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wholly new kinds of human relationships: it needs, therefore, a social context in which to do it.

I understand this reality, not so much as a matter of spiritual pride, or the basis for a false assurance, but as an amazing gift of God and a demand that what is a potential reality by God's grace become a fact through our collaboration.

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Black Theology

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I BLACK THEOLOGY: ITS ORIGIN

While it may be admitted that black theology was made prominent by writers of the 1960s and 1970s, the roots of black theology go further back in history. Marcus Garvey (1887–1940), a strong Jamaican advocate of black religion is regarded by many as the apostle of black theology in the United States of America. Ferm describes him as a forerunner Of the Black Muslim and other black protest movements in America, who advocated a black God and a black Jesus.¹ The brilliant Civil Rights leader, Martin Luther King, Jr., concedes that Garvey was indeed the apostle of black religion. Speaking at Garvey's memorial shrine in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1965, King is quoted by Drake as saying:

'Marcus Garvey was the first man of colour in the history of the United States to lead and develop a mass movement ... He was the first man on a mass scale and level to give millions of Negroes a sense of dignity and destiny, and make the Negro feel he is somebody.'²

Marcus Garvey was a religious teacher. Garvey's concept of God may not have been as radical as his more recent counterparts, yet one cannot fail to see an intimation of black theology in his teachings. Garvey is quoted by Burkett as saying:

'Whilst our God has no colour, yet it is human to see everything through one's own spectacles, and since the white people have seen their God through white spectacles, we have only started out (late though it be) to see our God through our own spectacles ... We Negroes believe in the God of Ethiopia, the everlasting God—God the Father, God the Son

¹ Dean W. Ferm, *Contemporary American Theologies* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), p. 41.

² Clair Drake, Foreword to *Garveyism As a Religious Movement* by Randall Burkett (Metuchen, N.J. & London: Scarecrow Press, 1978), p. 15.

and God the Holy Ghost, the one God of all ages. That is the God in whom we believe, but we shall worship Him through the spectacles of Ethiopia.’³

Although Garvey was perhaps the foremost apostle of black theology, this does not mean that he was the first black leader to champion the cause of liberation for the Black race. Nat Turner (1800–1831) not p. 138 only preached liberation but actually led a revolt that shook the foundation of slavery.

Unlike their counterparts in the Caribbean who were integrated into the society relatively soon after the abolition of slavery, the American blacks were faced with the monster of racial segregation. Segregation, the twin-evil-companion of slavery, held iron grip on the Negroes of America for over three centuries. They were barred from certain schools and colleges, restaurants, hotels and public sanitary conveniences. They were confined to certain sections (usually the rear) of public transport and places of worship.

It is an embarrassing fact of history that the Christian Church, generally referred to as the conscience of the nation, not only condoned but, for the most part, openly supported segregation. Columbus Sally observes that:

‘The White Southern Churches continued black subservience in the name of God. The (white) Protestant Churches ... were among the first groups to segregate after the Civil War and to accept racism as the basis of race relations.’⁴

Up to the late nineteenth century, no denomination openly resisted segregation. While the churches used God to justify segregation ‘they possessed no elaborate theology on the subject.’⁵ It was generally accepted, however, that ‘the Negro was a descendant of Ham, that he did have a soul, and that the Bible teaches brotherhood, but these did not add up to racial mixing.’⁶ One Southern Presbyterian Minister allegedly contended that ‘the colour line is distinctly drawn by God Himself ... and it would be a sin and crime to undertake to obliterate it.’⁷

Since the Christian Church was seen as having aided and abetted racial discrimination, some blacks have not only become suspicious of, but have also become openly hostile to the Church. ‘Historically, most black denominations were created in reaction to the blatant racism practised against blacks in white churches and so the fear now manifested in these denominations is understandable.’⁸

The hostility of blacks against the Church reached crisis proportion on May 4, 1969, when James Foreman interrupted the Sunday morning worship at New York’s Inter-racial Riverside Church, and p. 139 presented Black manifesto demands for that congregations’ share of \$500,000,000 from the United States white religious community.⁹

The continued effort on the part of some writers to promulgate white superiority and black inferiority has only served to widen the existing gap between the two races and to cause many blacks to reject Christianity.

