

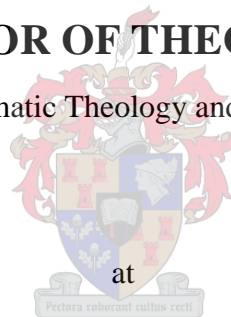
**THE POOR AND THE PUBLIC: AN EXPLORATION OF SYNERGIES  
BETWEEN BLACK THEOLOGY AND PUBLIC THEOLOGIES**

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Dissertation Presented in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

**DOCTOR OF THEOLOGY**

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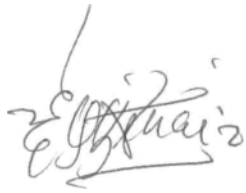
Promotor: Prof. Nico Koopman

December 2010

## Declaration

By submitting this dissertation electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the authorship owner thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

**Signed:**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. J. M. van der...' with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Date:**

December 2010

## ABSTRACT

The title of this study is – *The Poor and the Public: An Exploration of Synergies between Black Theology and Public Theologies*.

In Chapter One, which is the introduction, the research question is posed namely, “What is the meaning and potential of Black Theology and Public Theologies for the calling of the church to address poverty in the world?” The chapter also outlines the structure of the study.

In Chapter Two (*Poverty – Some Conceptual Clarifications*), an investigation of poverty was made. The investigation covered the meaning of poverty, the way poverty is determined, causes and effects of poverty, globalization and poverty, measures undertaken to eradicate poverty, and poverty and blackness. It is shown that poverty entails injustice, humiliation, helplessness, powerlessness, and insecurity. It is patently demonstrated that poverty is a reality to a greater majority of humanity, particularly, those who live in Africa. The majority of the poor are black people and many of them are wedged in a poverty trap. Globalization also affects the poor in both positive and negative ways.

In the third chapter (*A Cursory Overview of Biblical Perspectives on Poverty*), it is argued that from the perspective of the Christian Scripture, poverty is an outrage and a form of oppression. Human selfishness is a hindrance to the eradication of poverty. However, God affirms and protects the poor. Therefore, the church must respond in such a manner as to make poverty history.

Chapter Four (*The Place and Priority of the Poor in Black Theological Discourses*) investigates the role (the place and priority) of the poor in Black Theology. The sections examine the definition of Black Theology; the development of Black Theology in both the USA and South Africa; the methods of Black Theology, which include discussions on the sources of and approaches to Black Theology; the strengths and weaknesses of Black Theology, and contemporary trends in Black Theology. An analysis of Black Theology to establish the role that the poor play in its discourses is offered. It is shown that Black Theology gives priority to the

poor. It recognizes that the triune God works with the poor, as the poor learn to love themselves enough to practice their total freedom and affirm their full humanity on earth just as heaven does. Black Theology, it is further argued, employs a robust approach of dealing with poverty through prophetic speaking in various modes.

In the fifth chapter (*The Place and Priority of the Poor in Public Theological Discourses*), an investigation is made into the role, the place and priority of the poor in Public Theologies. The discussion includes the background of Public Theologies, i.e. origin and development of Public Theologies, its similarities and differences with other forms of theology, and some definitions of Public Theologies. This is then followed by a discussion of the sources of Public Theologies and the principles of Public Theologies, i.e. creation and liberation; vocation and covenant; moral law; sin and freedom; ecclesiology and Trinity; and Christology. An analysis is carried out of two approaches to Public Theologies namely the direct public involvement of churches and the public significance of congregational practices. Finally, the role of the poor y in Public Theology is examined. It is argued that the two approaches to Public Theologies complement each other, and that Public Theologies attend to the plight of the poor from both a perspective of the impact of congregational practices on poverty, and the more direct impact on poverty through appropriate technical analysis as well as the formulation and monitoring of public policies, which, sequentially, speak to situations of poverty.

Chapter Six (*Some Lessons for Black and Public Theological Discourses*), the final chapter, brings Black Theology into dialogue with Public Theologies. Public Theologies become good news to the poor when it begins to use tools such as imaginative thinking, storytelling, naming the devil, technical analysis, and public policy matters. It is argued that Public Theologies can learn from Black Theology in the area of prophetic speaking on poverty especially with regard to criticism, envisioning, and storytelling. Conversely, Public Theologies could enrich Black Theology and all theological attempts to address poverty because they offer solutions in the area of technical analysis and policymaking. Since most of the poor people, globally, are black and live in Africa, Black and Public Theologies need to empower the church to respond to a legacy of despair in Africa, the dependency syndrome in Africa, Africa's indebtedness and Unfair Trade, and to encourage good governance in Africa.

Some general remarks and recommendations to Black and Public Theologies are also offered. By speaking prophetically on poverty through the modes of criticism, envisioning, and storytelling as Black Theology does, by speaking prophetically through the modes of participation in technical analysis and policy making as Public Theologies do, and by exploring the potential of congregational practices for addressing poverty, both Black Theology and Public Theologies – in dialogue and partnership - become good news to the poor.

## OPSOMMING

Die titel van hierdie studie is – Die Armes en die Publieke: ’n Ondersoek na die Sinergieë tussen Swart Teologie en Publieke Teologieë.

Die navorsingsvraagstuk is – Wat is die betekenis en potensiaal van Swart Teologie en Publieke Teologieë vir die kerk se roeping om armoede in die wêreld te verlig?

In hoofstuk 2 (*Armoede – Konseptuele Verheldering*) word armoede ondersoek aan die hand van die vraag wat armoede is, hoe armoede bepaal word, oorsake en gevolge van armoede, globalisasie en armoede, maatreëls wat geneem word om armoede uit te wis, en die verband tussen arm-wees en swart-wees. Daar word aangetoon dat armoede gelykstaande is aan ongeregtheid, vernedering, hulpeloosheid, magteloosheid en onsekerheid. Hierdie hoofstuk toon duidelik dat armoede ’n werklikheid is waarin die oorgrote meerderheid mense, veral dié in Afrika, hulle bevind. Die meeste armes is swart mense. Baie is vasgevang in die strik van armoede. Globalisasie beïnvloed die armes op positiewe sowel as negatiewe maniere.

In hoofstuk 3 (*’n Beknopte Oorsig van Bybelse Perspektiewe op Armoede*) word geargumenteer dat armoede, volgens die Christelike geskrifte, ’n wandaad is. Dit is ’n vorm van onderdrukking. Menslike selfsug belemmer die uitwissing van armoede. God erken en beskerm egter die armes. Gevolglik moet die kerk reageer op ’n wyse wat armoede iets van die verlede sal maak.

In hoofstuk 4 (*Die Plek en Voorrang van die Armes in Swart-Teologiese diskoerse*), word die rol (en die plek en voorrang) van die armes in Swart Teologie ondersoek. Die ondersoek is verdeel in afdelings oor die vraag wat Swart Teologie is; die ontwikkeling van Swart Teologie beide in die VSA en in Suid-Afrika; die metodes aangewend in Swart Teologie, wat insluit besprekings van die bronne van Swart Teologie en benaderings tot Swart Teologie; sterk en swak punte van Swart Teologie, asook hedendaagse tendense in Swart Teologie. ’n Ontleding van Swart Teologie is gemaak ten einde vas te stel wat die rol is wat armes in die diskoerse daarvan speel. Daar word geargumenteer dat Swart Teologie die voorrang van die armes beklemtoon. Swart Teologie erken dat die drie-enige God met die armes werk namate die armes leer om lief genoeg

vir hulleself te wees dat hulle hul volkome vryheid sal beoefen en hulle volle mensheid sal bevestig op aarde – net soos dit in die hemel is. Swart Teologie, so word geargumenteer, volg ’n robuuste benadering tot die aanspreek van armoede deur profeties te spreek in verskillende modi.

In hoofstuk 5 (*Die Plek en Voorrang van die Armes in Publieke Teologie-diskoerse*), is die rol, die plek en die voorrang van die armes in Publieke Teologieë ondersoek. Die ondersoek is verdeel in besprekings van die agtergrond van Publieke Teologieë, d.w.s. die oorsprong en ontwikkeling van Publieke Teologieë, die ooreenkomste en verskille wat dit vertoon met ander vorme van teologie, en ’n aantal definisies van Publieke Teologieë. Dit word opgevolg deur ’n bespreking van die bronne van Publieke Teologieë. Die beginsels van Publieke Teologieë word bespreek: skepping en bevryding; roeping en verbond; sedewet, sonde en vryheid; ekklesiologie en Triniteit, en Christologie. Hierop volg ’n ontleding van twee benaderings tot Publieke Teologieë, naamlik die direkte openbare betrokkenheid van kerke en, tweedens, die publieke belang van gemeentelike praktyke. Ten slotte word die rol ondersoek wat die armes in Publieke Teologie speel. Daar word geargumenteer dat die twee benaderings tot Publieke Teologieë mekaar komplementeer en dat Publieke Teologieë op die lot van die armes ingestel is vanuit die perspektief van die impak van gemeentelike praktyke op armoede sowel as vanuit die meer direkte impak op armoede deur middel van gepaste tegniese ontleding en die formulering en monitering van openbare beleidsrigtings wat gevolglik tot omstandighede van armoede spreek.

Hoofstuk 6 (*Enkele Lesse vir Swart- en Publiek-Teologiese diskoerse*) bied ’n slotsom aan vir hierdie studie. Die voorgestelde lesse word uitgelig deur Swart Teologie met Publieke Teologieë in gesprek te laat tree. Daar word geargumenteer dat Publieke Teologieë goeie nuus vir die armes raak wanneer dit instrumente begin gebruik soos en deelneem aan verbeeldingryke denke, storievertelling, die uitwys van die duiwel, tegniese ontleding en openbare beleidsaangeleenthede. Daar word verder aangevoer dat Publieke Teologieë by Swart Teologie kan leer oor profetiese spreke oor armoede, veral wat betref kritiek, visionering, en storievertelling. Publieke Teologieë, word geredeneer, verryk Swart Teologieë en alle teologiese pogings om armoede te verlig omdat dit hulle die dimensies van tegniese ontleding en beleidmaking bied. Omdat die meeste armes wêreldwyd swart Afrikane is, behoort Swart en Publieke Teologieë – so word geargumenteer – die kerk bemagtig om te reageer op ’n

nalatenskap van wanhoop in Afrika, 'n afhanklikheidsindroom in Afrika, Afrika se skuldlas en onbillike handelspraktyke, en om goeie regering in Afrika aan te moedig. Enkele algemene opmerkings en aanbevelings word gemaak oor Swart en Publieke Teologie. Deur profeties te spreek oor armoede in die modi van kritiek, visioenering en storievertelling (soos Swart Teologie maak), en deur profeties te spreek in die modi van deelname aan tegniese ontleding en beleidmaking (soos Publieke Teologieë maak) en deur die potensiaal van gemeentelike praktyke om armoede aan te spreek, te ondersoek kan Swart Teologie en Publieke Teologieë – in dialoog en in vennootskap – goeie nuus vir die armes word.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I gratefully acknowledge the constructive supervision and the invaluable guidance of my promoter, *Professor N. Koopman*. I am thankful for his considerable and thoughtful interaction with me, and the material presented in this study. I have fond memories of the many times he prayed with me.

