemma is a result of past events?" or "In the view of the present situation, you have discovered the truth of what is."

Swing low, sweet chariot
Coming for to carry me home.

The truth of what "is" is that this Spiritual, like many others, was a code song which indicated that it was time to leave the plantation. Miles Fisher says that after Nat Turner's revolt, many slaves wanted a chariot to come from out of the skies and take them to Africa. But if we continually keep our dialog with the Spiritual, a better answer can be given to the song. Because of the research which the text requires of us, we found that Africans resorted to veiled and indirect language; much of this indirectness occurs in allegory. Therefore, "home" in the Spiritual is not heaven, but the freedom land of the North. The "chariot" is not some rig the angels put together, but the symbolic train of the underground railroad.

I looked over Jordan and what did I see
.....
A band of angels coming after me
.....
If you get there before I do
.....
Tell all my friends I'll be there too
.....

In many of the Negro Spirituals "Jordan" is that symbolic river which separates the "freedom land" from the land of enslavement. It points back to the Old Testament story of the Hebrew children crossing the Sea of Reeds, and includes the flavor of the New Testament because it was in the Jordan that John the Baptist baptized men into a new life of freedom. And, of course, Jesus was baptized there. There are other symbolic statements: "band of angels" is that small group of men who were to take them on their journey; "if you get there before I do . . . tell all my friends I'll be there to . . ." is not that they will meet in the great by-and-by after death, but that soon they too will be parting from the plantation and will meet with the others in the freedom land.

The language of the Spiritual must be thought of in terms of what Ernst Fuchs calls the "language of self-understanding." It is the language of faith which "is the language of an existence that understands itself." The Spiritual is the medium through which the black man made an affirmation of himself as man; and through this medium, he portrayed

his existence before God. Although the nature of the language of the Spiritual cannot be separated from the reality in which it participates (slavery), there is a reality which lies behind the existence of the language (the historical African consciousness).

2.

This brings us to the question of why the Negro Spiritual was called into being. Could it be because the black man in slavery was so weary of his condition that he hoped for a better life somewhere? Africans were brought from their homeland to a land where they were "not only physical and environmental aliens but products of a completely alien philosophical system."³² Le Roi Jones says that

Herskovits . . . points out that most of the 'myths' about the Negro past were formed by the new masters' refusal to understand that the Africans were not governed by the same mores and culture references as Western man, that they had come from an alien land and culture. But one of the most persistent traits of the Western white man has always been his fanatical and almost instinctive assumption that his systems and ideas about the world are the most desirable, and further, that people who do not aspire to them, or at least think them admirable, are *savages or enemies*.³³

Therefore, in the wake of being thought of as savages or enemies of western culture, the slave had to deal with his world. In his dealings with this world, he had to come to grips with the environmental pressures which influenced him.

As we have already seen, the African world had a great influence on the slave, especially if he was of the first generation of slaves in America. The African's belief was in the supernatural, which made it inconceivable to participate in any aspect of life that did not include the worship of the gods. In America, however, the African found that the white man conducted his life without fear or thought of the gods. Also in America the threat to the very being of the African was challenged and his identity was dissolving into the realm of nonentity. Thus, in an attempt to deal with his world, the slave called the Spiritual into being. The Spiritual is the cry of the innermost depths of the soul which allows a person to make an affirmation to life even in its darkest moments.

³² Jones, p. 7.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

BY HUBERT DANFORD MAULTSBY

Paul, Black Theology and Hermeneutics

In his now classic work, *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism*, Franz Cumont wrote:

... it is a fault common to all scholars, to all imbued with book learning, that they are better acquainted with the opinions of ancient authors than with the sentiments of their contemporaries and that they prefer to live in the past rather than in the world surrounding them.¹

If one takes Cumont's statement as being somewhat reflective of the truth it would seem justified then to use the insights and results of critical, biblico-historical research and theological thinking to further illuminate the world and problems of contemporary man; to use the insights and "opinions" of the past to enlighten the present. What can one say, or for that matter, what does the biblical witness say, if anything, about the contemporary problems of: Racism; the position of women in the world; the economic and international balances of power, etc.? If, for example, it says nothing about "racism" per se, but still witnesses, one might contend, to new possibilities for existence; what are the elements or means of, the hermeneutic? That is, what contemporary analogues or terms does one use to produce an effective "translation"? Can, for example, Paul and *his* view of: the world, life, and Christian experience, help us at all in our contemporary life-situation vis-a-vis, let us say, Racism?

Our task, then, is one of hermeneutics. Hermeneutic comes from the Greek *Hermeneuein* meaning to "translate" or to "interpret." Hermeneutics, then, deals with "the possibility and validity of finding contemporary meaning in ancient texts."² This "translation" or "interpretation" of ancient texts obviously presupposes a preunderstanding. A preunderstanding that determines the kinds of questions one asks of the texts. What is involved here concerns:

... the fundamental problem of whether it is possible to put an ancient text (the Bible) at the basis of an affirmation of faith designed to be understood, and taken seriously, by modern man. Can a past event, and the text to which it gave birth, have any real significance for my life now? That is the fundamental question about the possibility of current meaning for the Christian faith... For unless the Biblical text and the kind of reality to which it points, can in fact give meaning to life in the present age, then the need for the Christian faith, to say nothing of Christian theology, has been seriously compromised, if not eliminated. The Hermeneutical question, therefore, concerns itself with the possibility of Christian faith and theology in the modern world.³

¹Franz Valery Marie Cumont, *The Oriental Religions In Roman Paganism* (Chicago, Open Court Pub. Co., 1911), p. 230.

²Paul J. Achtemeier, *An Introduction to The New Hermeneutic* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 14.

³*Ibid.*, p. 13.

One preunderstanding is that given by the Black theologians and the Black social situation in America. The hermeneutic does presuppose preunderstanding but it does not take preunderstanding for granted. Rather, it enters into dialogue with the ancient text which in this instance is the New Testament, specifically Paul, in order to evaluate, elaborate and deepen this understanding in the light of the Christian faith.

Few, with all due respect to those who have been writing in the realm of Christianity and Ethics or even in the efforts to construct a "Black Theology," have yet attempted a hermeneutic or "translation" to illumine the problem of racism. Few have yet looked at racism and given a totally satisfying answer to the very simple question: why? This is not meant to imply that the aspects illuminated here will be "totally satisfying," or that they will be a comprehensive solution to this complex, multifaceted, human problem. But it is meant to suggest that Paul's view of man and his world might be very instructive and, in some instances, might provide us with some answers.

The problem is that those writing have not gone behind the "ad hoc" to ask the fundamental question: "why?" It would seem, too, that they have been rather wanting in scientific, biblical exegesis and in their handling of historical material critically. Hopefully, and in sincere and honest humility, some small contribution might be made via our suggestions here. First, the materials must be dealt with strictly, carefully, and scientifically. Second, the original must be distinguished from the "translation" of it; that is, we must distinguish what it *says* from what we *interpret* it to say. This distinction is vitally important. It is where, one might suggest, most slip up methodologically — confusing into a veritable jumble or *mélange*: biblical exegesis, historical criticism and modern-day or contemporary application and interpretation.

The purpose here is to contribute to the "growing edge of contemporary discussion" in Black Theology but from the vantage point of New Testament Studies; that is, from the perspective of how a critical handling of historical materials and a New Testament hermeneutic might better delineate the problems and contribute to the discussion within the context of biblical theology. Thus, the purview is the contemporary black social situation but the point of departure is the illuminations that might possibly be provided from a New Testament hermeneutic.

The area of Black Theological studies per se was born so recently that it is difficult to establish this present approach within "its locus in past scholarship and its horizon" since it has no precedents. Black Theology, one might even say, is in its neo-natal stage. An approach and hermeneutic then from a strictly New Testament point of view could be an extremely significant ingredient for growth in this "child's" formula; both as to methodology employed and future directions of translation and interpretation.

Through a contribution from the New Testament perspective, one's hermeneutic, "translation," or use of past perspectives to illuminate

present perspectives would be grounded on solid, historical evidence dealt with critically. What one could say or use, one would use but where the evidence is open to question as to its precise interpretation or meaning one could unabashedly state that and yet still keep his argument intact, integral, clear and honest. This type of precision — and the kind of insights gained from New Testament Studies we believe would be quite complementary and able to contribute substantially to the current efforts to construct a Black Theology. No one has yet approached Black Theology from just this perspective. Our own efforts here will undoubtedly require in future, careful and even more precise refining. But perhaps a direction and a level will have been pointed out. No one yet has attempted in any way in Black Theology to consciously exploit Paul's viewpoints on man, the world and man's existence in that world to illuminate the "suffering oppression in a white man's land" that Cleage speaks of. In that respect Paul's potential has not been fully appreciated, if appreciated at all, because the potential of Paul's world-view has not been seen as useful to Black Theology.

This then is a very real prospect. To make use of or to translate Paul's view of *Hamartia*, "Sin," as a cosmic power by means of the contemporary analogue: "Racism" as that cosmic power. Black theologians like Cleage and Cone have "used" the New Testament in their hermeneutic but, we would suggest, not as creatively as they might have, thereby underestimating (and in the case of Cleage, rejecting altogether!) the resources available in Pauline theology. A significant prospect and contribution appears possible to use then in the very doing of hermeneutics — by using Paul's understanding; by applying his expression of the problem of Sin and Law in *Romans 7* to the contemporary problem of man's struggle with individual and institutional racism. Why man's individual aims and the very good and productive purposes of his "creations" — his systems and institutions — become perverted can be greatly illumined by Paul's view of Sin or "racism" as a cosmic power penetrating all the components of the universe. For Paul, Sin is a power not a person's *individual* sins or deeds. Although this latter is precisely the sense in which we today conceive of "sin," it is not so for Paul. Still, the paradox that is so essential to Paul's thinking must be borne in mind; namely, that while Sin is a power that perverts human existence by enslaving man, this fact does not abrogate nor vitiate man's responsibility. Sin is a power that enslaves; yet, man is responsible and accountable. This is the paradox in Paul's thought.