³ Randall K. Burkett, *Garveyism As a Religious Movement*, p. 47.

⁴ W. E. Pannell, *My Friend the Enemy* (Texas: Word Books, 1968), p. 29.

⁵ David Reimers, *White Protestant and The Negro* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 29.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Robert S. Lecky & H. Elliot Wright (eds.), *Black Manifesto* (New York: Sheed & Ward Inc., 1969), p. 12.

Howard Jones refers to a Christian magazine in which were three pictures of skulls, one of a white man, one of a black man and another of an ape. The magazine attempted to show that the skull of the black man and the ape were similar and not like that of the white man. Jones correctly affirms that 'as long as white Christians write articles like this to degrade black people, more and more blacks will reject Christianity.'¹⁰

Embittered by the injustices suffered and disillusioned by the kind of Christianity he saw, Malcolm X, son of a Baptist preacher became a Black Muslim. The bombing of a black church in Birmingham, Alabama, a few years ago, where five Sunday school children lost their lives, convinced Angela Davis that there was no hope for blacks in American democracy, hence she turned to communism. Other blacks who encountered racism lost all hope and became anti-religious.

Howard Jones has remarked that:

'A small but significant number of Black Churches across America have completely abandoned the cardinal doctrines and practices of the Christian Religion. Embracing a black militant theology based upon certain portions of the Bible, and the philosophy of black writers, religious and non-religious, they seek their own identity. These churches seek to liberate the minds of the people from the brain-washing influence of what they term "Slavery Christianity". Consequently many blacks heed their message.'¹¹

The emergence of the black church was inevitable if the black race in America were to maintain their dignity as individuals and enjoy true liberty in conscientious worship. The emergence of a black theology was also inevitable if they were to consolidate their position in a white community and free themselves from the memory of their past.

II BLACK THEOLOGY: ITS TEACHINGS

A clear definition of black theology was issued in a statement by the National Committee of Black Churchmen (NCBC) in June 1969, which states in part that: **P. 140**

'Black Theology is a theology of black liberation. It seeks to plumb the black conditions in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ so that the black community can see that the gospel is commensurate with the achievement of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both white and black people.'¹²

The expression 'black theology is a theology of blackness' is consistent with the view of James Cone who says, 'there is no truth for and about people that does not emerge out of the context of their experience. Truth in this sense is black truth ...'¹³

God and Christ

Views concerning God vary considerably among black theologians. Cone's concept of God is one which allows God to appear as one who exists primarily as a vindicator of the poor and oppressed. He says:

¹⁰ Howard Jones, *White Questions to a Black Christian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), pp. 14, 15.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹² For the full statement see Wilmore Cone, *Black Theology* (New York: Orbiss Books, 1979), pp. 100–102.

¹³ James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), p. 17.

'God elected to be the God and Saviour to people oppressed and powerless ... His vindication is for the poor because they are defenceless before the wicked and powerful "My righteousness will vindicate your suffering".'¹⁴

Marcus Garvey perceives God as an impersonal being. Burkett quotes him as saying, 'there is a God and we believe in Him. He is not a person nor a physical being. He is a spirit and He is a universal intelligence.'¹⁵

A number of exponents of black theology explicitly affirm that God is black. James Cone, affirms

'The negative reaction of white theologians to the Black Christ is due almost exclusively to their witness, a cultural fact that makes it almost impossible for them to relate to anything black.'¹⁶

Commenting on the vicarious death of Jesus Christ, Clarence Hilliard says, 'Christ became blacker than black since He was made sin for us. And he died on the cross, a death reserved for the niggers of his day.'¹⁷

Marcus Garvey contends that Jesus was conceived historically as a Black man. He staged a ceremony for the canonization of Jesus Christ p. 141 as a Black Messiah, an act that sent 'shock waves' through American society. Commenting on this momentous event Burkett writes:

One of the most spectacular ceremonies which took place under Universal Negro Improvement Association auspices, and the event which probably caused more comment throughout the United States in both the white and black press than any other in Liberty Hall, was the divine service for the canonization of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Black Man of Sorrows and also the canonization of the Blessed Virgin Mary as a black woman.'¹⁸

By this single act, Garvey probably undercut whatever conservative views he had hitherto expressed relating to God's colour.