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My parents, *Joel & Emmy Butia*, brothers (*Kiptum, Kipkoech, Kipchoge, Kiprob, Kipkogei, Cheruiyot, & Kibichiy*), sisters (*ne kigosirto Jelagat, Jebet, Jepkosgei, & Jematia*), and friends in Kenya, constantly enquired how far I had gone with this study. Their unrelenting yearning to see this assignment completed was a tremendous inspiration.

I thank the triune *God* for keeping me company and for leading me on a voyage to make a contribution to the world of knowledge especially to this relatively new and rapidly growing area of theology, a contribution, which, it is envisaged, will bring a positive change to the plight of the many poor black people, globally, and in Africa, in particular.

I am grateful!

“Poverty is increasing in the Third World,  
the gap between the rich and the poor countries is widening, there are wars – more than a  
hundred since the last world war and all of them in the ‘Third World’.  
Cultures are being lost through the imposition of foreign commercial cultures... Oppression  
is not a fashion.  
The cries of the oppressed keep rising to heaven... more and more loudly.  
God goes on hearing these cries, condemning oppression and strengthening liberation ...  
What I ask myself is what a theology is going to do if it ignores this fundamental fact of  
God’s creation as it is.  
How can a theology call itself ‘Christian’ if it bypasses the crucifixion of whole people and  
their need for resurrection, even though its books have been talking about crucifixion and  
resurrection for twenty centuries?  
Therefore if those doing ... theology are not doing it well, let others do it and do it better, but  
someone must keep on doing it”  
(quoted in Rowland 1999:250-251).

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# CHAPTER ONE

## RESEARCH FOCUS AND OUTLINE

### 1.1 Background

Poverty remains one of the biggest challenges to societies all over the world. In his book, *Ending Global Poverty: A Guide to What Works*, Smith<sup>1</sup> (2005:1) notes that, “The scale of global poverty is immense. According to the World Bank, about 1.25 billion people subsist on less than \$1 per day, and some 2.8 billion – nearly half the world’s population – live on less than \$2 per day.” Smith (2005:1) further notes that conditions of poverty are particularly desperate in Africa and people in Sub-Saharan Africa, for example:

... are poorer today than they were a generation ago. The number in the region living in extreme poverty has been estimated by the World Bank to have increased from 217 million in 1987 to 291 million in 1998. By 2001, some 48 percent of the population was absolutely poor, living on less than \$1 per day – the highest incidence of poverty in the world.

A recent World Bank Press Report (August 26, 2008) indicates that there are more poor people around the world than previously thought. It indicates that 1.4 billion people live on less than US\$ 1.25 a day. Of particular concern is the Sub-Saharan Africa where the number of the poor has almost doubled, from 200 million in 1981 to about 280 million in 2005. The report indicates that, if the trend persists, a third of the world’s poor will live in Africa by 2015 (<http://go.worldbank.org/T0TEVOV4E0>).

Although the poverty situation in Africa may have changed slightly, the poverty levels remain unacceptably high and evident.<sup>2</sup> In the almost fifty years since most African countries achieved

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen C. Smith is a Professor of Economics and International Affairs, and the Director for the Research Program on Poverty, Development, and Globalization at the George Washington University, USA. His fields of specialization include Development Economics, Labour Economics, and Economics of Organizations.

<sup>2</sup> In her book, *The Challenge for Africa: A New Vision*, Prof. Wangari Maathai, the Kenyan scholar, politician, and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, writes that, although poverty rates in Africa have declined over the past decade,

independence and in the nearly two decades since the end of the Cold War, the continent has moved forward in some critical areas of governance and economic development.<sup>3</sup> Throughout

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they remain stubbornly high. HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis – which are preventable diseases – continue to take too many lives. In sub-Saharan Africa, one in six children dies before his/her fifth birthday, comprising fully half of the world's child deaths. Conflicts ravage too many communities as rival groups vie for political and economic power. Moreover, the importance of the cultural heritage of Africans to their own sense of self-awareness remains insufficiently recognized (Maathai, 2009:10). The challenges, which Africa faces, are real and vast. In 2007, Kenya was plunged into a pointless and violent post-election conflict and a humanitarian crisis, which claimed more than a thousand lives, and left hundreds of thousands homeless. Internecine fighting continues to wreak havoc in the Darfur region of Sudan, Chad, Southern Somalia, the Niger Delta, and eastern Congo. Zimbabwe's most recent elections were marred by violence and a failure to tally the vote properly, but it was able to reach a negotiated political settlement. A series of violent attacks in South Africa against immigrants from other African countries left almost a hundred people dead and forced tens of thousands to flee from their homes (Arthur Bright, "South Africa's Anti-Immigrant Violence Spreads to Cape Town," in *Christian Science Monitor*, May 23, 2008). Drought and floods affect many countries in both Western and Eastern Africa. Natural resources are still being coveted and extracted by powers outside the region with little regard for the long-term health of the environment or poverty reduction. Desertification and deforestation, through logging and slash-and-burn agriculture, decimate species, water supplies, grazing grounds, and farm land, contributing to recurrent food emergencies. Shifting rainfall patterns, partly as a result of global climate change, directly threaten the livelihoods of the majority of Africans who still rely on the land for their basic needs. At the same time, sub-Saharan African countries are falling short of the benchmarks for health, education, gender equality, and environmental sustainability, which are among the eight Millennium Development Goals agreed on by the United Nations in 2000.

<sup>3</sup> More countries in African have democratic forms of governance, and more Africans are being educated. Debt relief has been granted to a number of African countries, and international trade policies are now subject to greater scrutiny to assess their fairness or lack of it. South Africa has made a successful, and peaceful, transition to full democracy from the apartheid regime. Kenya, in 2002, held its first genuinely representative elections in a generation and the perennial civil wars in Angola and Mozambique have ended. Liberia has emerged from a devastating series of internal and regional conflicts. In 2005, it elected President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as the first woman to head a modern African state, and the process of reconciliation and reconstruction is underway. Rwanda, a decade and a half after the 1994 genocide, has a growing economy, and Rwanda women constitute almost half of its parliament, the highest female percentage of parliamentarians in the world (Cathy Majtenyi, "Women Have Strong Voices in Rwandan Parliament," in *Voice of America*, July 16, 2007). After decades of dictatorship, instability and extreme poverty, and a conflict which has claimed up to five million lives, in 2006, the Democratic Republic of the Congo held elections overseen by the United nations that were judged as largely free and fair. A fragile peace holds between Northern and Southern Sudan, and efforts to end the civil war in Northern Uganda continue. Maathai



the African continent, there are instances where forward motions and stasis (motionless state) occur simultaneously. Efforts to battle corruption have been waged, but often incompletely; principled and visionary leaders are still too few in number, and while the world increasingly recognizes that Africa will be hit hard by climate change, the transfer of “green” technology from industrialized nations to the continent remains slow, and forests in Africa continue to shrink. A discussion on the phenomenon of poverty will be offered in more detail below.

Various institutions on national and international levels have not succeeded in eradicating poverty effectively, to make poverty history. Despite its noble endeavors, the church also has not addressed this problem faithfully and effectively. The Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia, the general secretary of the World Council of Churches, is of the view that:

...For the poor of the world to enjoy God's resources like the rest of humanity, structures and economic models that marginalize them must be changed. Aid and charity will not eradicate poverty as long as economic, financial and trade policies continue to favor the rich. People in poverty need justice, not just aid. This is the challenge that the churches and the wider ecumenical family are called to address in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/general-secretary/speeches/religious-leaders-conference-cologne.html>).

Christians and, by extension, churches have been at the forefront of several major movements for social change. From the establishment of the earliest orphanages, hospitals and public schools, to the abolition of slavery and forced child labour, churches have responded to the cries of poverty and suffering. However, the battle is yet to be won. Grinding poverty continues. The presence of such crushing poverty in the world, and especially in Africa, begs the question whether the way the churches respond to suffering and poverty has been effective. Churches indeed need theologies, which can enable them to respond more faithfully to the triune God regarding poverty in the world.

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(2009:11) writes that, since the early years of this century, a number of African economies have grown at more than five percent, and African civil society – NGOs, trade unions, civil associations, community based groups, and ordinary citizens – is becoming bolder in speaking out in support of human rights and good governance. These are real achievements, and they belie the idea that Africans cannot take charge of their own affairs.

There are various theologies developed over the last few decades, which have explicitly attempted to address social challenges like poverty. Among these are the Liberation Theologies of Latin America, and the Black Theology, which developed in North America and South Africa. According to James Cone in his book, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, the task of Black Theology is:

...to analyze the nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the light of oppressed blacks so they will see the gospel as inseparable from their humiliated condition, and as bestowing on them the necessary power to break the chains of oppression. This means that it is a theology of and for the black community, seeking to interpret the religious dimensions of the forces of liberation in that community (Cone, 1990:5).

Cone had written earlier in another book, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church* that:

Whether among black Protestants or Catholics, black theology is partly a product of the attack of black clergy *radicals* on racism in white churches. Indeed it was the presence of racism in white churches that forced black theologians to stand up and say, loud and clear: “The white church is not the Christian church!” The defense of this claim gave birth to black theology (Cone, 1986:52 – *italics added*).

Since so many black people live in poverty, the focus on the plight of black people is supposed to imply a focus on poverty.

More recently, a new so-called contextual theology developed namely Public Theology. As the launch of a Global Network for Public Theology<sup>4</sup> in Princeton in May 2007<sup>5</sup> demonstrates, the notion of Public Theology is growing all over the world. In South Africa and other parts of

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<sup>4</sup> The Global Network for Public Theology (GNPT) is an academic research partnership that promotes theological contributions on public issues, especially those issues affecting the poor, the marginalized, and the environment in a “glocal” (global-local) context. The GNPT was founded in 2007 by a group of research institutions (<http://www.ctinquiry.org/gnpt/index.htm>).

<sup>5</sup> In May 2007, representatives from twenty-four research institutions around the world met at the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton, USA to form a new research partnership called – *The Global Network for Public Theology* (<http://www.ctinquiry.org/gnpt/institutions.htm>).

Africa, the idea of Public Theology is gaining momentum.<sup>6</sup> This research is interested, therefore, in establishing the potential of both Black Theology and Public Theologies to assist churches in addressing the challenge of poverty. The aim of Public Theology is described by Duncan Forrester as follows:<sup>7</sup>

The term ‘public theology’ is itself a little striking. Most of its articulate proponents are anxious not to be confused with the radical political theologians of Europe or with liberation theologians, initially from Latin America and now from many countries and contexts around the world. These theologians address to their own contexts theologically grounded programmes which are consistently radical. In contrast, the public theologians are cautious about the very idea of a theological *programme* in the public sphere, and their inclinations are on the whole liberal or conservative rather than radical. **They are more concerned with gaining an entrée to the existing public debates and being heard there, than with challenging the system or espousing any utopian cause** (Forrester, 1997:32 – *emphasis added*).