For Paul, one could say that man as an individual is good but when he gets involved in and deals with the structures and values of this world — since they are permeated and perverted by the "power" Sin — he is torn in two directions. Individuals then might be very good but when they get into the systems, the structures, the values — the *nomos* — of "this world" their intentions become, almost inexplicably, twisted and perverted. "Sin," having perverted the *nomos*, keeps them from doing the

right thing. This tension between knowing the right and doing the right is reflected by Paul in *Romans* 7.

The relationship of Racism to American social institutions has been illuminated by William Loren Katz, William Grier, Price Cobbs, Kenneth Clark, Ralph Ellison and a host of others. Carmichael and Hamilton in their book *Black Power* delineated the distinction between institutional and individual racism. The Kerner Commission characterized racism as corrupting our institutions. In doing so the Kerner Commission in effect empirically verified what Carmichael and Hamilton had earlier argued.

One can see then from these and other works the various attempts to illumine the very subtle and slippery phenomenon, Racism. Having recognized the validity of Carmichael and Hamilton's designations of racism as a sort of Cerberus — one head being individual racism and the other institutional racism — one is still puzzled by the myriad solutions. One author advocates the assumption and exercise of power (Clark, *Dark Ghetto*; Carmichael and Hamilton, *Black Power*) while another offers effort on the part of individuals as a solution (Silberman, *Crisis in Black and White*; Clark, *op cit.*). Still another says, realizing the psychological damage done, the answer lies in rejecting the "white is superior, black is inferior" syndrome (Silberman, *op cit.*; Grier and Cobbs, *Black Rage*). Another argues as a solution the simple recognition by Whites that Negroes exist and are human like they (Ellison, *The Invisible Man*).

Grier and Cobbs, while aware of the brutality visited upon Blacks by the systems and institutions of society seem, in the main, concerned with individual or attitudinal Racism. This concern is reflected while at the same time unwittingly demonstrating Paul's potential for interpreting Racism as a cosmic power. This is seen when Grier and Cobbs speaking in terms of the comos say: "For black and white alike, the air of this nation is perfused with the idea of white supremacy and everyone grows to manhood under this influence."⁴ Still, they seem primarily concerned with racial "prejudice," and therefore with individual rather than institutional Racism. Eldridge Cleaver in his analysis (*Soul on Ice*) says that blacks "desire to break the ofays' power over us." Looking again to the prospects and possibilities that Paul offers for clarifying and understanding this phenomenon, we see that Racism seems to be here defined by Cleaver as the power of the ofay; that is, the power of the white man under Sin or Racism. After Cleaver, who writes of the loss of white heroes being due to a global exploitation that is "rooted in the myth of white supremacy," one can observe an historical transition; that is, earlier, in such writers as DuBois, Ellison, and even in Grier and Cobbs the accent is on individual racism, "prejudice." The solutions proffered suggested that each and every American — individually — had to change. By the time Carmichael and Hamilton write there is a notice-

⁴William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, *Black Rage* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), pp. 166-167.

able historical shift. The accent or stress is now on the need to change society's systems and institutions; in this vein Kenneth Clark, Carmichael and Hamilton and others advocate the necessity of "power." Eldridge Cleaver too displays this historical shift of emphasis when he speaks of the myth of white supremacy being the *basis* for the institutional savagery and oppression of society's systems. "Colonialism," "imperialism" and "domestic exploitation" are seen as "rooted in" the myth of white supremacy. Using Paul's conception one could say they are seen as rooted in the "deception" Sin practices on man (cf. *Romans 7:11*). Sin, Racism, using the myth of white supremacy to pervert man's institutions and societal systems — the *nomoi* — deceives man.

On the theological side, the attempts to illumine and understand Racism — to precise, define, grasp this phenomenon — are represented by the life and works of Martin Luther King, Jr., as well as the works of James Cone, Albert Cleage and Joseph R. Washington.

All King's books deal with individual and institutional racism although he never explicitly speaks in these specific terms of the distinction. But, in effect, he does admit to the distinction when he speaks of the need for structural change in America's domestic and foreign policies as well as a change in attitudes. For example, King recognizes these two types of racism when in the appendix, as throughout the book *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*, he singles out the systems or institutions of: education, employment and housing as badly in need of redefinition and reorganization of priorities. But the question is if these systems or institutions have been misguided or perverted into perpetuating the evil of segregation — Why? How? How does one explain the sincere and well-meaning people as King maintains they are, who nonetheless destroy others? Paul, we would suggest provides an answer.

Joseph R. Washington in *The Politics of God* wonders why it is that whites make no conscious decision to hate Black people but do so nonetheless. Why? How? Who then is culpable? Paul's understanding of Sin and Law and his expression and explanation of it in *Romans 7*, we would suggest, speaks directly to Washington's dilemma of how this unintended but nonetheless actualized, irrational hatred comes about.

In his *Black Theology and Black Power*, James Cone states:

I am not suggesting that the New Testament language and its theological interpretation in the history of Western Christianity are no longer useful for black people in America. Rather, I am saying that there is a real need for a radical approach which takes the suffering of black people seriously.⁵

We would suggest that when he speaks of men being "controlled by evil powers that would make them slaves and the demonic forces of racism . . .,"⁶ Paul might be very useful in better understanding this

⁵James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), pp. 49-50.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 40.

phenomenon and thus contribute to that "radical approach" Cone calls for.

Albert Cleage's arguments against Paul notwithstanding, does recognize the individual and institutional aspects of racism. Speaking about organizations, neighborhoods and Black Power he says:

Even if you could organize your block or your neighborhood you might get a new streetlight or an extra garbage pickup, but you could not touch the real problem of Black powerlessness. Your block and your neighborhood suffer as a part of the institutional racism that oppresses all Black people everywhere. We are oppressed by impersonal white institutions with power.⁷

In the Introduction to *Black Christian Nationalism*, Cleage poses several questions as he sees them that Black Theology wants to know about. One of these questions is:

What is the nature of man as affected by white racism and the Black experience? Is the white man a devil or a beast? If not, how can we explain his bestial behavior?⁸

Recognizing Cleage's intense dislike for Paul, nonetheless Paul's concept of Sin and Law as seen in *Romans 7*, we submit, provides an answer to this query.

At bottom, all these attempts then accept *implicitly* Carmichael and Hamilton's distinction of Institutional and Individual Racism. The difficulty lies in this dialectical nature of racism; that is, in its individual and cosmic aspects. Since this phenomenon, racism, realizes itself in *both* these dimensions the problem that arises is how one maintains the tension or reality between these two in an illumination of racism. How does one maintain and yet attempt to understand both expressions in illumining racism? Most writers grasp only one side of this dialectic and as a result accent one, either individual *or* institutional racism, at the expense of the other. Paul, we suggest, and his conception of Sin can resolve this difficulty because it can maintain the dual aspects of individual racism and institutional racism.

Given the religious-historical traditions of "Sin" and "Law," and Paul's understanding of these concepts, current definitions conceiving of "Sin" as individual deeds and "Law" as specific legislation are much too narrowly conceived and much too limited to encompass Paul's categories. Without doubt, then, we feel that Black Theology has something to say but it is our opinion that the perspective of New Testament Studies, and particularly Paul, can help it to say it better.

In the suggestions such as those presented here — the ramifications of *any* human problem being phenomenally complex — one cannot hope to cover all the areas nor hope to deal even adequately with those that are covered. Perhaps, the most that can be hoped for is the throwing off of a few sparks that will illumine, if only for a few seconds, dark corners

⁷ Albert Cleage, *Black Christian Nationalism* (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1972), p. 49.

⁸ *Ibid.*, XVI.

and directions that demand further thought, research, and reflection. Furthermore, it was not our *aim* here to say anything really new or startling; yet, hopefully, that has happened in some instances. Although one should try never to "exegete the obvious," it should be remembered that very often the most significant impact and insights come from the things we have heard before. Bringing our own experience to testify, how often could each of us witness to the fact that he or she has been "revolutionized by the obvious?"

"It happens time and again to all of us that we need to clarify the truth that is to be translated into action and to translate into action the truth that has been clarified. . . ."⁹

It is sincerely hoped that some clarification and some translation might be effected through what is suggested here.

ROMANS 7

A. 'Hamartia' and "Nomos" in Pauline Theology

Understanding the relationship between Sin and the Law is of major importance in Pauline theology. For the Jew the Law was the Old Testament and the Torah. He could wear his *tephelim* proudly because it designated him outwardly as a follower of the law and the law was something in which he could take pride; something in which he could "boast." For the devout Jew the law symbolized everything — his culture and history; his covenant with God; his institutions; his very being itself. Paul concedes all this and in his concession he states unequivocally: "the commandment is holy and just and good" (Rom. 7:12). But then comes his proviso: Sin, Paul says, through the law (Rom. 7: 11) deceives man into thinking that he himself can attain life.¹⁰ For Paul "redemption is simultaneously liberation from the Law and from its function as that which evokes sin."¹¹

For Paul too the Law is the tradition of Israel in its totality. It is "the historically given legal demands, cultic and ritual as well as ethical."¹² But what, in Paul's understanding, is demanded of man is not a self-justifying striving; a striving therefore contingent upon "works of the Law" in which man might boast; rather, what is demanded of man is an obedience contingent upon "faith" so that man does not seek nor strive to justify himself by "works" done in obedience to Law, but is justified by faith. Therefore man has no basis on which to "boast." "But Paul goes much further still. He says not only that man can not achieve salvation by works of the Law, but also that he is not even *intended* to do so (cf. Rom. 3: 20; Gal. 2: 16)."¹³ The Law was given to lead

⁹ Ernst Roseman, *Jesus Means Freedom* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), p. 42.