Human Suffering

It seems fair to say that Black Theology is rooted in the suffering of black humanity. Suffering in its various forms of poverty and social injustice is generally attributed to white racism, which, according to black advocates, enslaved and oppressed black people.

The constant reference to slavery and racist oppression is a noticeable trend in black theology. Although they have been legally freed from slavery, the blacks are constantly reminded of the emotional and psychological baggage carried over from slavery from which personal freedom is either unattainable or undesirable.

Black theology, therefore, is offered as a kind of panacea for the oppressed and suffering. It is against this background that black theology must be viewed as essentially a theology of liberation, liberation of the black race from oppression and social injustice.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 44–46.

¹⁵ Randell Burkett, *Garveyism As a Religious Movement* (London: Scarecrow Press, 1978), p. 15.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

¹⁷ Clarence Hilliard, 'Down with the Hunky Christ, Up With the Funky Christ', *Christianity Today*, V. 20.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 53. The event is described in detail in Jacques Garvey, *Garvey and Garveyism*, pp. 139–142. In Edmond Cronon, *Black Moses*, pp. 179ff.

Sin and Man

Sin has been interpreted by some as a social dysfunction, economic and political oppression. The evil of slavery, segregation and the dehumanizing of the poor are highlighted as the major maladies of humankind. Black theology insists on the dignity of the black man and equal rights for him to exert his manhood. Garvey contends that by virtue of his being created in the image of God, man should not 'descend to the level of a peon, serf or a slave, but that he should always be a man in the fullest possession of his senses, and with the truest knowledge of himself.'¹⁹ It was this conviction of the intrinsic self-worth of man that motivated Martin Luther King, Junior, to lead the Civil Rights Movement. Elijah Muhammad, recognized among **p. 142** Black Muslims as a prophet, contends that the first man was black. Unpopular though the concept may be, it is this belief that the original man was black that leads to the conclusion by some that God is black since he created man in His own image.

Salvation and Eschatology

Fundamental among the emphases in black theology is liberation—a word which is used synonymously with salvation. Salvation has come to mean deliverance from social and economic oppression. Hence there is an over-riding emphasis on human work and human effort, and a down-playing of divine help.

Among some black preachers Christianity and earthly freedom are presented as inseparable for the black man. White missionaries are criticized for what is termed 'extolling the virtues of the next world'. Cone rejects what he terms as the 'white lie' that the Christian is primarily concerned with life in the other world.

'If eschatology means that one believes that God is totally uninvolved in the suffering of man because he is preparing them for another world then black theology is not eschatological. Black theology has hope for this life. The appeal to the next life is a lack of hope ... Heavenly hope becomes a Platonic grasp for another reality because one cannot live meaningfully amid the suffering of this world.'²⁰

Violence and Racism

While advocates of black theology are united in the concept of liberation for the black man and oppressed, they are divided on the question of the means or method of achieving liberation. Influenced by Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. resorted to non-violence as a means of liberation. He insisted that 'returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars ... Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.'²¹

Not everyone upheld King's doctrine of non-violence. Some of his successors seem to have countenanced confrontation rather than peaceful demonstration. According to James Cone, liberation is 'emancipation of black people from white oppression by *whatever means* black people deem necessary.'²²

The militant and anti-white expressions so characteristic of the radical elements of black theology have attracted much criticism from **p. 143** both white and black

¹⁹ R. K. Burkett, p. 56.