Forrester, who was responsible for what was, probably, the first Centre for Public Theology, namely, the Centre for Theology and Public Issues at the University of Edinburgh, makes a strong plea for the participation of theology in public discourses. Theology has a role in public opinion making and public policy discourses.

From Forrester’s description of the focus of Public Theology, it becomes clear that a tension might exist between Public Theologies and those contextual theologians that have the liberation of the poor and oppressed as their explicit agenda, e.g. Black Theology. This tension raises the

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<sup>6</sup> Public Theology in South Africa and the rest of Africa is gaining momentum as demonstrated by the founding of centres or research programmes for Public Theology in Universities such as the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa ([www.sun.ac.za/theology/bnc.htm](http://www.sun.ac.za/theology/bnc.htm)), the Centre for Public Theology, University of Pretoria, South Africa ([www.up.ac.za](http://www.up.ac.za)), the Institute for Public Theology & Development Studies, University of Mkar, Nigeria (<http://unimkar.edu.ng>), and the Department of Religion and Theology, University of the Western Cape, South Africa (<http://www.uwc.ac.za/arts/Rel-Theo>).

<sup>7</sup>At the time of writing, Forrester is the Emeritus Professor of Christian Ethics and Practical Theology in the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. He is also the founding Director of the University’s Centre for Theology and Public Issues and the Personal Chair of Theology and Public Issues (Storrar & Morton, 2004:2). Although he also focuses on inner church life, his emphasis, like that of Stackhouse, is on the direct role of theology in the public domain.

question of whether Public Theology/theologies do/does pay genuine attention to the cause of the poor. Is the attempt of Public Theology/theologies to gain access to public debates of service to the poor? Is the attempt of Public Theologies, or at least some of the first representatives of Public Theologies, to distance themselves from contextual theologies such as Black Theology, a sign that the cause of the poor, which is so central to the agenda of such theologies, is not adequately addressed by Public Theologies?

It is important that Public Theologies seek a point of entry into the pluralistic public debate(s) and resist spelling out utopias or offering simplistic criticisms of societal systems in complex, pluralistic societies. There is a need, however, for theologies, which participate constructively in the discourses of pluralistic, modern-postmodern societies to address poverty and marginalization through such participation.

This study is in search of a theology or theologies, which achieve both these goals, that is, a theology or theologies that can participate in an effective and transformative way in the discourses of modern-postmodern pluralistic societies, and that can address simultaneously the needs of the poor, suffering and marginalized. In fact, theologies are required, which employ public discourses in pluralistic societies as vehicles to overcome poverty. This study is in search of theologies, which are good news to the poor.

## **1.2 Research Question and Aim**

Against this background of worsening poverty, the quest for a theology or theologies that might guide churches to respond more faithfully to the challenge of poverty, and the potential of Black Theology and Public Theologies as a means of providing such guidance to churches, this research project poses the following research question: What are the implication and the potential of Black Theology and Public Theologies for the calling of the church to address poverty in the world?

In the light of this research question, the title of this study is formulated as follows - The Poor and the Public: An Exploration of Synergies between Black Theology and Public Theologies.

The aim of the study could, therefore, be expressed in the following question: How do we construct a framework for Black Theology and Public Theologies, which ensures that both theologies in modern-postmodern pluralistic societies address the plight of the poor and marginalized in the context of the global market economy? In developing a framework for Black Theology and Public Theologies which serve this aim, an attempt is made to learn some lessons from Black Theology and Public Theologies in terms of the priority that each gives to the poor and the marginalized.

The aim of this research, therefore, is to illuminate the potential of the discourses in Black Theology and contemporary Public Theologies that can enhance the calling of the church to attend to the plight of the poor. This illumination may be achieved by discerning the role of the poor in Black Theology and Public Theologies, and by indicating how the two could enrich each other to guide contemporary churches in their task of working for salvation and liberation in the face of overwhelming poverty.

### **1.3 Research Methodology**

This study is undertaken through consultation and the analyses of literature from various disciplines, which deal with themes such as global poverty, definitions of and approaches to Black Theology and Public Theologies, the role and place of the poor in both theologies, and the potential of both Black Theology and Public Theologies to address poverty in contemporary contexts. The research will investigate the most important literatures on these themes.

Although other contextual theologies such as Political Theology and especially Latin American Liberation Theology also deal with the role of the poor in theological discourse, this investigation will be limited to Black Theology and Public Theologies. This choice ensures that the theme is dealt with in a manner that will be highly relevant to South African and other African contexts. The research takes cognizance of the various approaches, emphases and agenda in the rapidly evolving field of Public Theologies. A flexible approach to the understanding of Public Theologies is therefore advocated in this study, and Public Theologies will be broadly

understood as a reflection on the meaning of Christian faith for public life. This study specifically inquires into the meaning of Christian faith for the public challenge of poverty.

This study is *descriptive* - it provides an outline of global poverty levels, biblical perspectives of poverty, and the place and priority of the poor in Black Theology and Public Theologies. The study is also *normative* - it pictures what a church, which effectively responds to the challenge of poverty, would look like, and how a world free of poverty would be. Past and contemporary attempts to eradicate poverty are evaluated with the intent to make appropriate recommendations. Lastly, the study is *practical* - it suggests guidelines for addressing poverty.

## **1.4 Outline of Chapters**

**Chapter One** constitutes the introduction to the dissertation, while **Chapter Two** offers some conceptual clarifications on poverty. The chapter focuses on poverty, its definitions causes and effects as well the approaches to its study. In addition, the manifestation of poverty among black people and measures towards poverty eradication are discussed.

In **Chapter Three**, the conceptual clarification made with reference to insights from contemporary social sciences (in Chapter Two), is complemented by a cursory overview of biblical perspectives of poverty. Both the social science and biblical perspectives of poverty inform the discussion of poverty in Black Theology and Public Theologies in later chapters. **Chapter Four** discusses Black Theology. In the first part of the chapter, the origins, development and context of Black Theology are discussed, as well as the approaches to its study. In the second part of the chapter, the role of the poor in Black Theology is investigated.

**Chapter Five** deals with the place and priority of the poor in Public Theological discourses. It begins with the various definitions of Public Theologies, as well as the approaches to the discourses and the emphases. This outline is important for the sake of an orientation to this relatively new and rapidly growing field in Theology. This discussion attempts to illuminate the potential of Public Theologies for addressing poverty. The second major part of the chapter specifically deals with the role and place of the poor in Public Theological discourses.

**Chapter Six** dialogues with the approaches to the poor in both Black Theology and Public Theologies, and suggests lessons that may be learned from this dialogue. Subsequently, some guidelines are highlighted from the rich theological discourse that may assist churches in addressing the challenge of poverty. The chapter ends with a conclusion.

# **CHAPTER TWO**

## **POVERTY – SOME CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This second chapter is a discussion from a social science perspective on the concepts of the poor and poverty. Since the place of the poor in both Black Theology and Public Theologies plays such an important role in this study, an analysis of the nature, faces, manifestations, causes, and responses to poverty globally and in Africa, where the prevalence of poverty is greater, is of central importance.

The structure of the discussion on poverty in this chapter is developed under the following headings: definition of the terms, poor and poverty; determining poverty; causes and effects of poverty; globalization and poverty; measures undertaken to eradicate poverty; and poverty and blackness. A summary of findings is sketched. This analysis of poverty is crucial for this study, since this study focuses on how Black Theology and Public Theologies deal with the challenge of poverty.

### **2.2 Definition(s) of the Poor and Poverty**

In this section, the concepts, poor and poverty are defined by examining definitions of the concepts from a variety of disciplines. Some of the sources consulted include an English dictionary, the writings of scholars such as Stephen C. Smith, Johann Graft, Nehemiah Nyaundi, Jones and Nelson, and internet sources, just to mention a few.

Poverty is a cause of considerable community concern. It is a cruel trap. For many of the unfortunate people who are ensnared in this painful leg hold, escape on their own is all but possible. There are many definitions of poverty. These definitions differ depending on the viewpoints from which poverty is approached. However, an understanding of some of the



characteristics of the poor and the meaning of the word “poor” may help us to understand “poverty.”

Throughout the world, the poor tend to share common characteristics. The following are some of those characteristics:

- i. The poor throughout tend to be malnourished. Malnutrition is a dietary condition caused by insufficiency or excess of one or more nutrients in one’s diet. Because of malnutrition, they suffer poor health, which may also affect their ability to do well at school (Smith, 2005:27).
- ii. It is also notable that the poor tend to dwell in farms that are agriculturally unproductive, or land that has been over-cultivated. Smith (2005:27) writes that, “They live in environmentally stressed areas, have poor access to technology, and lack personal and political power.” Furthermore, “The poor are more likely to be rural, agricultural, and have little or no land. The poor also tend to come from large families, with few income earners” (Smith, 2005:27).
- iii. Smith (2005:27) further notes that, “The problem of female-headed families living in poverty is growing in developing countries... In a number of countries they have already approached or exceeded the 50 percent... The chances that a person will be poor, if he or she is a member of a minority or indigenous group is far greater than if a person is from the majority ethnic group.” He notes that, “In most countries, poverty is also concentrated within particular regions (Smith, 2005:27).
- iv. One other characteristic of the poor is the fact that, “... the poor generally come from poor countries” (Smith, 2005:27).

One could deduce from Smith’s observations that the poor are those who suffer malnutrition, poor health, and have lower levels of education. They live in environmentally stressed areas, have poor access to technology, and lack personal and political power. They are, by and large, rural, agricultural, and may have little or no land. Some of them may come from large families

with few income earners, and may be members of minority or indigenous groups. The chances that they come from poor countries are high.

In an article, “Christian Teaching and the Concept of Poverty”, in the book, *The Cries of the Poor: Questions and Responses for African Christianity*, Nehemiah M. Nyaundi, an East African theologian and writer, understands being poor as “...having very little money with which to buy one’s basic needs; having something only in very little quantities; inadequate, especially in contrast with what is usual or expected” (Nyaundi, 2002:118). According to Nyaundi, the state of being poor has to do with having very little money to buy one’s basic needs. It is a state of inadequacy in contrast to what is usual.

In his *Introductions to Sociology: Poverty and Development* Johann Graaff also writes that:

Being poor is not just being without money. Being poor frequently also means being subjected to physical abuse and violence, being subjected to humiliation and indignity, being subjected to exploitation by the powerful and the wealthy. It frequently involves experiences of humiliation, of helplessness, of powerlessness and insecurity, of fatalism, of being trapped in a terrible bleak peace, and deep injustice (Graaft, 2004:8).

Graaff’s remark above probes deeper into what the state of being poor entails. He introduces a social aspect to being poor showing an understanding of being poor that goes beyond the tangible to the intangible such as being subjected to physical abuse, humiliation, exploitation, and all forms of injustice.

From all the above comments, the following deductions can be made:

- i. Those who are seen or described as poor are those who share certain common characteristics. Such characteristics include suffering malnutrition and poor health, and the resultant inability to do well at school especially by children who come from such families that suffer malnutrition and poor health. The poor are more likely to be rural and agricultural. They dwell in agriculturally unproductive farms. They have poor access to technology and lack personal and political power. The poor tend to come from large families, with few income earners. They generally come from poor countries.