¹⁰ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, Vol. I (New York: Charles Scribner), 1955, p. 248.

¹¹ Gerhard Kittel, Vol. I *Theological Dictionary of The New Testament* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1964), p. 313.

¹² Bultmann, *op. cit.*, 260.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 263.

man to life, but because of Sin leads instead to death.¹⁴ For Paul justification by works and justification by faith are mutually exclusive because "Christ is the end of the law, that everyone who has faith may be justified" (Rom. 10: 4).¹⁵ Man's attempt to save himself by keeping the law, by "works," only leads man into sin. The attempt, the striving, the effort itself is sin.

It is the insight which Paul has achieved into the nature of sin that determines his teaching on the Law. This embraces two insights. One is the insight that sin is man's self-powered striving to undergird his own existence in forgetfulness of his creaturely existence, to procure his salvation by his own strength, that striving which finds its extreme expression in 'boasting' and 'trusting' in the flesh'. The other is the insight that man is always a sinner, that fallen into the power of sin, he is always already involved in a falsely oriented understanding of his existence.¹⁶

... the Law brings to light that man is sinful, whether it be that his sinful desire leads him to transgression of the Law or that desire disguises itself in zeal for keeping the Law.¹⁷

For Paul Sin is not seen as individual deeds or transgressions. Thus he does not speak of forgiveness of sins, but of God "destroying" Sin (Rom. 6: 6, 14). Sin is conceived as a personified power; a ruling power — with man as its slave.¹⁸ Paul speaks of Sin as having entered into the world (Rom. 5: 12); as having dwelled in (Rom. 7: 17, 20) and enslaved man (Rom. 6: 6, 17 ff.). But man, in the understanding of Paul, is nonetheless responsible, culpable; because although sold under sin (Rom. 7: 14) man places himself at sin's disposal (Rom. 6:

¹⁴ Gunther Bornkamm, *Paul* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 121-122.

¹⁵ Bultmann, *loc. cit.* cf. also Bornkamm, *op. cit.*, 12, 17, 20. On p. 20 Bornkamm states: "As in Philipians and Romans, its [Galatians] subject is that in sending Christ into the world God made an end of the Jewish way of salvation, righteousness on the basis of the Law, and inaugurated universal salvation on the sole basis of righteousness deriving from faith."

¹⁶ Bultmann, *op. cit.*, 264. cf. also Bornkamm, *Paul*, 46 where of Gal. 2: 11-21 he says: "According to Paul's account, Peter's inconsistency was tantamount to a denial of the truth that men are justified not by doing what the Law commands, but solely through faith in Christ, because his second attitude made clear that, for himself and Jewish Christians, the prescriptions of the Jewish Law were obligatory, thus forcing Gentile Christians, too, to submit to Jewish customs. For Paul, any relapse into legality could only mean that faith based on Christ alone was declared to be sin, and Christ an agent of sin. In reality, however, sin consisted in harking back to the Law which Christ's death on the cross had nullified, and in abandoning the new life which he made possible."

¹⁷ Bultmann, *op. cit.*, 265. cf. also Sanday and Headlam (I.C.C.) *Epistle to the Romans*, 188.

¹⁸ Bornkamm, *op. cit.*, 133, 151. When Paul does speak of forgiveness of sins he is generally quoting as in Rom 4: 7f. cf. on this point Bornkamm, *Paul*, 151; Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul*, 135-136; Conzelmann, *Outline of the Theology of the New Testament*, 327. In the theology of Paul, sin itself appears most often as a cosmic power which enslaves man. Bornkamm, representative of a consensus of scholars on this point says: "significantly, sin practically always occurs in the singular and is spoken of as a power embodied in a person." One can certainly speak of a consensus among scholars that sin in Paul is conceived of as a cosmic power. cf. Conzelmann, *Outline of the Theology of the New Testament*, 194; Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* 244-245, 249; Bornkamm, *Paul* 133; Schoeps, *Paul in the Light of Jewish Religious History* 184-185; Schlier, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament* 31-32; Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* 23-24; Nock, *St. Paul* 212; Arndt-Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* 42; Stacey, *The Pauline View of Man* 162; Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, V.I., 311; Spivey and Smith, *Anatomy of the New Testament* 329.

13) and receives wages from Sin (Rom. 6: 23) in payment for his obedience to sin's rule. In the understanding of Paul man is culpable because "as created by the Lord and owned by him, the Christian together with his body and its members is released to serve the ends of righteousness and appointed to life (Rom. 6: 12-23),"¹⁹ but man serves instead Sin with its resultant: death. Sin is also seen as a personified power when Paul speaks of its having been once dead but revived and of Sin's having "used" the Law to cause man to covet; that is, Sin by means of Law rouses in man desire and by so doing deceives man and kills him (Rom. 7: 8, 11, 13).²⁰

In reference to Paul's understanding of Sin and Law Bornkamm observes that the letter to the Romans is polemical in tone because it is directed at the Jews' conception of salvation:

In a way the Jew symbolizes man in his highest potentialities; he represents the "religious man" whom the Law tells what God requires of him, who appeals to the special statute granted him in the plan of salvation, and who refuses to admit that he has failed to measure up to God's claim on him and is in consequence abandoned to sin and death. As contrasted with this man who prides himself on being religious, Paul expounds his message, for Jew and Gentile alike, about the Law and about grace proffered to all who believe in Christ.²¹

In Paul's view Sin issues forth in man's life as an active, dynamic, enslaving power.²² In contemporary terms Sin would be called not an individual deed or act but a "style of life". *Hamartia* (Sin) using *Nomos* (Law) causes man to desire; to struggle and strive to justify his "self" and his life by means of his "works". In (Rom. 7: 7ff). Paul says the relationship of Sin and Law is such that "sin managed to turn the divine, commandment against itself and into an instrument for my (man's) own self-assertion".²³ Sin is not merely revealed as such by *nomos* but actually functions, *works*, by means of the commandment.²⁴ Still, Paul emphasizes: the *nomos* is good. Even though it is conscripted, impressed into service as an ally of sin; still, the *nomos* itself is blameless. It is "holy, just and good".²⁵ In fact it functions still, even while being "used" by Sin, in behalf of God. It serves not to diminish Sin but to show all the more what Sin is. *Nomos* (Law) shows *Hamartia* (Sin) "in the plenitude of its power to destroy (7: 13)".²⁶ "Even if indirectly and in a paradoxical way, by the very denying of life, instead of opening up accounts to it, the *Nomos* remained in the service of the divine will to save".²⁷ For Paul neither the person strictly, rigorously observing the Law nor the person flagrantly transgressing the Law, be he Jew or

¹⁹ Bornkamm, *op. cit.*, 131.

²⁰ Bultmann, *op. cit.*, 245-249. cf. also Furnish, *op. cit.*, 116; Cozelmann, *op. cit.*, 232, 234.

²¹ Bornkamm, *op. cit.*, 95; 123.

²² *Ibid.*, 124.

²³ *Ibid.*, 126.

²⁴ Furnish, *op. cit.*, 141.

²⁵ cf. Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, 229.

²⁶ Bornkamm, *op. cit.*, 127. cf. Furnish, *op. cit.*, 140-141.

²⁷ Bornkamm, *loc. cit.*

Gentile, could find the way to God because for Paul it was a matter of grace. These strivings signify "works" and the possibility of "boasting". For Paul the means is now not *nomos* but grace; the points of reference are now not "works" but Christ and faith.²⁸ "To cancel the power of evil and death the Law has no avail (Rom. 8: 3). Actually, it only sets its seal on it and establishes it. As a means of salvation it has been abolished; Christ is the end of the Law (Rom. 10: 4)".²⁹

Man in Paul's view repeatedly fails to realize in his strivings: life. Man seeks life but finds death.³⁰ Man repeatedly fails to realize he cannot "achieve" life; he cannot "do" anything to attain salvation. Life, love and grace are gifts. Gifts are by their very nature "received" — freely given — not earned or "achieved" so that one might proudly boast of his achievement.

For Paul sin is, in a word "boasting". This "boasting" is not simply identified with "conceit" or "egotism" in the relatively superficial psychological sense, although it also manifests itself as conceit in relationships with others (e.g. I Cor. 4: 6). Rather, it refers to man's turning away from God "to the creation and to one's own strength". Sin (boasting) thus means "a misconstruing of the human situation", a refusal to recognize that life is a gift from God (I Cor. 4: 7). Hence, Paul bids his readers not to boast in men (e.g. I Cor. 1: 29; 3: 21) or "in your flesh" (Gal. 6: 13), but only "in the Lord" (I Cor. 1: 31; II Cor. 10: 17-18) or "in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6: 14).³¹

In Paul's view the condemnation of the Jews stemmed not from the fact that they failed to keep the commandments of God. Some kept the commandments and some did not. They were condemned because they attempted to use the Law to "justify" themselves; to exalt themselves over against their fellow man.³² The Law became the symbol and means of all in which they might "boast" before God. Bultmann puts it this way: "The attitude of sinful self-reliance finds its extreme expression in man's 'boasting'. It is characteristic both of the Jew, who boasts of God and the Torah (Rom. 2: 17, 23), and of the Greek, who boasts of his

²⁸ Bornkamm, *op. cit.*, 128, 137; Furnish, *op. cit.* 193-194.