²⁰ James Cone, *Black Theology & Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), p. 123.

²¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963), p. 57.

²² James Cone, *Black Theology & Black Power*, p. 6.

theologians. Major Jones criticizes James Cone and Albert Cleage for what he terms 'too much dependence on the Black Power Movement which has encouraged a sense of hatred which stifles the human spirit.'²³

Among the more moderate exponents of black theology, violence and racism are rejected as the solution of the problem between blacks and whites. Deotis Roberts includes reconciliation between blacks and whites as an indispensable dimension of Christian liberation. He declares that we should seek 'a constructive, deeply motivated long-range, massive orientation in black-white relation.'²⁴

The man who stands out in his moderate teaching on non-violence and racial harmony not only in words but by his own lifestyle is unquestionably Martin Luther King Jr. Cleve Grant, a Jamaican minister of the Church of God, writes: 'He never carried a gun, not even a knife to defend himself. He had only his faith in God to rely on ...'²⁵

Under the most extenuating circumstances King demonstrated his commitment and belief in non-violence and thereby became immortalised as a hero of peace. Quoting Benjamin Maye, President of Morehouse College, Grant adds:

'King knew suffering; his house was bombed; he lived day by day for thirteen years under constant threats of death, maliciously accused of being a Communist; stabbed by a member of his own race, slugged in a hotel lobby; JAILED OVER TWENTY TIMES: often betrayed by friends; yet he displayed no rancour in his soul, no bitterness of heart, no revenge, no resentment, BUT went up and down the length of the world preaching nonviolence and the redemptive power of love.'²⁶

The Future Hope of Blacks

The very fabric into which black theology is interwoven is the dignity and hope of the Negroes. The question that needs to be faced however, and which black theology has not clearly addressed is: what constitutes the final victory of the Negro? To the early advocates of black theology the answer was emancipation from slavery. To the advocates from the turn of the century up to the late 1960s victory for the Negro was seen as liberation from racial segregation and injustice. Today the emphasis seems to be on liberation from the plight of poverty. A clear theology has not been articulated as to the means of achieving this goal nor is there reference to the machinery for the maintaining of said goals assuming that they are attained.

The feeling has been expressed by many blacks that as long as they remain in the white man's land they will not be truly free. As a result [p. 144](#) many have yearned to go back to Africa, their ancestral home, which to them epitomizes ultimate freedom.

Assuming that Africa was able to accommodate all the blacks who desire to go there, the question remains, would they be welcomed by Africans? The evidence from reports of those who have gone there and returned seems to point to the negative. As a basis for man's present peace and future hope, Christian theology teaches that a complete transformation of man's life is a fundamental prerequisite. Black theology has not emphasized the need for such a transformation. The emphasis seems to be on changing the system or the society or getting out of it.

²³ Major Jones, *Christian Ethics for Black Theology: The Politics of Liberation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), p. 194.

²⁴ Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), p. 20.

²⁵ Cleve Grant, 'We Won Many Battles Without A Gun', *The Star*, Jan. 16, 1979.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

III BLACK THEOLOGY ASSESSED

The Dignity of Man

Black theology places much emphasis on the dignity of man especially the black man whose rights were infringed by slavery and racism. The dignity of man is highlighted in scripture in the creation account. Because of the sacredness of human life, human sacrifice was forbidden and laws for the protection of human life were instituted. The same reason is used for the New Testament appeal to dedicate one's life to God and abstain from immorality ([Rom. 12:1, 2](#); [1 Cor. 6:19](#)) and subsequent punishment for desecrating the body, the human temple ([1 Cor. 6:19](#); [Rev. 21:8](#)).

The unity of the human race gives support to the dignity of every human being. The inferiority or superiority of any race or colour is unfounded in scripture. The apostle Paul speaks in favour of the unity and dignity of the human race when he says that from one man He (God) has made every nation of man that they should inhabit the earth ([Acts 17:26](#) NIV). Herein lies the ground for the repudiation of superiority of one race over another.