- ii. Secondly, being poor entails having very little money (or any medium of exchange that is widely accepted in payment for goods and services and in settlement of debts) to buy one's essential or basic needs. It is a state of meagerness and inadequacy in contrast to what is usual.
- iii. Thirdly, being poor includes circumstances where one is subjected to continuous substantial maltreatment and brutality. It involves being subjected to humiliation and indignity. It entails subjection to exploitation by the powerful and wealthy. It is noted that being poor often involves degradation, defenselessness, powerlessness and insecurity. It is an experience of fatalism (or a belief system that all events occur according to a fixed and inevitable destiny that is neither controlled nor affected by the individual will) and of being trapped in terrible bleak peace and deep injustice.

What then is poverty? Poverty is the inability to satisfy one's basic needs, a lack of relations, a lack of material needs, the inability to meet social needs, and a lack of sufficient income and wealth.

**Poverty is the inability to satisfy one's basic needs.** In their book, *In Word and in Deed: Towards a Practical Theology of Social Transformation*, Cochrane, de Gruchy, and Petersen describe poverty as not being able to satisfy one's basic needs such as food, housing, health, education, job and social participation. It is "... the same as to be oppressed" (Cochrane *et al*, 1991:61). A poverty-stricken person is one assailed by urgent material and intellectual needs, which s/he cannot fulfill. It is to suffer not just lack, it is "...an injustice that has a structural basis in the society within which one lives. It is to 'have not' among those who 'have' in abundance" (Cochrane *et al*, 1991:61).

Poverty, nonetheless, is much more than just a lack of income. Even though some families may not have a regular income, their needs may be met by more than just cash contributions. In an article, in *Urban Poverty in Africa: From Understanding to Alleviation*, it is noted that people have been defined as poor in relation to "...spatial terms and in relation to lack of services which other urban residences have access to" (Jones and Nelson, 1999:11). Some of these services

include education, health, good housing conditions, water, electricity, appropriate sewerage, land ownership and secure tenure. Jones is critical of such an approach to defining poverty. In her view, such an approach presumes that the problems of the poor can be solved by an injection of facilities and services. She notes that a basic services' approach to defining poverty fails to address the management of facilities and sustainability.

On their own, the poor also define poverty. They have their own understanding and definition of what poverty is, and who the poor are. They can make a distinction between the poor and the very poor. Jones illustrates this observation as follows:

... [I]n one slum area, poor households identified how the more 'well off' poor households were able to afford proper storage containers. They could also ensure that they were at the front of the queue at the times when the water supply was turned on. Since the communal water tap was turned on only for a short time and at low pressure, they often monopolized what water there was (Jones and Nelson, 1999:13).

In such a state of affairs, the impact of a water project on the living conditions of the poor may not be raised unless a qualitative evaluation that is directly embarked on with the poor is done.

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that poverty is partly the inability to secure material goods, which improve the quality of life, while the poor are those who do not enjoy decent living conditions, hardly have enough to eat, and struggle to clothe themselves.

Nyaundi observes that the African continent has millions of people who have no material possessions, have disabling diseases, and who are displaced from their homes, ignorant, and without shelter and food. Millions of people fall in this bracket (Nyaundi, 2002:123).

***Poverty is a lack of relations.*** Some communities in Africa may have a view or an understanding of poverty that is not shared by those living in affluent parts of the world. Several definitions of poverty, especially the ones so far noted in this chapter, may demonstrate a biased understanding of poverty. It is an understanding of poverty where material goods differentiate the poor from the rich. Nyaundi notes that, "In an African set up it is believed that a man who has no house, wife,

children and cattle is poor. In fact in the same culture, a polygamous home where there are many children is considered to be a rich home” (Nyaundi, 2002:123).

Such a view of poverty includes the lack of relations as an indicator of poverty. For example, in Kenyan (a setting which is familiar to the researcher), a pastoralist family from among the Rendille in the North or the Maasai in the South, which has a big herd of domestic animals, would deem itself very rich. Such riches do not include a stone house, a motor car, leather seats, and china table sets, which are considered as indicators of riches in other parts of the world in modern times. If, and when, one is deprived of the opportunity to relate to another human, animal or object, including natural and supernatural beings, then that person may be considered poor.

***Poverty is a lack of material needs.*** Poverty understood in the sense of a lack of material needs entails the idea of being unable to access the necessities of daily living. Such necessities would include food, clothing, shelter and health care. Poverty, understood in such terms, is the deprivation of essential goods and services (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty>).

***Poverty is the inability to meet social needs.*** One may define poverty qualitatively; and in that sense, poverty would mean vulnerability, powerlessness, isolation and humiliation, deprivation and social exclusion (Jones and Nelson, 1999:12).

In an article titled, *The Meaning and Measurement of Poverty*, Simon Maxwell of the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) asks the following question:

Is poverty simply about the level of income obtained by households or individuals? Is it about lack of access to social services? Or is it more correctly understood as the inability to participate in society, economically, socially, culturally or politically?  
(<http://www.odi.org.uk/publications/briefing/pov3.html>)

Maxwell’s point is that poverty is and should be understood not just from a single perspective such as the level of income, but in the context of all the different factors involved, i.e. level of income, lack of access to social services, and inability to participate in society in terms of economic, social, cultural and political matters.

Such an understanding of poverty encompasses social exclusion, dependency and the inability to participate in society. Examples of social needs may include education and information (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty>). Thus, an elaboration of what is meant by social exclusion is important. The wikipedia website defines social exclusion as that which:

...relates to the alienation or disenfranchisement of certain people within a society. It is often connected to a person's social class, educational status and living standards and how these might affect their access to various opportunities. It also applies to some degree to the disabled, to racial minorities, women and to the elderly. Anyone who deviates in any perceived way from the norm of a population can become subject to coarse or subtle forms of social exclusion ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_exclusion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_exclusion)).

Those who are socially excluded are poor.

***Poverty is a lack of sufficient income and wealth.*** People who lack sufficient income and wealth are seen as poor. The problem, however, lies with the meaning of “sufficient”. An understanding of what is sufficient varies across the different economic and political parts of the world. People who are under the above conditions are often considered “**poor, impoverished, in low income, or broke**” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty>).

Poverty, therefore, may be understood in at least *five* ways. The first is the *inability to satisfy one's basic needs*, and the second is the *lack of relations*. The third is the *lack of material needs*. Poverty, in material terms, would mean the deprivation of essential goods and services. Fourthly, poverty may be understood in terms of the *lack of social needs*. When one is unable to participate in society, is socially excluded, is placed in a state of dependency, or is in all of these situations, such a person is socially poor. The fifth aspect of poverty is the *lack of sufficient income and wealth*. Although the term “sufficient” is relative, those who are deemed or who deem themselves as having “insufficient” income and wealth would be called poor.

All the definitions above point to the following: Poverty is hunger<sup>8</sup>. It is pervasive poor health and early death. It is the loss of a child and the denial of rights to basic education. It is powerlessness and vulnerability. Poverty is the inability to maintain a minimum standard of living. It is a condition of continued lack of basic nutrition. It is the inability to purchase all one's basic needs including food. Poverty is a lack of choices and opportunities for basic human development. Poverty is reflected in a short lifespan, illiteracy, and lack of material resources. It is a lack of freedom and human dignity. Poverty is focused on both the quality of life and the lack of material possessions.

It may be observed that poverty has at least three dimensions namely the economic, the social, and the political. From an economic perspective, poverty is the lack of resources such as land, infrastructure and productive resources, as well as lack of access or minimum access to facilities such as credit, markets, and production assets. The social dimension of poverty entails the lack of access to basic health, education, recreation, sanitation, and shelter facilities. The third dimension to poverty is political. This dimension entails the lack of power to make one's own decisions and/or determine one's own fate. It includes lack of empowerment and equal access to opportunities in situations where one is prevented from applying one's talents to realize one's full potential. In the words of Graaff (2004:8):

Poverty is not a simple phenomenon. It has economic, political, cultural, emotional, and psychological dimensions. It means that people suffer many more wounds than just the physical, and it means that poverty is a state of vulnerability. Physical deprivation, then, is often a symptom of something more important, namely, a position of structural deprivation, an exposure to exploitation and abuse which people are unable to escape.

Nyaundi's understanding of poverty is also significant. For Nyaundi, poverty is "... a state of being in utmost need. It is a state of despair and powerlessness. It is not a state of having no choice, but of having nothing to choose from" (Nyaundi, 2002:123).

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<sup>8</sup> It is estimated that 17% of the world's population is classified as undernourished or suffering from chronic hunger. Chronic hunger is measured by a daily intake of less than 1,700 calories and lack of access to safe and nutritious food (Smith, 2005:2).

In brief, it may be stated that poverty represents *a state of not having*. It is a state of not having enough money, for example, to acquire one's basic needs. Secondly, poverty represents *a state of inability* - a state of inability to meet or satisfy one's basic needs. Such basic needs would include food, shelter, health, education, source of income, and social participation. Thirdly, poverty does represent *a state of inferiority*. The socially inferior are, in many situations, socially excluded, isolated, deprived, and humiliated. They are also powerless and vulnerable.

Those who suffer poverty or the "poor" include, among others, the majority of black people globally. One could note that the poor black women are the most marginalized. Poor black women suffer both structural injustice and individual violations of their personhood, which deny them the opportunity to attain their full humanity. In South Africa, the majority of black women suffer oppression and poverty. The black women are, therefore, triply oppressed in terms of sex, race and class and are the poorest and most marginalized in society (Cochrane et al, 1991:62).

### **2.3 Determining Poverty**

A description of how poverty is measured is discussed in this section. Attention is given to absolute and relative poverty. The question here is how is poverty measured? Although there is abject poverty in the developing world, there is poverty everywhere in the world. Poverty is evident in the developed, and in the developing world. Such poverty has resulted in wandering homeless people, poor suburbs and ghettos. In some instances, poverty is seen as the collective condition of poor people, or of poor groups, resulting in some instances of entire states or countries being regarded as poor. To avoid stigma, such poor nations or states, are usually called "developing countries" (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty>).

Poverty may be either absolute or relative. Absolute poverty refers to:

... a set standard which is consistent over time and between countries. An example of an absolute measurement would be the percentage of the population eating less food than is required to sustain the human body (approximately 2000-2500 kilocalories per day) ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty#Measuring\\_poverty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty#Measuring_poverty)).

On the other hand, relative poverty is understood as...



... socially defined and dependent on social context. In this case, the number of people counted as poor could increase while their income rise. A relative measurement would be to compare the total wealth of the poorest one-third of the population with the total wealth of the richest 1% of the population ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty#Measuring\\_poverty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty#Measuring_poverty)).

### **2.3.1 Measuring absolute poverty**

At this point, the discussion will turn to the way absolute poverty is determined or measured. Some of the tools or indicators that are used to measure poverty especially absolute poverty include living on less than US\$1 per day, life expectancy, and child mortality. These indicators are examined below.