²⁹ Bornkamm, *op. cit.*, 134. Conzelmann in his *Outline of the Theology of the New Testament* (p. 235) says of Rom 7: 7-25: "The account ends in a lament (v. 24), followed immediately by thanksgiving (v. 25a; cf. 8: 1ff). The result is that the doctrine of the end of the law in Christ is not antinomian. Indeed, it presupposes the validity and holiness of the law. In faith, what the law intends comes into effect (Rom. 3: 28-30)."

³⁰ cf. Furnish, *op. cit.*, 142; Conzelmann 226 f.

³¹ Furnish, *op. cit.*, 137-138, cf. also p. 150: "Grace points to the initiative and power of God as the one who 'gives' righteousness and to man (in his helplessness, sinfulness, and enmity) as the receiver. But the law seems to presuppose that man is in his own right an 'achiever,' and it may lead him to suppose that by his performance of the works which the law commends, he is himself enabled to win the verdict of 'righteousness' from God."

This criticism of the law has its basis in Paul's insight that reliance on "the flesh," the orientation of one's life in terms of the values, goals, and possibilities of "this world," only drives one ever further away from God, in relationship to whom true life is found. Man's alienation from God and "boasting" in the flesh is the essence of his sin, and since the law encourages reliance on "worldly" accomplishment, the law itself becomes sin's agent."

³² D. J. Doughty, "The Situation of Man In the World." Unpublished Notes On The Theology of Paul, p. 4.

wisdom (I Cor. 1: 19-31). It is also a natural tendency of man in general to compare himself with others in order to have his 'boast' thereby (Gal. 6: 4)".³³

The fundamental premise of Paul is that *all* men — without exception — are under the power of sin; and what's more man is not even aware of his sad situation. Paul asserts, admittedly in mythological language, that Sin has "deceived" man and led man to believe that he is destined for life when he is actually destined for death and destruction (Rom. 7: 7-12).³⁴ Spivey and Smith in their *Anatomy of the New Testament* say this of the Pauline conception of Sin as seen from the letter to the Romans:

Paul clearly does not regard sin as personal wickedness or individual transgression resulting from the ill will of single persons. Although he indicates that men are responsible for their sin and do not sin inevitably or by nature, he is quite aware of the suprapersonal character of evil among the human race. Specifically he traces the origin of this evil or sin to Adam (Rom. 5: 12-21; cf. I Cor. 15: 45 ff). Moreover, he can refer to bondage of the creation to decay (8: 21) or to the present evil age (Gal. 1: 4) without ever mentioning him. Paul speaks of sin as an external power that can enslave man (chap. 6) and describes its insidious attack upon man through the law (chap. 7). Yet in the light of his specific references to Adam we may maintain that his understanding of the corporate character of sins owes much to that strand of Jewish thought which laid responsibility for the corrupt state of humanity at Adam's doorstep (cf. especially IV Ezra 7: 116-126 and II Baruch 54: 15-19).

In summary, Paul's conception of sin has two foci, which remain in paradoxical and unresolved tension with one another. Man sins willingly but inevitably. Paul can never speak of sin in such a way as to relieve mankind as a whole, and indeed the individual, of responsibility for it. Yet he would by no means subscribe to a purely personal or individual concept of sin.³⁵

Man is deceived by Sin in such a way that even that which he regards to be "holy, just and good" becomes the means by which Sin leads him into death. Once enslaved by Sin, however, what man needs according to Paul — contrary to the Greek view that man's basic problem is ignorance — is not a teacher who brings him knowledge but a "Redeemer" who destroys the power of Sin and brings him freedom.³⁶

Sin then for Paul quite clearly is a power; a power that perverts human existence,³⁷ and the only solution Paul sees is another power able to

³³ Bultmann, *op. cit.*, 242. cf. also 240 *infra* — 241: "Arrogance which in the Jewish world takes the form of zeal for fulfilling the Torah and of pride over one's accomplishments in doing so and over Israel's titles to honor appears in the Hellenistic world as a striving after wisdom and as pride in knowledge and pneumatic endowment."

³⁴ Doughty, *op. cit.*, 5.

³⁵ Spivey and Smith, *Anatomy of the New Testament* (New York: MacMillan, 1969), 328-329.

³⁶ Doughty, *op. cit.*, 6.

³⁷ According to Dibelius (*Geisterwelt in Glauben des Paulus*) Sin is described in Romans 6 and 7 as the "most harmful" enemy to man: "a tangibly active, personal power: (p. 119). Unlike Death in Rom 5: 12f. which is seen as the ruler of this Age; Sin is conceived as a "personal despot." This Dibelius contends is clearly shown in Rom. 6: 6, 12 and 13.

He argues that one must recognize the distinctive manner of ruling. Rom. 5:17

void or destroy the power of Sin and free man. In this way "man is 'bought free' from his previous slavery; but even so, he nevertheless does not belong to himself; for there is for man no absolute belonging-to-one's-self, but belonging to God or 'the Lord' is man's freedom — namely, freedom from. . . sin (Rom. 6: 15ff.; 7: 5f)."³⁸

. . . the mythological notions of the spirit powers and Satan do not serve the purpose of cosmological speculation nor a need to explain terrifying or gruesome phenomena or to relieve men of responsibility and guilt. When Paul speaks of the event by which death came into the world he takes recourse not to the devil, as Wis. 2: 24 does, but to Adam's sin (Rom. 5: 12f). Though Death does appear in the mythological role of the 'last enemy', I Cor. 15: 26, yet in 15: 56 it is 'sin' that is the 'sting of death.' It is out of man's deeds that death grows as their fruit. Paul may indeed speak in naive mythology of the battle of the spirit powers against Christ or of his battle against them (I Cor. 2: 6-8; 15: 24-26). In reality he is thereby only expressing a certain understanding of existence. The spirit powers represent the reality into which man is placed as one full of conflicts and struggle, a reality which threatens and tempts. Thus, through these mythological conceptions the insight is indirectly expressed that man does not have his life in his hand as if he were his own lord, but that he is constantly confronted with the decision of choosing his lord.³⁹

depicts death as the ruler of this world; according to Rom. 6:12 Sin should not rule "in your mortal bodies" (Revised Standard Version rendering). "A great distinction" exists, Dibelius feels, between the two (p. 123. cf. also in his statement on p. 122: "... die Art dieser Sundenherrschaft mit der Herrschaft des Todes — 1 Kor. 15, Rom. 5 — nicht verglichen werden kann.")

If these spheres of rule are as mutually exclusive as Dibelius seems to argue for how then does one explain in Rom. 7:24 the phrase: "... this body of death"; or Rom. 8:10: "... your bodies are dead because of Sin."? Then too the apocalyptic structure of thought — of which Paul would seem to be a part, even though he may at times reinterpret it — sees "this age" as being evil or under the power of wickedness, sin, or iniquity and not *solely* under the power of Death. Thus, it would appear that Dibelius' absolute "distinction" of these realms of rule does not seem justified. Also, Qumran would seem to show that this exclusivity is not well-founded. But of course this latter source for comparative study, it must be remembered, was not available to Dibelius. Finally, the text itself does not appear to make as *absolute* a distinction between the two as Dibelius' argument would seem to warrant. Rom. 5:12 in particular depicts death as a *consequence* of Sin (so too does Rom. 7:13). This then would seem to make Sin the over-all cosmic power rather than making Sin and Death two equal powers, as Dibelius implies, differentiated only in and by their spheres of influence; namely, Death ruling "this Age" and Sin ruling "within man."

Dibelius contends that since Sin's locus is in man the concept of "possession" as seen in the gospels could be a helpful analogy. One can, therefore, "describe Sin as a demon." But it must be remembered, he warns, that Paul did not conceive of Sin as "simply" a demon and therefore there is no firm boundary in his descriptions between the picture, or description, and the reality (p. 122). Dibelius feels that with this proviso firmly in mind one can then assert a personification of Sin also in Rom. 3:9 where all Jews and Greeks are seen to be "under sin"; and in Gal. 3:22 as well.

For Dibelius Romans 6 and 7 give one the points of departure for an intensification of the first century belief in spirits. He considers Paul's view of Sin and Death as demons operating in a "psychological" framework, "paved the way" for understanding the dark powers that threaten man not as coming from without but from within man himself (p. 124). Again, in reference to this last point, one must conclude that had the documents from Qumran been available to him a scholar as perceptive as Dibelius would have seen that Paul was not unique nor did he "pave the way." In regard to demons and powers, since they were part of his "weltanschauung," Paul simply was a man of his time. Dibelius himself, on this point, notes that beliefs in angels, devils and demons is something the apostolic period shared with other periods (p. 192).

³⁸ Bultmann, *op. cit.*, 244.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 258-259.

According to Paul then all men stand under the power of sin; that is all men are enslaved by Sin. In the worldview of Paul, Sin appears on the scene as an active cosmic power which deceives man and leads him into death (Rom. 7: 7-13). Sin deceives man by leading him to believe that he can somehow achieve authentic life by his own strength and resources through the world and the things of the world. And, in spite of the fact that in the depths of his being he knows that authentic life can never be created by human striving but can only be received as a gift, man allows himself to be deceived and is therefore without excuse. Man's vain attempt to create and secure his own life by manipulation of his world leads him into direct contradiction with the world by which he now becomes enslaved.⁴⁰ He is led into contradiction with his fellow man from whom he has become separated in his striving to assert his own life. He is led into contradiction with even himself because his striving leads not to freedom and life but rather to slavery and death (Rom. 7: 13-25). It is in this sense then that Sin is portrayed as a cosmic power which enslaves man; alienates him from his world; separates him from his fellow man and leads him into servitude and destruction.