It should not be left to the politicians alone to speak out against social injustice; the Church's voice should be heard loud and clear in its condemnation of anything or anyone who violates human rights.

Rather than becoming cynical, the black man should strive to p. 145 develop his personality and potentials and get on with this business of living with a view of making this world a better place. Derek Webster has well stated that:

‘The potentials in man are usually for what is healthy and life giving, for what flees and looks to new questions. It can however be marred and twisted to serve ignoble ends. Man creates the most infamous death camps but it is also man who meets his end in them with the prayer of forgiveness on his lips for his torturers.’²⁷

The paradox of man expressed above only serves to highlight the biblical view of man and hence his need for transformation.

Concern for the Poor

The emphasis of black theology in helping the poor and oppressed is founded in both the Old and New Testaments. Amos spoke out with indignation against the inhumanity of those who sold the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes ([Amos 8:6](#)). Isaiah criticized the wealthy for oppressing the poor and weak ([Isa. 10:1-2](#)). God showed his concern for the poor when he initiated the jubilee principle to counteract the greedy monopoly of land ([Lev. 2:5](#)) and institute the seventh year rest of land for the benefit of the poor ([Ex. 23:10, 11](#)). The poor were not to be treated unjustly ([Ex. 23:3, 6](#)).

God—Liberator of Oppressed

Christians in general agree that God indeed is Liberator. The freedom He provides is for all men. Among radical advocates of black theology, God is liberator of the black race and therefore God is black. The Bible presents all as being in bondage to sin. Man has been taken captive by the Devil, the universal taskmaster. God sent His Son Jesus Christ into the world in the fullness of time to redeem or free man from his bondage. By His death on the

²⁷ Derek Webster, ‘Creativity Within Religious Education’, A Note Toward the Significance for Religious Education of Dialogue Between Christian Theology & Humanistic Psychology. *British Journal of Religious Education*, V. 2, No. 4 (Summer 1980), p. 133.

cross, Jesus became a ransom for all ([Matt. 20:28](#)). Moved with love and compassion, God came to redeem us.

Unfortunately the views of radicals, be they political or theological, generally get more publicity than those of moderates. Because of this, some positive points in black theology could be totally eclipsed by focusing on the radical negative elements. Some critics have questioned whether or not it is authentic to speak of a black theology. [p. 146](#)

How shall we Caribbean evangelical educators respond to black theology? A response is necessary. As Caribbean evangelicals we should respond to black theology because notwithstanding some positive things, it cuts across the grain of evangelical teaching on some fundamental issues.

While it may be true that black theology is not a present threat to the evangelical faith in the region, this is no reason why it should be swept under the carpet. With our close proximity to and frequency of communication with North America and inter-locked as we are with their education system, black theology might infiltrate our region and offer a strong challenge. Are we prepared for this challenge?

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The Gospel and Chinese Society

Samuel Ling

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Evangelical interest in evangelizing the Chinese people has increased as China begins to open her doors to the West. Among the Chinese of the diaspora, the church is maturing and a new generation of theologically conscious leaders is emerging. In such a context, theological reflection on the Christian message for the Chinese people is something which is both timely and desirable. The increase in training programmes designed for cross-cultural as well as national workers among the Chinese, in North American theological schools, will encourage this trend.

I CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

Theology involves an interface between the text and the context, the infallible Scripture and the cultural situation. In the case of the Chinese context, a multi-disciplinary approach is needed. Insights need to be integrated from biblical, theological and historical studies, as well as from studies in Chinese literature and art forms, the social and behavioural sciences and the history of the Chinese church. What makes the task more complex is that the Chinese cultural context is itself changing: what does it mean, after all, to say that one is 'Chinese' today? What is the common denominator between a foreign exchange student from the People's Republic of China studying in North America, a scientist from Taiwan teaching in a North American university, a restaurant worker from Hong Kong and his wife working in a garment factory in Chinatown, a fourth-generation American-born