**Absolute poverty is living on less than one dollar a day.** The World Bank defines absolute (extreme) poverty as **living on less than US\$1 per day**, and moderate poverty as living on less than \$2 a day. It has been estimated that in 2001, 1.1 billion people had consumption levels below \$1 a day while 2.7 billion lived on less than \$2 a day. The proportion of the developing world's population living in extreme economic poverty has fallen from 28 percent in 1990 to 21 percent in 2001. Much of the improvement has occurred in East and South Asia. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the GDP/capita shrank by 14 percent and extreme poverty increased from 41 percent in 1981 to 46 percent in 2001. Other regions have seen little or no change. In the early 1990s, the transition economies of Europe and Central Asia experienced a sharp drop in income. Poverty rates rose to 6 percent at the end of the decade before beginning to recede (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty>).

**Absolute poverty is low life expectancy.** Life expectancy has greatly increased in the developing world since the Second World War (WWII) and the gap is starting to close between to the developing world and the developed world where the improvement has been smaller. Even in Sub-Saharan Africa, which is the least developed region, life expectancy increased from 30 years before the Second World War to a peak of about 50 years before the HIV pandemic and other diseases started to force it down to the current level of 47 years (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty>).

***Absolute poverty is high child mortality.*** Child mortality has decreased in every developing region of the world. The proportion of the world's population living in countries where per-capita food supplies are less than 2,200 calories (9,200 kilojoules) per day decreased from 56% in the mid-1960s to below 10% by the 1990s. Between 1950 and 1999, global literacy increased from 52% to 81% of the world population. Women made up much of the gap; female literacy as a percentage of male literacy has increased from 59% in 1970 to 80% in 2000. The percentage of children not in the labor force has also risen to over 90% in 2000 from 76% in 1960. There are similar trends in the proportion of the population with access to clean water (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty>).

Thus, absolute or abject poverty is living on less than US\$1 a day. It has to do with experiencing low or decreasing life expectancy, and high child mortality. People experience absolute poverty when they do not possess the resources that are necessary to support human life. Absolute poverty can also be defined as subsistence poverty since it is based on judgments of minimum subsistence requirements<sup>9</sup>. Anyone, for example, with an income below the minimum subsistence requirement can then be classified as absolutely poor. Absolute poverty is based on subsistence. It is a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs including food safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education, and information. Absolute poverty depends not only on incomes, but also on access to social services.

### **2.3.2 Measuring relative poverty**

A document prepared by the now defunct **National Party** in South Africa entitled *Development & Empowerment Strategy: The NP's Vision for a Caring Society* states that, "Relative poverty refers mainly to inequalities existing within a society, for example, the uneven distribution of resources and hardship" (1999:6).

Relative poverty poses a dividing line, which is unique to a specific community at a specific time, by distinguishing the relatively poor members of a given community from the rest. Such a

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<sup>9</sup> For further reading on minimum subsistence requirements, see Kgarimetsa, M. 1992. "The Two Faces of Poverty – Urban and Rural", in *Social Work Practice*.

dividing line is drawn in accordance with the wealth of the specific community. A standard for relative poverty would be, for example, an income or consumption cut-off point.

The *National Party's* document further states that, "Relative poverty therefore measures one socio-economic standard against another" (1999:6).

It follows, therefore, that a family with a given income can, if they are living in an affluent community, be regarded as poor, and if they are living in a poverty-stricken area, be regarded as wealthy. Poverty, then, becomes relative to the environment such that, if all in a given community earn an equal amount of income, it does not mean that there is no poverty; but it means that, if measured against the standard of absolute poverty, all are poor, or none are poor.

In many developed countries, the official definition of poverty used for statistical purposes is based on *relative income*. Thus, many critics argue that poverty statistics measure inequality rather than material deprivation or hardship. For instance, according to the United States Census Bureau, 46% of those in "poverty" in the United States own their own homes (with the average poor person's home having three bedrooms, one and a half baths, and a garage).<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the measurements are usually based on a person's yearly income and they frequently do not take account of total wealth.

It is, therefore, notable that absolute poverty is measured in terms of set standards that are consistent over time and between countries. Such standards include living on less than US\$1 per day, life expectancy, and child mortality. Relative poverty is socially defined and is heavily dependent on social context. It is based on a comparison of poor people with others in the community.

What then are the causes of poverty, and what are some of its effects?

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<sup>10</sup> Rector, Robert E. and Johnson, Kirk A. 2004. [\*Understanding Poverty in America\*](#), Executive Summary, Heritage Foundation, January 15, 2004 No.1713.

## 2.4 Causes and Effects of Poverty

The causes and effects of poverty will be discussed below. An attempt is made to identify causes of poverty that are either unique to or prevalent in Africa. What follows is a discussion on the effects of poverty and poverty traps. What are some of the causes of poverty? What factors have been cited to explain why poverty occurs?

### 2.4.1 General causes of poverty

The Wikipedia website ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty#Causes\\_of\\_poverty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty#Causes_of_poverty)) on poverty notes a number of factors that explain the causes of poverty. These factors include:

- **Unemployment** - lack of jobs in some places is a prime factor that brings about poverty;
- **Lack of freedom** - this may include social oppression;
- **Ideologies** such as capitalism, socialism, and communism - although these are seen by some as solutions<sup>11</sup>, others see them as causes of poverty. A theory that goes back to Karl Marx claims that unrestricted capitalism would lead to accumulation of power and wealth in the hands of the elite. For example, in North Korea, Cuba and the former USSR, communism has been blamed as the cause of poverty;
- **Infrastructure** - poor, failed, or absence of infrastructure, and lack of opportunities;
- Government corruption;
- Lack of a functioning democracy;
- **Lack of social integration**, e.g. arising from immigration;
- Crime;

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<sup>11</sup> An example of seeing capitalism as a solution is the June 24, 2003 article by Zerihun Mebrate titled, *Capitalism is the Cure for Ethiopia's Problems*. The article reads, in part: "...What Ethiopia desperately needs is to remove the political and economic shackles and replace them with political and economic freedom. It needs to depose the socialist regime and establish capitalism, with its political/economic freedom, its rule of law and respect for individual rights. And to accomplish that, it first needs to remove the philosophic shackles and replace tribal collectivism with a philosophy of reason and freedom. The truly humanitarian system is not the Marxism espoused by Western intellectuals but the only system that can establish, as it historically has, the furtherance of life on earth: capitalism" ([http://www.ethiomeia.com/press/capitalism\\_a\\_cure.html](http://www.ethiomeia.com/press/capitalism_a_cure.html)).

- Natural *disasters*;
- *Substance abuse* such as alcoholism and drug abuse;
- *Natural factors* such as change in climate or environment;
- *Historical factors* such as imperialism and colonialism;
- *Overpopulation* - the website notes that population growth slows or even becomes negative as poverty is reduced due to the demographic transition;
- *War* including civil war, genocide, and democide;<sup>12</sup>
- Illiteracy rate;
- Lack of social skills; and
- *Exploitation* of the poor by the rich.

Some other causes of poverty enumerated in the wikipedia website ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty#Causes\\_of\\_poverty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty#Causes_of_poverty)) include:

- Individual beliefs, actions and choices;
- *Mental illness* and *disability* such as autism and schizophrenia;
- *Geographic factors*, for example, fertile land and access to natural resources.
- *Diseases*, specifically, poverty related diseases - AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other diseases overwhelmingly afflict the poor, which perpetuate poverty by diverting individual, community, and national health and economic resources from investment and productivity. Further, many tropical nations are affected by diseases such as malaria and schistosomiasis<sup>13</sup> that are not present in temperate climates.

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<sup>12</sup> Democide is defined as "The murder of any person or people by a government, including genocide, politicide (politically motivated killing of people and elimination as a political entity), and mass murder" (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democide>).

<sup>13</sup> Schistosomiasis or bilharzia is a disease affecting many people in developing countries. In the form of 'acute' schistosomiasis, it is sometimes referred to as snail fever and cutaneous schistosomiasis may sometimes be commonly called swimmer's itch. In certain African communities, the process of overcoming schistosomiasis is an important rite of passage. Although it has a low mortality rate, schistosomiasis can be very debilitating (bilharzia, or bilharziosis, is the eponym for schistosomiasis in many countries, after Theodor Bilharz, who first described the cause of urinary schistosomiasis in 1851) (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schistosomiasis>).

Other causes include:

- ***Inadequate nutrition*** in childhood in poor nations that may lead to physical and mental stunting;
- ***Improper taxation***, either due to taxes perceived as being too high, or due to inherent unfairness in the fiscal system, which might place an excessive burden on the poorest segments of society;
- High government spending;
- ***Discrimination*** of various kinds in terms of age, gender, and race, etc.; and
- ***Cost of goods*** for basic necessities ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty#Causes\\_of\\_poverty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty#Causes_of_poverty)).

#### **2.4.2 Some causes of poverty in Africa**

The causes of poverty that are peculiar to Africa (although they may be found in other parts of the world) are discussed below.

Various explanations have been offered for Africa's poverty, which include the slave trade, colonialism, the North/South trade imbalance, the debt crisis, the unfavorable terms of trade, and the high rate of population increase. Other factors are ruthless dictators and oppressive military regimes, greed and corruption, ethnicity, bad governance, i.e. political instability/weak state institutions/ineffective economic policies, education, science and technology, hostile physical environment, i.e. declining productivity in agriculture, and economic policies of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs).

In a book co-edited with Peter Kimuyu<sup>14</sup> titled *Vision for a Bright Africa: Facing the Challenges of Development*, George Kinoti<sup>15</sup> writes that, "Africa's poverty is of great concern... No matter

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Kimuyu (PhD), is an Associate Professor and a former Chairman of the Department of Economics, University of Nairobi, Kenya.

<sup>15</sup> George Kinoti (PhD) is a Professor of Zoology at the University of Nairobi, and a Director of the Africa Institute for Scientific Research and Development (AISRED), Nairobi, Kenya.

how we measure poverty, Africa is desperately poor” (Kinoti, 1997:13). The causes of Africa’s poverty are many and complex. They are so interlinked that it is often hard to tell the cause from the effect. Several factors have been suggested as being at the heart of Africa’s troubles, some of which will be enumerated below.

N. W. Ndungu notes that several socio-economic and political theories have been proposed to explain the cause of Africa’s poverty. Some of those factors have already been mentioned above but all the factors or causes of poverty in Africa can be divided into two major groups - *external factors* and *internal factors*. Some of the **external factors** include: (i) slave trade, (ii) colonialism, (iii) the North-South trade imbalance, (iv) the debt crisis, and (v) unfavourable terms of trade (Kanyandago, 2002:138). Although the manner in which these external factors brought about poverty in Africa is widely known, it may be helpful to expound on the slave trade, and the North–South trade imbalance.

### *Slave trade*

From about 1510, Europeans had begun capturing slaves and taking them to work in the Americas. They were able to do this easily because their weapons were much more powerful than the traditional spears and shields of the Africans. The Europeans exchanged guns for slaves and some African leaders and/or chiefs, eager to possess guns, which would give them power over rival chiefs, began inventing new crimes for which the punishment was slavery. Coastal Africans began to use guns to raid inland villages for the slaves that the Europeans wanted. Those who resisted capture were killed. Fear of the slave trader led many Africans to move to remote areas where the soil was not so good and they were unable to grow enough crops to feed themselves. Africa became a continent of violence, war, fear and famine ([http://www.historyonthenet.com/Slave\\_Trade/effectsonafrica.htm](http://www.historyonthenet.com/Slave_Trade/effectsonafrica.htm)).