For Paul the Christian has become free from the power of Sin (Rom. 6: 7) through the salvation event of Jesus Christ. If the Christian has become free from Sin, he then no longer attempts to create his own life through the world and the things of the world. If the Christian has become free from Sin he is also free from the Law (Rom. 7: 4ff.). Because, in the broadest sense, the "law" refers to the ways and means by which man attempts to secure his own salvation. We have seen how, according to Paul, Sin uses the law to deceive man and lead him into death.

Paul was at one with all the devout of the Old Testament in believing that, in its original intention, the Law was God's call to and sign of salvation and life (Rom. 2:6ff.; 7:10): it was there to be obeyed. Applying to all, not just to Jews, it was summarized in the Decalogue and the command to love one's neighbor as oneself (Rom. 7:7; 13:9; Gal. 5:14). While Paul never abandoned this basic conviction, he was led to see what became all—important to himself personally, what he expressed in a more profound and radical way than did any Jew or Greek before him, and what no other theologian of primitive Christianity repeated after him, namely, that this same holy, righteous, and good Law (Rom. 7:12, 16) was in fact powerless to give salvation and life.⁴¹

But Paul believes that man now knows, however, that salvation comes to him only as a gift from God; that he is free from the law. He is free

⁴⁰ cf. Bultmann, *op. cit.*, 254ff cf. also Doughty, *op. cit.*

⁴¹ Bornkamm, *Paul*, 121-122. August Strobel writing on the conception of sin in New Testament times (*Erkenntnis und Bekenntnis der Sünde in Neutestamentlichen Zeit*) says that for Paul the concept of Sin is almost always used absolutely; that is, without a more precise definition (*op. cit.*, 48 infra-49). What this really means is no more clear than his statement about statistics (what statistics?) showing hamartia as the most comprehensive and most neutral concept. Just what precisely Strobel means by: "comprehensive" and "most neutral" or the "reality of Sin" is not clear (p. 49). But

from the vain attempt to win his own salvation. He is free from concern about his own life. The Christian has therefore a new relationship with himself. He is free from concern about himself. As a result, for the first time he has become free for the real demand of God — the demand of love (cf. Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:6).⁴²

SUMMARY

In conclusion then one can maintain that Paul does not say "man" or man's "inner being" is corrupt.⁴³ One cannot derive from Paul a doctrine of man's perverted nature. For Paul Sin is a power not a person's individual sins or deeds. Although this latter is precisely the sense in which we today conceive of "sin"; it is not so for Paul. Still, the paradox that is so essential to Paul's thinking must be borne in mind; namely that while Sin is a power that perverts human existence by enslaving man, this fact does not abrogate nor vitiate man's responsibility. Sin is a power that enslaves; yet, man is responsible and accountable. This is the paradox in Paul's thought.

Strobel is of the opinion that Paul speaks of Sin as an "autonomous power": (selbständigen Grosse) because he works from the reality of God's judgment as expressed in Rom. 2:15 (p. 49). How the one relates to the other he does not make clear.

While defending Paul against any accusation of speaking imprecisely, apparently because Paul uses the *precise* example of Adam, Strobel himself remains guilty of imprecision. He speaks first of Sin as an "autonomous power" and then, in effect, says that it is not. He sees Sin not as attributable to Satan or some "metaphysical anti-god" but exclusively as the fateful deed of man." (p. 49). This is patently a contradiction; incapable of substantiation from Rom. 7 where Paul says very clearly that man sins but it is because of this thing without and within him called: Sin. Unfortunately, throughout his treatment Strobel uses such imprecise and obfuscating phrases as: "the knowledge of Sin through the law... is grounded on the empirical present"; (p. 50) and "the radical sinfulness of men." (p. 50). What is meant by the "empirical" present or the "radical" sinfulness of man?

Strobel's sentiments and thinking are, perhaps, best revealed when he says such things as:

"Dass das Bekenntnis eigener sundiger Verlorenheit so spontan geschieht, halten wir fest. Es ist bei dem Christen Paulus nicht mehr Sache des Kults, sondern — wie bei Luther — eighen lebendige Erfahrung. Vielleicht ist diesem Punkt trotz gewisser Unterschied des Denkens die Einheit mit Luther am grossten und im Entscheidenden gewahrt." (p. 51).

Then, having taken issue with Kuhn for citing parallels to Paul in Qumran, he also rejects Lohmeyer's contention that Sin for Paul was a "metaphysical reality." (p. 52)

⁴² In a comparison between Paul's conception of the Law and that of Qumran Herbert Braun argues that Paul and Qumran are distinct because Qumran's allegiance is to the Torah (*Gesammelte Studien zum Neuen Testament und Seiner Umwelt*, 112-115). Braun contends that the concept of salvation in the one is quite distinct from the other. Paul conceives of God's act of salvation in Christ as freeing one from the Torah which is seen as deathly. Qumran, oriented to the Torah views it as a decisive help to salvation (p. 116. cf. also 113). Braun, citing a host of examples, notes that in Qumran: "die terminologie, in der die Sunde bekannt wird ist ausserst mannigfaltig. Der Beter spricht von seiner Sunde (p. 103, footnote 9) und von seinen Sunde (p. 104, footnote 10) ... befand sich im Gebiet der Bosheit (p. 104, footnote 26) ... unter vier Verwirrungen ... Er lebt im Dienst der Sunde (p. 105, footnote 50); ein verkehrter Geist herrscht in ihm (p. 105, footnote 51). Die Sunde ist eine den Menschen knechtende Macht (p. 105, 116)."

Although his study and comparisons are useful Braun unfortunately tries to make it seem as though Paul has some greater and even deeper perception and expression of grace than Qumran (cf. op. cit., p. 116). This feature makes his attempt seem at times more akin to apologetics than religious-historical investigation.

⁴³ cf. Bornkamm, Paul 124; 126. Even this respected scholar remarks: "Thus man's will, and not sin itself conceived as an objective reality, is the cause of sin!" (p. 124).

For Paul one could say that man as an individual is good but when he gets involved in and deals with the structures and values of this world — since they are permeated and perverted by the “power” Sin — he is torn in two directions. Individuals then might be very good but when they get into the systems, the structures, the values — the *nomos* — of “this world” their intentions become, almost inexplicably, twisted and perverted. “Sin”, having perverted the *nomos*, keeps them from doing the right thing. This tension between knowing the right and doing the right is reflected by Paul in Romans 7.

For Paul, when one lives in the new age and walks according to the Spirit there is no law. This is the point he tries to make the Galatians understand. In the new age law is not needed. It is only needed in this age that is under Sin.

The reason, then, that man shall not, must not, be “rightwised” by works of the Law is that he must not be allowed to imagine that he is able to procure his salvation by his own strength; for he can find his salvation only when he understands himself in his dependence upon God the creator.⁴⁴

For Paul, what delivers man is not the law — *nomos* — but the new act of God: the Christ. Whether then man fulfills the law or not is not the point because there must and can be no basis for boasting.⁴⁵

Now, however, that the “righteousness” of God is revealed “apart from law” (Rom. 3: 21), the cover is also removed from the law and the “Law as the power of death over sinful mankind is revealed. The prison that now is opened (Gal. 3: 22 f.) releases sinners subjected to death. God speaks the word of grace to them by representing them with his “righteousness”. That means at the same time that he does not let them die their own death but lets them die with Christ, dying to the law and the world in order to live for him (Gal. 3: 19 f.; Rom. 5: 8 f.; 6: 5 f. and others).⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Bultmann, *op. cit.*, 264.

⁴⁵ I am indebted to my teacher, L. K. K. Dey, for several of the insights contained in these “conclusions.”

⁴⁶ Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 63. Eduard Grafe, the last scholar to be mentioned in this treatment of *harmatia* and *nomos* in Pauline theology, wrote a little treatise in 1893 on Paul's teaching on the law. (*Die Paulinische Lehre von Gesetz*) In it Grafe stated that “*nomos* with or without the article signifies for Paul the Old Testament revelation of God's will.” (p. 9) Later research, it would seem, has shown this definition to be somewhat narrow. In Romans 7 alone Paul does not seem to operate with this univocal understanding of *nomos*. In reference to Romans 7 and Paul's understanding and teaching on the law Grafe makes several highly problematic statements. Statements, it might be added, that were echoed by others after him. He speaks of Paul's realizing that the Law was not the way to righteousness in terms of desperation or as a last resort. Paul, he says, turned from the Law after “a painful experience” and “vain attempts to fulfill the Law.” (p. 13) As several scholars after him, so Grafe seems to have forgotten Paul's own apodictic declaration in Philippians 3: 6 that as to righteousness under the law, he was “blameless.” Grafe also speaks of the “absolute sinfulness” of man, which coupled with his vain attempts with Sin leads to the outcry in Rom. 7: 24 (p. 17) Again, this is not substantiated by the text itself. Paul in Rom. 7: 17 does not lay the blame, so to speak, on the “absolute sinfulness” of man but on the power, Sin! He, in fact, nowhere speaks of the “absolute” sinfulness of *man* cf. also on this point, the very telling article by Krister Stendahl “The Apostle Paul and the Intropective Conscience of the West”; and P. Feine “Der Ursprung de Sunde nach Paulus” (written in 1899 and an excellent article even though written in 1899 and an

The all-important concern then is this new act of God in Christ. Recalling an ancient Roman liturgy one could aptly say: "per ipsum et cum ipso et in ipso". For Paul God destroys the power of Sin because Christ is the end of the nomos.

excellent article even though written fifty years before the discovery of the Qumran literature.

Grafe, though, does state as he sees it Paul's answer to the question: 'what is the purpose of the Law or why has God promulgated the Law?' In light of the Christ-event Paul gives what Grafe correctly terms to be even for a Jew, a rather astonishing answer: the divinely-willed purpose of the Law is, as experience teaches, it serves to incite and increase Sin. (p. 16).

BY CALVIN E. BRUCE

Black Spirituality and Theological Method

*"... Thou hast made us for Thyself and our
hearts are restless till they rest in Thee."*

— ST. AUGUSTINE

As black theology moves beyond its initial stage of self-annunciation, several pressing concerns head the theologians' agenda for constructive theologizing. I suggest a three-fold task that awaits future completion. It is needful for black theologians to thoughtfully and critically:

- 1) describe the norms for liberation inherent in the history of Christian faith and teaching;
- 2) interpret the significance of such norms in light of the crucial spiritual well being of the black church; and
- 3) apply such normative considerations of spiritual liberation to the construction of a theological program aimed at uniting black Christians into a univocal witness of the glory and goodness of God.

In sum, it is expedient for contemporary black theologians to make their theological method amenable to the liberation message the black church has always cherished.¹ This is facilitated by black theologians recognizing the vital spiritual strength of Afro-American identity and the liberative qualities of black spiritual striving.

The theme of this writing is declaratory: black spirituality can be liberative; and black liberation has an essential spiritual component. How successfully the theologian demonstrates the interdependence of each concern is determined by how insightfully his theological method works for his theological system. Any workable theological system addressing black Americans should posit the importance of the Afro-American spiritual temperament as an indispensable starting point. For inherent in Afro-American spirituality are proper ingredients that frame a phenomenological *context* in which the theological *content* of the Christian message most favorably speaks a message of hope to the despairing and oppressed.

I offer a different interpretation to the phrase "theological method" than what one customarily finds in a formal exposition on the aims of Christian theology.² Furthermore, I make a definitional distinction between black spirituality and black religion. The latter may include the

¹We should keep in mind the fact that the religious history of black Americans has not been altogether glorious or conducive of liberative enjoyment of American freedom. Nonetheless, the black church has preached freedom, as a soteriological possibility, even when it was not an immediate political reality.

²Ch. John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), 29-34. My definition calls for more existential passion to be evidenced in the actuation of "theological method" than what Macquarrie's exposition emphasizes.

former. But the former deserves pre-eminence with respect to the "theological method" I see as highly favorable to the message of spiritual liberation. We begin with that distinction.

I. THE PRE-EMINENCE OF SPIRITUALITY

"Black spirituality" and "black religion" are often used interchangeably when discussion focuses on the faith of the black community that has sustained black souls through centuries of hardship and humiliation. Technically, spirituality (black or otherwise) is not synonymous with religion.

Religion can be the institutionalization of rite, ritual and dogma without involving a sense of the abiding presence of the Object of faith. It is possible for persons to be "religious" without experiencing the summons to participate in the magnitude and mystery of transcendent reality. By contrast, it is unlikely that persons enjoying a fruitful life in the spirit can bypass such participation in transpersonal ultimacy.

I refer to spirituality as the growth and enrichment of the human personality, as the soul journeys toward a closer proximity to the Source of all Creative Being. Spirituality involves the deepening of the affective response to the beauty and benevolence of God. Making its mark upon the intellect, spirituality includes the intensification of consciousness of the will and intent of the Almighty. Touching the interiority of moral experiencing, spirituality joins moral conviction with ultimate commitment. Moreover, spirituality embodies the inner-directedness that prompts those living in the spirit to stand in the gateway of Time and peer into the realm of Eternity. The fruition of spiritual ambition, I postulate, is mystic participation in the absolute Ground of Being, however such union is described metaphorically.³ We can push the distinction a bit further.

Religion is customarily metaphysical in philosophic outlook. (Civil religion appears to be an exception.) Spirituality is metaphysical in the context of the direction for living it offers spiritual man, and in the content of "ontic sanctity" that makes a qualitative difference in the person's spiritual make up.⁴ Religion is a belief system reflecting on the nature of ultimate reality. Spirituality is the method and manner by which the ultimately real touches the depth of the wonderer.

Religion proclaims, "God has said . . ." Spirituality invites the awakened soul to hear God's personal summons with the inner ear of faith. For spiritual man seems more concerned with what God is now saying, when divine creativeness joins human creativity.

³ Spirituality, as Christians have reflected on it over the centuries, is suited by a number of vivid metaphors. The union with Divinity seems especially appropriate to discussions of African-Afro-American spiritual temperaments. I am aware that my own language (quasi-ascetical, quasi-Philosophical) does not succeed in capturing the dramatic reality of such experiences.

⁴ N. B. Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, III (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1967), 11. In the vernacular of black preaching, we would say that "sanctification" sets one apart as a "peculiar" person living a life of extreme devotion to God.

Religion teaches man to appreciate God's love. Spirituality challenges man to experience directly the transformative power of that love. Religion edifies. Spirituality sanctifies. Religion enlightens the mind. Spirituality illumines the soul. Religion is concerned, in part, with knowing. Spirituality is essentially replete with being. Religion can be an end in itself. Spirituality is always the conduit to a never-ending "every-when."⁵

By now it should be clear why this essay focuses upon black spirituality. Spirituality is boundless and dynamic. Religion may not be. Though it contains the possibilities for dynamic, creative I-Thou encounters, black religion as conservative and institutionalized tends to be static. In this regard black religion differs little from other non-black religious systems. Roger Bastide's observation is pertinent. Even for Afro-Americans.

Religion . . . is a living experience — yet it is not *alive*, in the sense that it does not evolve, does not change with the passage of time, and remains anchored to the performance of such ritual as has been laid down by the ancestors.⁶

This reading does not depreciate the meaning of religion for blacks of African ancestry. For certainly, black religion has served as a crucial psychic bridge over troubled waters. It has enabled black souls to look beyond the present situation of suffering and heartache to a Source of Love that renews and restores the faculties for living. Along with its therapeutic function, black religion has provided much of the only education blacks have received, in the form of ecclesiastical traditioning. Black religion has been the commodity of the unique social institution non-blacks could not thwart: the black church. Without good religion, the black community would not have survived until today.

Nonetheless, the prime value of black religion (as part of a permanent institution) lies in a different direction. The black church has fostered the sense of an "alive" spirituality we have just described. However one comes out in the debate as to the actual degree of African retentions in the New World, it is certain that the black church in America has thrived on the dynamic qualities of black spirituality. History has evidenced a faith affirmation among black religionists that "both the individual and the community [have] a continuous involvement with the spirit world in the practical affairs of daily life."⁷

To exclude black believers from the possibility of dynamic *spiritual* existence would negate this very phenomenological self-affirmation. The aphorism is that blacks are religious, even when we enjoy the carnal pleasures of life. I prefer to think that we have the capacity to enjoy

⁵For usage of this suggestive term, see Michael Gilson's article, "Myth and the History of African Religion" in T. O. Ranger and I. N. Kimambo (eds.), *The Historical Study of African Religion* (Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1972), 50-70, esp. p. 66.

⁶Roger Bastide, *African Civilizations in the New World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 129.

⁷Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion And Black Radicalism* (Garden City, N. Y.: Anchor/Doubleday, 1973), 19f.

a fruitful spiritual life, though all the fruits of the Spirit are not simultaneously visible at every moment. As long as we have retained a vision of God and have courageously journeyed toward a higher state of spiritual becoming, we have not suffered total confinement or constriction of the human spirit. As long as we have striven to attend the beckonings of the Divine Spirit, we have secured an ontological rootage in ultimate reality. As long as our spiritual life has been satisfactory, other facets of human existence have tended to be in order.

The reality of an engaging spiritual life cannot be overplayed. It is what unites those of African ancestry into a distinctive *ethos*. The African Geoffrey Parrinder observes: "The spirit side of man is all important and rules his life."⁸ That affirmation expresses what characterizes the *Lebenswelt* of Afro-American spiritual man. He lives, breathes, thinks and moves in a spiritual world. His morals are grounded in recognition of the many spiritual powers-that-be. His faith accords him an all-purposive paradigm by which spiritual existence is understood as a vital ingredient in a cosmogonic vital life-force. His entire life is spirit infused and spirit directed.

The implication for a black ascetical theology is crucial. A black theology which honors the significance of black spirituality comprehends this "irreducible posit": at the heart of the Afro-American heritage is spiritual man's consciousness of and availability to Divinity. Afro-American spirituality enables the faithful to enjoy life as a communion with God, and as a co-operative venture in the creative purpose of God's will. This communion is transpersonal and transcendent at its base and mystical or ecstatic at its extremity. Obviously, theological language cannot capture the intensity of such experiences, which effect the depth of the human personality.⁹ But the imaginative employment of "theological method" may aid the task of capturing the reality of faith which has nurtured the spirits of black believers.

When that faith is sustained and transmitted by the program of the black theologian, the spiritual functionality of black theology is upheld. What follows is specific suggestion of how theological method has advanced the cause of Afro-American spirituality — as it culminates in spiritual liberation of black Christians who take up the cross and follow the Master.

II. METHOD FOR SPIRITUAL LIBERATION

For the Christian, liberation is Christ's call to freedom, addressed in the "nowness" of radical existential choice. Liberation insists on the immediacy of human decision. It urges that those who have experienced the depths of bondage rise to the occasion and enjoy the freedom now

⁸ Geoffrey Parrinder, *Western African Psychology* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1951), 48.