An article in the *Encarta*, a CD, records that the removal of millions of young men and women from Africa led to depopulation in Africa. The depopulation stifled African creativity and production. Slaving and slave trading stimulated warfare and corrupted the laws (as leader made more crimes punishable by enslavement). The situation muted technological advancement and

created a class of elite rulers and traders. It is recorded in the article that the slave trade was the beginning of a dependency relationship with Europe. The relationship was based on the exchange of Africa's valuable primary products for European manufactured goods, which continued after the slave trade ended, through the colonial period and beyond. In this sense, the slave trade was the first step towards modern Africa's current status as a region where technological development is yet to match the pace of more industrialized nations. ("Atlantic Slave Trade", *Microsoft® Encarta® 2006* [CD]).

### ***The North-South trade imbalance***

The international economic system contributes enormously to the impoverishment and underdevelopment of Africa. The international economic system serves to keep the North rich and powerful at the expense of the poor and powerless South. Kinoti (1997:22-23) writes:

The South serves as the source of cheap agricultural and other raw materials and provides a captive market for the manufactured goods of the North. The North determines not only the prices the South must pay for essential goods and services which the South must import from the North, but also the prices she will pay for exports from the South. Attempts by the South to industrialise in order to achieve some measure of self-reliance are firmly resisted by the North through trade barriers and the control of capital goods, technology and finance.

The result of the relationship between the North and the South is an almost unbreakable dependence of the South on the North, which yields great economic gains for the North.

Kinoti argues that the North uses a wide range of mechanisms to maintain complete control of the international economic system:

The principal ones are national policies governing bilateral relations, multinational corporations, regional bodies such as the European Union, the UN and its agencies, the IMF and the World Bank. Official aid, Western NGOs, missionary work, the foreign radio and television programmes all help to create a favourable public opinion in the South, which facilitates continued manipulation and exploitation of the poor nations (Kinoti, 1997:25).

In addition to the external factors, a number of ***internal factors*** also contribute to poverty in Africa, which includes:



### ***Ruthless dictators and oppressive regimes***

Ndungu (2002:138) notes that Africa has witnessed the rise into power of ruthless dictators and oppressive military regimes, which "... have siphoned resources from their countries in order to remain in power". The concern of such leaders is their political survival and not a promotion of economic development and welfare of the people they lead.

Similarly, Kinoti (1997:18-19) writes that bad governance is unquestionably the most important cause of the socioeconomic crisis in Africa. The loss of democracy after independence and the development of autocracies have had disastrous consequences for African economies. Furthermore, political oppression and the monopoly of decision-making by dictators and their associates have caused widespread apathy, which has deepened with the deteriorating economic and social conditions. Kinoti notes that militarization, which is necessary to keep illegitimate regimes in power, has been very costly for Africa, because huge amounts of money have been squandered on the purchase of arms and on the upkeep of bloated armies. In such situations, the beneficiaries of militarization are the Western arms manufacturers and dealers, and the African ruling elite.

### ***Greed and corruption***

Greedy and corrupt leaders have contributed immensely to Africa's misery. Ndungu (2002:138) writes that, "The elite have looted the economies of their countries and banked the money in foreign accounts". He cites the leadership of Presidents Mobutu Sese Seko<sup>16</sup> of Zaire and Malawi's Kamuzu Banda, among others, as examples of such corrupt leaderships.

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<sup>16</sup> Despite the country's obvious natural resources, which include copper, gold and diamonds, much of Zaire's population continued to sink further into poverty. Regrettably, Mobutu, known for his trademark leopard-skin hat, amassed a personal fortune estimated to be as much as \$5 billion, and homes in Switzerland and France (<http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9709/07/mobutu.wrap/>).

Kinoti also notes that corruption, the theft of national resources and gross incompetence have created havoc in African economies. He then poses the question: Who is responsible for bad governance in Africa? Kinoti is of the view that the largest share of the blame is on the African political leaders. However, he argues that African autocratic rule would have been difficult without Western support. For example, the people of Zaire, now called the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), would not have suffered so much and for so long, were it not for assistance from USA, Belgium and France to Mr. Mobutu, the then president of Zaire. Kinoti also argues that the terrible civil wars, hunger and famine in Angola and Somalia might have been avoided if the USA was not actively involved in these countries. Misrule in Africa, Kinoti observes, is rooted in her colonial past and it is sustained by neo-colonial structures. Through political and military might, economic power, diplomacy and propaganda, the West exercises a decisive influence in the management (or rather the mismanagement) of public affairs in Africa (Kinoti, 1997:19-20).

In answer to his question on who is responsible for bad governance in Africa, Kinoti (1997:20-21) does not only blame the African political leaders, he points out that the church also has played a very important role in the misrule of Africa. He argues that whether the church recognizes it or not, it is a major political factor in Africa, but since independence, the church has contributed substantially to misrule by default, that is, through silence and inaction. Silence, in effect, means approval of the regime in power or of specific political actions. Kinoti cites two examples, one in Uganda, and the other, in South Africa. In Uganda, few church leaders such as Archbishop Janani Luwum and Bishop Festo Kivengere did confront Idi Amin and Milton Obote at some point. However, it was too late because the nation had already been ruined. In South Africa, the silence of majority of the church leadership allowed apartheid to take root. Kinoti observes that the Church in South Africa did little beyond making feeble protests when the Afrikaner government gave the notice, through the 1953 Bantu Education Act, of its intentions to take over mission schools, which were responsible for over 90% of African education. The clearly stated intention of the Act, by far the most devastating apartheid law, was to educate the Africans for servitude. The apartheid government went ahead and took over mission schools in 1955.

Kinoti further notes that the church in many other African countries is equally guilty of supporting repression, corruption and other evils, by her silence. This is particularly true of evangelical Christians who, while they claim to be biblical, are very selective in their use of the Scripture. Kinoti notes that the words of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Amos, for example, have only a limited place in their theology and agenda (Kinoti, 1997:21).

In addition to the sins of omission, the church in Africa is guilty of sins of commission.<sup>17</sup> Muslims have also played and continued to play similar roles to that played by Christians in actively promoting bad governance in some countries such as Sudan and Somalia, and passively doing so in others.

Nonetheless, in South Africa, some of the most powerful leaders of the struggle for freedom and human dignity have included persons who were moved by their Christian faith such as Albert Luthuli, Trevor Huddleston, Beyers Naudé and Desmond Tutu. In other countries such as Kenya, Malawi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), sections of the church have played crucial roles in what has been called “the liberalization” of Africa.

### ***Ethnicity***

Closely related to corruption is ethnicity or tribalism. Ethnicity is a dynamic that has brought about poverty in Africa. Ndungu sees ethnicity as “... a prevalent scourge in a number of African countries.” Ethnic clashes, which are politically motivated, have brought about loss of lives and destruction of property that, in some instances, was acquired over a long period. Ethnic violence brings about the weakening and shattering of economies of such countries. During instances of ethnic clashes, the nationals are turned into refugees and beggars within and outside of their own

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<sup>17</sup> Sections of the church have actively supported, and continued to support, thoroughly corrupt and oppressive regimes. In South Africa, for example, the support of apartheid by Dutch Reformed Church, which included providing a theological basis for the racist regime, was perhaps the most notorious. In some other countries in Africa, e.g. Ethiopia and Liberia, some clergymen and lay people gave active support to clearly corrupt and oppressive rulers in exchange for recognition, material gain, and tribal solidarity (Kinoti, 1997:21).

countries. Ndungu (2002:139) cites the cases of Sudan,<sup>18</sup> Somali,<sup>19</sup> Rwanda and Burundi<sup>20</sup> as examples of countries whose citizens have become internally and externally displaced.

An ethnic community, in itself, is good and necessary, because it gives its members a sense of identity, belonging and security. Ethnicity or tribalism is the problem. Ethnicity is responsible for political instability and conflict in most African countries. The cost of ethnicity (tribalism) to Africa has been colossal, i.e. in terms of deaths and suffering, economic loss, and the continuance of socioeconomic underdevelopment.

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<sup>18</sup> “Since February 2003, Sudan's western province of Darfur has been the site of extremely violent conflict between the province's nomadic Arab tribes, supported by the government in Khartoum, and the native African settled peasant tribes... The present conflict started in February 2003 and has rapidly developed into one of the most violent military confrontations on the continent. There have been an estimated 30,000 casualties, one million people are displaced within the province and over 120,000 have fled into neighboring Chad. The fight is basically between black African insurgents and the Khartoum government and its local agents, the Arab militias. The deep causes of the rebellion lie in the feeling of superiority and cultural elitism of the “Arabs”, and of resentment and perceived oppression and neglect on the part of the “Africans”. The “African” rebels point out that in spite of being a loyal part of the Muslim north; Darfur is in fact as badly off in terms of lack of infrastructure, neglect of education and economic underdevelopment as the Christian south” (<http://www.crimesofwar.org/onnews/news-darfur.html>).

<sup>19</sup> On February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2006, at least two more people were killed during the fourth day of the heaviest fighting to take place in the Somali capital in four years. Supporters of some of Mogadishu's militia leaders clashed with an armed Islamist group, which claimed to be trying to establish law and order. Opponents said the Islamic courts were terrorizing locals. Just on that single day, the clashes resulted in at least 17 deaths; most were attributed to civilians being struck by stray bullets. Accounts of the fighting were many and varied... some witnesses claimed that women were killed and children hurt when a mortar exploded near a milk factory. Since the overthrow of former military leader Mohamed Siad Barre in 1991, clashes between armed groups have been rampant in Somalia (<http://www.echolist.com/world/2006/february/news74180.html>).

<sup>20</sup> On April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1994, the plane of Rwanda's president Habyarimana was shot down over Kigali. Burundi president Ntaryamira was also killed in the crash, which many blame on Hutu extremists opposed to the Arusha accords. That night, the orchestrated slaughter of Rwandan Tutsis by Hutu militias began. By July of 1994, as many as 800,000 Tutsis had been killed, most by clubs and machetes ([http://www.britannica.com/worldsapart/4\\_timeline\\_print.html](http://www.britannica.com/worldsapart/4_timeline_print.html)).

Kinoti (1997:22) writes that the one difficulty with tribalism is often a case of beauty being in the eyes of the beholder. People would easily see tribalism in others while failing to notice it in themselves and in their ethnic group. He notes that tribalism, like racism, has two elements. One is prejudice, and the other is favoritism. On prejudice, Kinoti shows that one could be prejudiced against other ethnic communities – their customs, food, language, abilities, and physical appearance. Tribal arrogance on the part of the larger ethnic communities is oppressive to the smaller communities. On the other hand, a sense of inferiority can make a small tribe blindly hostile to members of the larger communities. The second element to ethnicity is favoritism. With favoritism, tribalism comes in handy in the competition for jobs, property, and power or prestige. Tribalism blinds people to truth and justice.