⁹ See my forthcoming article, "Black Spirituality, Language And Faith" in *Religious Education*.

made available through the liberative word of God that sets man free. The fruition of spiritual liberation testifies that those delivered from all that oppresses the spirit will walk in a new spiritual life and allow the human spirit to enlarge itself in deeds of love and justice toward all persons, as guided by the mercy of the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual liberation is the commencement of a journey toward a deeper relationship with God and with all of God's creation. Such a state of existence is never complete in itself, but points beyond itself to other realms of spiritual unfolding. Spiritual man is encouraged by the witness of Christian theology to know that the soul can attain closer proximity to God in his majestic glory. It is possible to allow the vision of God in one's consciousness. And it is possible to allow that vision to motivate one toward greater spiritual self-authentication, another name for "liberation."

Not surprisingly, this theological revelation is knowable directly by those who sensitize themselves to the beckoning of transpersonal signals of transcendence. The "rumor of angels" becomes a secret shared by those who make themselves *available* to divine communication. As expected, this availability is thwarted or obfuscated in the lives of those who are guilty of "sleeping on the margin of reality."¹⁰ The prophetic consciousness of the mystic alerts humankind, however, to the urgency of waking up to reality and participating in it directly. The mystic teaches us to appreciate the fact that there need not be a disjunction between the noumenal and phenomenal self. We can be spiritually awakened and drawn to God by the invisible spiritual magnetism that quickens the spirit.

One legacy of black spirituality is that it has taken black worshipers to "the borderland of mysticism."¹¹ The journey is made possible by strong faith in God. Faith has taught us that we can, indeed, steal away in the early morning hours and "have a little talk with Jesus, tell him all about our troubles." Faith has inspired us to see the beauty of God amid the ugliness of our surroundings. Mystic faith has summoned us to God's presence and has strengthened us, in every perplexity, to "hasten to the Throne."

The homiletical tradition of the black church has transmitted this faith. Black preaching has always conveyed a message of *joy* and a call to ecstatic worship. The good news has resounded. The Kingdom is now come into the hearts of those who receive with gladness the promise of the Father: the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Black souls have been comforted by the truth of this timeless revelation: To know God in the fullness of spiritual liberty is to taste of the joy which refreshes but never completely satiates the soul thirsting for God. Furthermore, black

¹⁰ According to Gabriel Marcel, this insensitivity is countered by one's sustaining an *availability* to divinity. See Marcel, *Homo Viator* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1951), 22f.

¹¹ N. B. Henry Hugh Proctor, *Between Black And White* (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1925), 66.

preaching has encouraged us to hunger and thirst for even more of God's righteousness.

This homiletical thrust of black spirituality is at the heart of "black liberation theology" of every age. Today's black theologian cannot afford to ignore the immeasurable spiritual sensitivity undergirding the dynamic of existence-with-others on the journey for spiritual advancement. In point, the black theologian is obliged to educate the religious community regarding the *spiritual* relevance of liberation struggles, and regarding the method for achieving the goals of liberation.

Some notable steps have been taken in this connection. James H. Cone has urged that black theology catch the spirit of black power and translate it into a program aimed at the creation of new black values concomitant with the recreation of self-affirming black identity. The purpose of black theology affirms the spiritual completion of the black self. In Cone's words:

The task of Black Theology is to make Christianity *really* Christian by moving black people with a spirit of black dignity and self-determination so they can become what the Creator intended.¹²

These words, suggestive as they are, lead us to ask: What did the Creator intend (black) persons to be? Christian ascetical theology offers a clue.

If we understand God's will as expressed through his creative agency, we can conclude that God's intent for man falls within the scheme of creation on the whole. Such creation is never completely finished, but always predisposed to the activity of the Spirit working in the world. Natural theology "reveals" that the creature has a vitally important mission in creation. It teaches this fact about human nature: "... each human spirit is an unfinished product, on which the Creative Spirit is always at work."¹³ The centrality of this revelation is that the meaning of human existence is interlaced with the ultimate meaning of all the created order. Man was created and is recreated to witness to the glory of God.

However man can subvert God's purpose and violate his own creative destiny. Accordingly, when man is bound by the sins of pride, self-deception and servitude to a life-force countervailing this first principle of creation, he is in spiritual bondage. He then needs a method for liberation: freedom *from* sin and freedom *to* participate in divine creativeness.¹⁴

Black liberation theology, honoring this principle, is not so radically new after all. It affirms two insights black folk have known all along: we are a spiritual community and we look to Jesus Christ for spiritual liberation. These are the essential credos of theological perspicuity revealed naturally when our ancestors received the kerygmatic message

¹² James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), 130.

¹³ Evelyn Underhill, *The Spiritual Life* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1937?), 50.

¹⁴ What is needed as part of black theological praxis is a "post-liberation" ethic suggestive of the moral possibilities for just and merciful deeds that are enlarged when oppression is overcome.

of liberation. The method for spiritual deliverance has been simple: hear God's voice, renounce sin, receive his Holy Spirit, and join creation in testifying to the benevolence of the Creator, by living a praiseworthy life.

God's "voice" is easy to discern, but difficult to describe. It may be heard by the bedside or down by the riverside. In any case, it calls for a decision and points the pathway to freedom. The power of its summons touches the interiority of human personality and effects a radical conversion of the spiritual self. Our ancestors who obeyed could testify to having been "struck dead" by God — only to awaken to a new life in the spirit. The problem of this symbolic language notwithstanding, we ought to be able to offer the same testimony in our age.

Blacks have always had a "lived theology" that served to liberate the spirit from all forms of bondage. Such a theology reflected the "deep hunger" black souls have felt for God. It has enabled black devotees to cultivate the "disciplines of the spirit" as part of the process of providing for "centering moments" and "creative encounters" that authenticate black existence. Such a theological penchant has intrigued the spiritually adventurous to enter a realm of being in which mystic enlightenment enables one to become a "disciple of sensitivity," one who strives for greater spiritual excellence.¹⁵

Similarly, black worshipers have known intuitively how we can reach God and sup with him and bask in the radiance of his majesty. Many of us have been practical mystics at heart and have been inspired to follow the spiritual pathway leading from purgative to illuminative to unitive stages of spiritual growth in godliness. We have realized that "experience is the only source of knowledge"¹⁶ and that a life graced with God's favor provides the best occasion for rewarding spiritual experiences.

Our forefathers and mothers contended for the faith once delivered to the saints. They exercised their faith and achieved "higher heights" and "deeper depths" in God's love. They entertained a vision of God that transformed broken lives into vessels of God's glory. They inspired us to take hold of a way of living, a method, for sustaining the blessings of a life graced by God's mercy. When we obeyed, we were blessed.

I wonder, at this point, what the professional black theologians of the last quarter of this century can teach the black religious community that it has not already known. Perhaps not a great deal of anything. My conviction is that the challenge to black theologians is to preserve the tradition of black spirituality, in demonstrating its instructiveness for the liberation movement. This can be accomplished, in part, when black theologians consider the full implications of "theological method" that honors the strong points of our spiritual heritage.

¹⁵ Alluding to Howard Thurman's writings only partially express his insights on the depth and richness of the spiritual life, which is "normative" to many expressions of black Christianity.

¹⁶ So postulated Henri Bergson, philosophically, in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1930), 236.

We now examine the connotation of that term, in order to comprehend what theological emphasis is most suited to the strivings of black *homo spiritualis*.

III. SPIRITUALITY, *THEOS*, *METHODOS*

The customary etymological definition of "theology" tends to be "the study of, or reasoned words about, God." In some circles, the common shorthand of this is "God-talk." Presumably the emphasis is on "logos" not "theos," as though the words we speak about God capture the essence of his being. As the consensus sometimes is: when enough words, and a variety of words, are spoken about God — some genuine gems of divine self-disclosure will shine through the discourse.

However, there is another way to define the scope of theology. It focuses upon "theos, whose true meaning is supreme desire or prayer — the Inward Love."¹⁷ Somewhat a tautology, theology thus denotes a prayerful dispositioning toward the source of prayer or inward spiritual desire: God alone. This definition should be seen as a proper denotation, not merely a convenient connotation to suit a treatise on asceticism. As such, it aids our understanding of theology that speaks to the black spiritual community.

"Method" generally connotes that which is purposeful, instructive, and pointing beyond itself. The customary denotation is that of a plan or rationale for undertaking a task in a certain way. Method can also be understood as *methodos*, a pathway toward something, in an Aristotelian sense. By this reading, *methodos* connotes not vision of the destination, but also enjoyment of the journey. The method is what one attaches oneself to — deliberately, virtuously, passionately.

To extrapolate a bit, method denotes an effective learning toward the "object" of free choice. In choosing the *methodos* as part of spiritual living, one chooses all that it may entail. One is never certain where the *methodos* will lead. Peril is overcome by promise, nonetheless; for the destination is never completely out of sight. One can be sure that if the *methodos* is worthwhile, the end it points to will be achievable.

At this point, I raise a question which all black theologians are urged to answer for themselves: If black liberation theology, indeed, does engage in a specific, worthwhile method, where does the *methodos* lead us? After we have existed the valley of the shadow of oppression, what liberative ground do we stand on? Once the liberation struggle succeeds in taking us to a promised land of humanistic self-realization, where will we really *be*, with respect to the larger concerns of human and trans-human destiny? Once we have overcome the racist's hate, where will we find ourselves in the domain of God's restoring love?

It would be unfortunate for black theology to serve only as another model for playing the theological word-game. Talking or thinking about

¹⁷ Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1961), 103.

God is just not sufficient for a good number of black persons who are serious about Christian spiritual vocation. Those who have a deep spiritual hunger are not satisfied with morsels of intellectual rumination. We need a wholesome diet of rigorous spiritual discipline, and nothing less will suffice.