The church may also be guilty of ethnicity. Kinoti (1997:22) observes that even the church frequently seems to be powerless in the face of tribal considerations. Many Christians throw their Christianity to the wind when it comes to electing bishops or other high officials. Some communities would want to have their own kin in positions of influence regardless of that person's moral, spiritual, educational, or leadership qualifications.

### ***African culture***

Coupled with oppressive military regimes and ruthless dictators, greed and corruption, and ethnicity or tribalism, is the African culture. There are fine elements in traditional African culture such as strong family ties, generosity, and a strong community spirit. However, some aspects of African culture are also major hindrances to progress. Kinoti (1997:26-27) mentions four hindrances - Africans' attitude to work, disregard for time, fatalistic attitude to life, and tolerance of evil.

Regarding *Africans' attitude to work*, Kinoti states that hard, honest work and pride in work well done are largely alien concepts in Africa, even among Christians. On *disregard for time*, he asserts that Africans' disregard for time is well reflected in the idea of "African time", which presents itself in situations where males idle about, incurring economic loss. Moreover, a *fatalistic attitude to life* is so widespread in Africa that some traditional societies believe that everything that happens to them is the will of God, the work of evil spirits, or the curse of

departed elders. Epidemics, famines, drought, illness, infertility and death are all attributed to supernatural forces that are beyond human control or, at least, African control. Superstition, witchcraft, and sorcery remain common in Africa and are hindrances to economic, political, and social development. The fatalism and fear breed apathy, another serious problem facing Africa today. The fourth hindrance to Africa's development within African culture is tolerance of evil. There is such a high level of tolerance of evil in Africa, which ought not to. Such evils include oppression, famine, corruption, and disease. Tolerance perpetuates these evils within African societies, while a fatalistic acceptance of events coupled with cowardice, is responsible for the acceptance of evil (Kinoti, 1997:26-27).

Kinoti further observes that, among Christians, the erroneous notion that the world belongs to the devil and "worldly" people foster a mistaken "other-worldly" attitude. Such Christians would, therefore, try to detach themselves psychologically from the world, find comfort in their faith, and concentrate on evangelism and other spiritual work (Kinoti, 1997:27).

### ***Fast growing Population***

Another reason proposed as a cause of poverty in Africa is the continent's fast growing population. Western countries, the donor community, and the World Bank, by and large, attribute Africa's poverty to population growth. However, some African leaders dispute this notion as they wonder whether rapid population growth is a cause or, rather, a consequence of underdevelopment (poverty). Ndungu cites some cases such as Zambia and the DRC. The two countries are very poor yet they are endowed with resources, which could feed twenty times their present population. By global standards, population density in Africa is quite low since thirty nine out of fifty two countries in the continent have about ten million people each, while ten other countries have about one million people each. In fact, only three countries have populations over thirteen million<sup>21</sup> (Ndungu, 2002:139-140).

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<sup>21</sup> For a detailed account of this argument, see *World Hunger, a Challenge for All: Development in Solidarity*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, (1996:24).

In the last three decades, Africa's population has grown rapidly. The *Human Development Report* shows that the number of people in Africa increased to more than double from the 210 million people in 1960 to about 520 million in 1991 (Human Development Report, 1993: 180-181). Kinoti (1997:31) attributes this growth to a decline in infant mortality rate, while the decline in infant mortality is attributed to greater availability of health care for mothers and children, as well as an increase in the number of women with primary education, which enabled them to take better care of children.

The question here is whether the growing population is a blessing or a curse to Africa. The *World Development Report* shows that the annual growth rate of the continent's total production of goods and services (Gross Domestic Product) was only 0.8% during the 1980s (1980–1988) while the population grew at the rate of 3.2% (World Development Report, 1990:180-181). Kinoti (1997:32) notes that Africa has become progressively poor since the early 1970s, and, as a result, she has become less and less able to feed herself. She has become more dependent on food imports and on foreign charity. The *World Development Report* shows that hunger has increased dramatically in many parts of Africa, and that between 1974 and 1988, food aid in the form of cereals, rose from 910 tons to 3,583 tons – an increase of 294% (World Development Report, 1990:184-185). What then should Africa do with the rapid population growth?

### ***Poor Management***

According to Kinoti (1997:28), poor management is an endemic disease throughout Africa. Poor management is characteristic of all African institutions from the state, through cooperatives and churches, to business undertakings, hospitals and schools. In Chapter Ten of his book, *The Africans*, Ali Mazrui<sup>22</sup> describes the reversals of efforts to modernize Africa and the very sad decay of infrastructure all over Africa. Poor management is a terrible drag on progress.

### ***Education***

Education is fundamental to economic and social development. Widespread illiteracy, low education standards, and inappropriate education contribute very significantly to Africa's

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<sup>22</sup> A. A. Mazrui. 1986. *The Africans*. London: BBC Publications.

economic and social underdevelopment. Kinoti (1997:30-31) notes that the last three decades have seen impressive expansion of education in terms of enrolment in the primary, secondary and tertiary levels; however, Africa has a long way to go before every young African can get an opportunity for education. Kinoti also laments the low standard of education in African from the primary to the university level.

### ***Political instability, weak states institutions, and ineffective economic policies***

There are other causes of poverty in the African continent. In the article, *The Cries of the Poor: Response of the Church*, Philomena Njeri Mwaura writes that political instability, weak state institutions, and ineffective economic policies, among other factors, bring about situations of poverty in Africa. She asserts that, "...poverty in Africa... has been blamed on political instability, weak state institutions and ineffective economic policies pursued by governments in the last twenty-five years" (Mwaura, 2002:198).

Over the last few years, political instability has been witnessed in such countries as Somalia, Sudan and the DRC. For the DRC, the future seems bright especially after the elections of 2006 that saw president Kabila voted into power in open, free and fair elections. The situations in Sudan and Somalia remain sadly unchanged.

### ***Science and technology***

It is noted that there is no better indication of Africa's economic backwardness than the rudimentary state of science and technology on the continent (Kinoti, 1997:33). Kinoti argues that nothing shows the vulnerability of Africa like her complete dependence on the West for the most basic means of material development, namely, science and technology. Kinoti is of the view that until Africa attains some measure of self-reliance in this vital area, her economic and social conditions will not improve significantly:

At independence, many African governments drew up plans to modernize their countries using imported machinery and foreign technical experts. In a few years Africa became the graveyard of giant development projects and obsolete equipment on which African nations had spent much of their meager foreign exchange, usually taking loans from Western institutions to finance the projects. In the meantime, the Western corporations and technical experts involved were doing well financially while Africa's foreign debt was growing (Kinoti, 1997:33-34).



### ***Declining productivity in agriculture***

This factor has also contributed to the lowering of standards of living in Sub-Saharan Africa compared to other parts of the world (Kanyandago, 2002:198). Several reasons may be advanced for the decline in agricultural productivity including climate conditions that have become very unpredictable, continued reliance on archaic methods of farming, and lack of support from governments for farmers. Kinoti (1997:36) is of the view that the physical environment is an important factor in the socioeconomic crisis facing Africa. Large parts of the Sahel and parts of Eastern and Southern Africa are ecologically fragile, being subject to droughts periodically. Kinoti argues that Africa needs not be poor on account of the physical environment, because the continent has plenty of fertile, well-watered land, as well as mineral and other natural resources. Even the marginal lands could become productive with proper management.

### ***The economic policies of Structural Economic Adjustment Programmes (SAPs)***

The economic policies of the Structural Economic Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) have forced many countries in Africa to decrease domestic consumption, thus, shifting inadequate resources to production of cash crop exports. State owned companies and many state services have been privatized to cut on government spending. Civil service has been downsized, health and education expenditure have been cut and the system restructured. Mwaura writes that the evidence available from all countries where SAPs were imposed such as Ghana, Uganda and Kenya "...show that these countries' indebtedness has increased in the adjustment period while economic growth has not been sustainable" (Mwaura, 2002:199).

In *The Globalisation of Poverty: Impacts of IMF and World Bank Reforms*, Michel Chossudovsky writes on some of the consequences of the Structural Adjustment Programmes of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). He notes that the IMF's economic stabilization package is in theory intended to assist countries in restructuring their economies with a view to generating a surplus on their balance of trade so as to pay back the debt and initiate a process of economic recovery. However, exactly the opposite occurs! The very process of "belt-tightening" imposed by the creditors undermines economic recovery and the ability of countries to repay their debt. The underlying measures contribute to enlarging external debt in the sense that the new policy-

based loans granted to pay back old debt contribute to increasing the debt stock (Chossudovsky, 1997:68).

Secondly, trade liberalization tend to exacerbate the balance of payment crisis, since domestic production is replaced by imports and new quick-disbursing loans are granted to enable countries to continue importing goods from the world market. Thirdly, Chossudovsky (1997:68) notes that the SAPs have resulted in a significant shift from project lending and a consequent freeze on capital formation in all areas which do not directly serve the interests of the export economy. Furthermore:

The IMF-World Bank reforms brutally dismantle the social sectors of developing countries, undoing the efforts and struggles of the post-colonial period and reversing “with the stroke of a pen” the fulfillment of past progress. Throughout the developing world, there is a consistent and coherent pattern: the IMF-World Bank reform package constitutes a coherent programme of economic and social collapse. The... measures lead to the disintegration of the state, the national economy is remoulded, production for the domestic market is destroyed through the compression of real earnings and domestic production is redirected towards the world market. These measures go far beyond the phasing out of import-substituting industries. They destroy the entire fabric of the domestic economy (Chossudovsky, 1997:68-69).

Some of the causes of poverty discussed so far include those that are caused by factors external to Africa, as well as internal factors. The external factors include slave trade, colonialism, the North-South trade imbalance, the debt crisis, and the unfavourable terms of trade. The internal factors include the rise into power of ruthless dictators and oppressive military regimes, greed and corruption, crime, ethnicity, African culture, fast growing populations, poor management, education, political instability, weak states and ineffective economic policies, science and technology, declining productivity in agriculture, and the economic policies of the SAPs. Other factors noted include natural disasters, substance abuse, war, apartheid, illnesses and disabilities, improper taxation, and high government expenditure.

What, then, are the effects of poverty? This question will be investigated in the next paragraph.

### **2.4.3 Effects of Poverty**

What are the effects of poverty upon a people? It should be noted that some of the effects of poverty may also be causes of poverty, and in such cases, a *poverty cycle* is created. A number of effects of poverty have been advanced. The effects that will be discussed here include crime, substance abuse and mental illnesses, hunger and starvation, lack of sanitation, human trafficking, increase in suicide cases, homelessness, low income, infectious diseases, high mortality rate and low life expectancy, injustice, and increasing loss of political freedom and national dignity.

#### ***Crime***

One of the effects of poverty is crime. Poverty is closely associated with crime. Even though not all poor people are criminals and not all criminals are poor, it is argued that most people who live in environments that are dominated by poverty are likely to commit crimes and to be punished. ("Poverty". *Microsoft® Encarta®* 2006 [CD]).