The history of Christian spirituality imposes an internal critique upon black theology addressed to the black church. Those involved in the black theological enterprise should be advised that, "Thought about God must in the end correspond with experience of God..."¹⁸ Any theological undertaking which does not prompt those subscribing to its insights to seek an actual experiential relationship with God may have accomplished not a great deal. In fact, if it has not made this accomplishment, what has it achieved? Stated otherwise: If those sharing the insights of black theology do not perceive in it a clearer, spiritual vision of God's purpose in their individual lives, how has black theology profited them as a *methodos* for making the Christian journey toward the City of God?

The issue is not solely that of placing one's hopes on living a better life in the hereafter, as the Conean critique sometimes insists.¹⁹ Heaven may be the ultimate goal, but there are other worthwhile goals achievable in this life, goals that obtain in the choice to live a spiritual existence "in but not of" the world, with all its immoral vicissitudes. The spiritual faith of black folks has its escapist features, without doubt. But the totality of black spiritual vocation is not confined to heaven-bound escapism. The crucial issue facing contemporary black theologians is to elucidate the possibilities for self-transcendence, as preserved in the history of black spirituality.

Historically, the psychic strengths of black spirituality have been liberative. Black spirituality has accorded believers a *methodos* for enjoying an elevated spiritual life that places one above the stress and strain of constant battle against the "principalities and powers" threatening one's existence at every point. Black spirituality has fostered a worshipful life style conducive of black persons' clinging to absolute hope and absolute faith. Charles H. Long broaches this point convincingly:

Though the worship and religious life of blacks have often been referred to as forms of escapism, one must always remember that there has always been an integral relationship between the 'hardness' of life and the ecstasy of religious worship.²⁰

Had not our ancestors availed themselves of this possibility for ecstatic self-transcendence, it is doubtful that the religious community could have preserved the convictions of promise proclaimed in the ecclesiasti-

¹⁸ Kenneth E. Kirk, *The Vision of God* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1931), 10.

¹⁹ Cf. James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues* (New York: Seabury Press, 1972), chp. 3: "The Meaning of Heaven in the Black Spirituals." If the choice is between liberation now or heaven later, there is no doubt where the radical liberationist would cast his lot.

²⁰ Charles H. Long, "Perspectives For A Study of Afro-American Religion in the United States," *History of Religions*, Vol. 11 (1971-72), 60.

cal ministries. That is to say, if we had not been taught to live a worshipful life and to "walk and talk with Jesus," the struggle to survive would have been overpowering. The fact is: black Christians have been able to live a theology that awakened the human spirit to the occasion to live engagingly in the profane world and, in special moments, to step into another sacred realm of spiritual being.

Afro-American spirituality has also conveyed the *methodos* by which black religious aspirants could know God in his fulness of beauty and love. This emphasis is crucial for black liberation theology. It suggests that "where we are headed" as God's children is a place we can only arrive at through faith and disciplined spiritual maturation. Spirituality leads us outward from self-despair and upward from the place we stood when the word of deliverance was received. Both points should be stressed further.

Spirituality takes us "outside" the barriers of circumstantial self-definition. It is a personal stride toward freedom — freedom to address and to adore God, and to allow God to bestow upon us a "new name." We receive our name when we pass beyond existential contingency to ecstatic new-awareness. We become a New Being motivated by a radically altered intentionality and drawn more closely to Being-Itself.

Drawing upon a familiar Biblical motif, black spirituality has always been an Abrahamic venture of faith. It involves being called out from a hostile environment to tread a spiritual course God will show through the miracle of faith. The uncertainty that attends the venture (the peril of *methodos*) is matched by the reassurance of divine promise. The consolation is that we are traveling "somewhere," as opposed to idly marking time "nowhere."

Secondly, spirituality is a journey with others to a higher state of some-where-ness in the domain of God's eternal complacency and benevolence. Spirituality contains within its moral qualifiers the insistence that life in the spirit is co-existence, and that participation in transpersonal Being is a joint obligation of spiritual selves-in-becoming. The stride toward freedom is a stride all can share. Inevitably, some will lead. Others will follow.

Exceptional black leaders of this sort have been the black clergy. As Lawrence Jones reminds us, the nineteenth-century black clergymen sought a city.²¹ It was not so much a destination located on a map, as a city "whose builder and maker is God." Black ecclesiastics who broke away from white Christian institutionalism were radical in spirit as well as in political temper. In fact, the two sentiments may be expressions of the same passion: To be spiritually alive is to be awakened to the opportunities for God's Holy Spirit to work through one's life toward the accomplishment of a greater good toward all.

²¹ See Lawrence A. Jones, "They Sought a City: The Black Church and Churchmen in the Nineteenth Century," in E. Eric Lincoln (ed.), *The Black Experience in Religion* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor/Doubleday, 1974), 7-23.

The black churchmen were prophets, priests, and politicians. Collectively they were a New Moses, leading God's children out of a land of institutional bondage. The pathway they traveled (*methodos*) was directed by an affinity for *theos* — sincere prayer, Inward Love. This prayerful dispositioning toward God's grace and mercy was essential. Both the spiritual leaders and followers enjoyed every step of the journey, because Jesus was present in their lives as guide, comforter and sustainer.

This emphasis of spiritual becoming-with-others is indispensable for black liberation theology. It honors the crux of theological insight abstracted from the Biblical narratives and preserved in the gospels, spirituals and the homilectical tradition. As we are called to live a saintly, holy life wherever we are geographically — we can be encouraged by the discernment that we are advancing toward the Heavenly City that "eyes have not seen." The black church has been nurtured on that theological conviction. Should some man or angel preach some other liberation gospel, let him be accursed.

Finally we ask: What can professional black religionists do to propagate such a dynamic faith for spiritual liberation?

IV. A CHALLENGE FOR PROFESSIONAL RELIGIONISTS

The black church has always had a "theological method" for cultivating a sensitivity toward spiritual callings. The method has taught us that when we allow God's grace to infuse all of our spiritual personality, we have the testimony of black saints of all ages: "I am on the journey. Don't you care to join me?" The method has enabled us to see the beauty of holiness and the power of sanctification that make the journey worth pursuing.

In our day, black religionists need not look for some new theological method for preaching the coming of the Liberative Kingdom. It has come and is coming in the lives of those who have been radically awakened to reality and have made themselves available to God's creativeness. What black religionists can "do" is to lead the black church to an elevated plane of spiritual excellence. The three-fold task can be met in this manner.

1. Black religionists are called upon to become politicians of a wholesome spiritual program of liberation. For the theologians, this involves engaging in the descriptive, interpretive tasks that illuminate the richness of the Christian faith, when such faith accords practical expression to our collective spiritual strivings. The faith of black spirituality, I would argue, is traceable through Africanisms and all facets of spiritual ambition aimed at more joyful living on this side of "chilly Jordan." How the faith is articulated theologically challenges black theologians to shape their words carefully and prayerfully, so that the power witnessed to by the Christian Tradition will be convincing and comforting.

2. Black religionists can join in the expression of black spiritual

advancement by allowing their own spirits to be transformed by the liberative message of hope-in-God. By so doing, they will not merely be speaking and respeaking *words about God*. They will be active participants in the salvation history of the One who liberates, sanctifies, and satisfies the distraught human soul.

Technically, the "theological method" for this accomplishment is already explicated in the manuals on ascetical theology. It includes the contemplative, prayerful positioning toward the goodness and glory of God. Such inclination of will and intellect is the *methodos* for framing the vision of God toward which the soul is drawn. Black religionists are urged to "join the method," if they are not already set out on the quest for transcendental enlightenment. We can be a bit more specific.

3. Black religionists need not be "hardened ascetics" — but they can profit from becoming "practical mystics." Practical mysticism need not be thought of as a posture of quietism, or a life style of self-inflicted mortification. Though mysticism has its draw backs, it certainly has many endearing strengths. Elucidating all such strong points would require an independent analysis apart from the circumscribed concerns of this writing. Nonetheless, one feature of the mystic temperament can be underscored.

Enjoying the vision of God is not an end in itself. It is a means toward a fuller spiritual life which produces effects in other spheres of human interchange. A central strength of mystic vocation involves the moral urging to share with others a politic of spiritual co-existence. Evelyn Underhill's words (in another connection) suggest what is at stake:

The riches and beauty of the spiritual landscape are not disclosed to us in order that we may sit in the sun parlour, be grateful for the excellent hospitality, and contemplate the glorious view.

. . . the Spiritual life has everything to do with politics. It means that certain convictions about God and the world become the *moral* and *spiritual imperatives* of our life.²²

When the mystic ascends to God's Presence, he goes not as an individual, but as "the ambassador of the race." He brings back a spiritual message that corroborates with what the theological tomes attest: God surpasses all our conceptions and imaginings. The mystic sees a Reality which he urges others to see. He does not need a map to explore the spirit world. His concern is to take others to the threshold of consciousness, where they themselves may hear the summons and explore the Land of the Divine. The mystic has already been there, and may go again. He is most concerned that we see and experience what has touched his life.

A final word. William James was convinced of the value of saintliness, despite its obvious risks of excessiveness. He urged his readers, "Let us be saints if we can." To fellow black religionists, I challenge, "Let us be spiritual ambassadors to the race — if we dare." In so doing we can help restless hearts find a place of peace and trust in God's mercy.

²² Underhill, *The Spiritual Life*, 84, 91. Emphasis added.

of literature by allowing their own words to be transformed by the English language of interpretation. In so doing, they will not merely be making and remaking words of their own. They will be giving readers, particularly in the selective history of the English language, something, and not only the language itself.

Ultimately, the "historical method" for the interpretation of literature is largely in the hands of the reader. It includes the reader's own, private, and perhaps the greatest, and perhaps the most subtle, knowledge of the world and of the language. The reader's own knowledge of the world and of the language is the only knowledge that can be used to interpret the text. The reader's own knowledge of the world and of the language is the only knowledge that can be used to interpret the text.

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