Some experts believe that poverty leads people to commit acts of violence and crime. Anger, desperation, and the need for money for food, shelter, and other necessities may all contribute to criminal behaviour among the poor. Other experts caution that the link of cause and effect between poverty and crime is unclear. In some cases, poverty undoubtedly motivates people to commit crimes, although it may not be the only factor involved. Other problems associated with poverty are often linked to crime. For example, to obtain money, some poor people commit the crime of selling illegal drugs; others may steal to obtain the money to buy drugs on which they are dependent (Corbett, Thomas J. "Poverty." *Microsoft® Encarta®* 2006 [CD]).

A research carried out in Madagascar in early 2002 by Marcel Fafchamps and Bart Minten of the Centre for the Study of African Economics shows that crime increased with poverty. The research aimed to investigate the relationship between poverty and crime. Following a disputed presidential election, fuel to Madagascar was severely curtailed in 2002. When fuel to the country was curtailed, the research shows that there was an increase in poverty levels. At the height of the fuel crisis, the research found that crime increased with poverty. There was crop theft and cattle theft among other crimes. Increased in transport costs led to rise in cattle and crop

theft, which suggested to the researchers that when Madagascar was isolated, poverty rose as well as crime (Fafchamps & Minten, 2002).<sup>23</sup>

It could be argued that crime breeds poverty and such an argument would be correct, however, the above example from Madagascar show that poverty too, can and does lead to an escalation of crime levels.

### ***Substance abuse and mental illnesses***

Another effect of poverty is Substance abuse and Mental illnesses. Substance abuse and mental illnesses are common among the poor. It is argued that it is so in part because substance abuse and mental illnesses are the causes as well as resultant effects of poverty. It could also be because the poor do not have or may have very little medical provision that would enable them to deal effectively with such challenges. ("Poverty." *Microsoft® Encarta® 2006 [CD]*).

Other effects of poverty would include: Hunger and Starvation, Lack of Sanitation, Human Trafficking, Diseases and Disabilities, Increases in Suicides, Homelessness, Increased Discrimination, and Low Life Expectancy. Kinoti writes that the first consequence of poverty is hunger. He notes that, "... One out of every three Africans does not get enough to eat... Tens of millions of children in Africa suffer from malnutrition, which means retarded physical and mental development, disease, disability or death" (Kinoti, 1997:13).

### ***Low income***

Kinoti also observes that as far as income is concerned, Africa is the poorest continent on earth. He writes that in terms of income (i.e. Gross National Product – GNP per capita), two thirds of the poorest 40 nations in the world are African, as are eight of the poorest ten nations. He observes that the depth of Africa's poverty and humiliation is indicated by the fact that most of the nations in Africa cannot conduct relatively small functions like elections or referendums

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<sup>23</sup> See FAFCHAMPS, Marcel and Bart Minten. 25 December, 2002. *Crime and Poverty: Evidence from a Natural Experiment*. In <http://www.bepress.com/csae/paper182> and another article in [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=587401](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=587401)

without foreign aid. He notes that even small conferences frequently depend on external funding (Kinoti, 1997:13-14).

### ***Infectious diseases***

In Africa, Kinoti writes, infectious diseases cause untold suffering and claim millions of lives each year. Such diseases include malaria, respiratory infections, diarrheal diseases and bilharzia. These infectious diseases are a major scourge since the poor living conditions favour their transmission. Drugs and immunizations are too expensive (Kinoti, 1997:14).

The poor experience high rates of infectious disease. Inadequate shelter or housing creates conditions that promote disease. Without decent protection, many of the poor are exposed to severe and dangerous weather as well as to bacteria and viruses carried by other people and animals. In the tropics, monsoons and hurricanes can destroy the flimsy shelters of the poor. Once exposed, people are vulnerable to fluctuations in temperature that lower their resistance to disease. They also are more likely to become infected with diseases carried by insects or rodents. For instance, mosquitoes carry malaria, a debilitating disease that is common in the tropics. In arid regions, drought leaves the poor without clean water for drinking or bathing. In temperate climates, including in the major cities of developed countries, homelessness is a growing problem. Many of the homeless poor are harmed by or die of exposure to extreme winter cold (Corbett, Thomas J. "Poverty." *Microsoft® Encarta® 2006* [CD]).

Inadequate sanitation and unhygienic practices among the poor also lead to illness. Inadequate sanitation almost always accompanies inadequate shelter. Because the poor in developing nations commonly have no running water or sewage facilities, human excrement and garbage accumulate, quickly becoming a breeding ground for disease. In cities especially in ghettos and shantytowns that house only poor people, overcrowding can lead to high transmission rates of airborne diseases, such as tuberculosis. The poor are also often uneducated about the spread of diseases, notably sexually transmitted infections (STIs). As a result - and because prophylactic devices such as condoms may be hard to obtain or afford especially in developing countries - STI rates are high among the poor. In particular, the incidence of acquired immunodeficiency

syndrome (AIDS) among poor people is higher than average (Corbett, Thomas J. "Poverty." *Microsoft® Encarta® 2006 [CD]*).

Along with the problem of a high incidence of disease, developing countries also have shortages of doctors. Medicine and treatment are often both scarce and too expensive for the poor. For example, only 18 percent of children in Somalia had been immunized against diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus in 1999; the comparable rate in the United States was 96 percent. In addition, many people who live in rural areas of developing countries cannot get to doctors located in urban areas. In developed countries, the poor may also have no health insurance, making the costs of health care unaffordable (Corbett, Thomas J. "Poverty." *Microsoft® Encarta® 2006 [CD]*).

### ***High mortality rates and low life expectancy***

Notable results of the inability of many African countries to afford medicines that deal with infectious and other types of diseases are high mortality rates and low life expectancy. The *World Development Report* shows that, in 1993, the infant mortality rates in Africa averaged 93 deaths for every 1,000 live births, ranging from, for example, 164 deaths a year in Sierra Leone, through 91 in Cote d'Ivoire to 42 in Botswana. The infant mortality rates in the richest nations averaged 7 in the same period. Regarding life expectancy, the same report shows that, in 1993, life expectancy in Africa was 52, compared to 77 in Western Europe and North America (*World Development Report, 1993:292-3, 238-9*).

### ***Injustice***

Kinoti further writes that poverty displays injustice, for it is unjust for one to live in great luxury and their neighbour in abject poverty. The richest 10% of the peoples of Tanzania, Kenya, and Zimbabwe take nearly 50% of the national income, while the poorest 20% take only 2-4%. A few Africans are among the richest in the world, and those who are rich are mostly presidents and people with powerful political connections, which they use to enrich themselves, at the expense of fellow citizens (Kinoti, 1997:15). In this case, injustice is a cause and an effect of poverty.

### ***Increasing loss of political freedom and national dignity***

One other effect of poverty that may affect poor nations, especially those in Africa, is the increasing loss of political freedom and national dignity. Although one should not object to the conditions for aid that are set by the West, one wonders about the future of Africa whose political, economic and social policies are dictated by the IMF, the World Bank, the UN, and other agents of the West. Kinoti (1997:17-18) observes that there are many people of goodwill in the West; however, nothing in the relations of Africa with Western nations suggests that Africa's wellbeing, and not her exploitation, is the principal motive behind the activities of those nations<sup>24</sup>.

Some of the effects of poverty noted include crime, substance abuse and mental illnesses, hunger and starvation, lack of sanitation, human trafficking, increase in suicide rate, homelessness, increased discrimination, high mortality rates and low life expectancy, low income, infectious diseases, injustice, and increased loss of political freedom and national dignity. It is also important to note that poverty breeds more poverty.

#### **2.4.4 The poverty trap**

It is significant to point out that *poverty breeds more poverty*. In situations of abject poverty, poverty itself has a tendency to breed more poverty. There are situations where the handicap of poverty is passed down from one generation to generation. This could occur when the family is caught in a trap of poverty, "...a situation in which a relatively small increase in income will take the family over the threshold for entitlement to benefits, thereby creating a net loss." A possible consequence is that members of the household may be discouraged from seeking employment, therefore, losing the opportunities for social advancement that such employment might afford them ("Poverty." *Microsoft® Encarta® 2006 [CD]*).

Smith (2005:12-17) proposes sixteen major poverty traps that keep the poor enslaved to the vicious cycle of poverty. Although this is not an exhaustive list, it does reflect the range of

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<sup>24</sup> In his 1991 book, *Lords of Poverty*, Graham Hancock provides a wealth of evidence to show that official aid is, quite bluntly, a cover for economic and political exploitation of poor nations.

problems that affect the poor. The poverty traps are listed as traps of: Family Child Labour<sup>25</sup>, Illiteracy<sup>26</sup>, Working Capital<sup>27</sup>, Uninsurable-risk<sup>28</sup>, Debt Bondage<sup>29</sup>, Information,<sup>30</sup> Under-

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<sup>25</sup> In a family child labour trap, parents may be too unhealthy and unskilled to be productive enough to support their family. Consequently, the children would have to work. In such a case where children work, they cannot receive the kind of education that they deserve, such that by the time they are parents, they will have to send their own children to work, and not to school. In this way, poverty is transmitted across generations (Smith, 2005:12).

<sup>26</sup> Illiteracy trap is closely related to the problem of child labour trap, in the sense that, even in situations that parents may not send their children to work, the parents may not send their children to school because they are poor and cannot afford such things as transportation, school uniforms, or a modest school fee. If the poor families could borrow money from the credit facilities, the higher incomes received by the child a few years later by their then-literate child, could pay back the loans easily. But if the poor lack access to credit, they may not be able to get loans to finance otherwise very productive schooling (Smith, 2005:12).

<sup>27</sup> Lack of credit also plays a role in the poverty traps. Smith (2005:13) writes that, “In a working capital trap, a micro entrepreneur must make do with an inventory too small to be productive – but this means she will also have too little net income to have a larger inventory in the future.” Smith illustrate this point thus: “For example, I met a woman in Ecuador trying to make ends meet by selling three pairs of used American jeans door to door – all she could afford to hold. But that made a chance for a sale – a matching style and size that the customers want – so low that her income was not enough to buy a large inventory the next day.” Smith further observes that despite the explosion over the last 15 years of microfinance institutions (MFIs) giving small loans to the poor, they are currently serving just 11 percent of the world’s 240 million poorest families. This statistic suggests that working capital traps are still pervasive.

<sup>28</sup> More often than not, it is the people with the fewest assets who face the greatest chances of losing what is most important to them. Such would include their land, their basic nutrition, and their health – the greatest uninsured risk. Smith (2005:13) observes that the majority of the poor are farmers, and they are generally unable to get any weather insurance. Consequently, they have to orient their entire approach to farming to minimize the risk of a catastrophic drought, or other shock in which their families face ruin. However, such an approach to farming also makes it unlikely that they can take advantage of opportunities to do much better and begin to build assets that can lift them out of poverty in the long run. Subsequently, these poor farmers are unable to change their circumstances in a way that would let them gain more security against high risks in the future. Although the poor may show great ingenuity in developing informal risk-sharing arrangements in their communities, the result can be considerable distortions and inefficiencies that also retard the rate of economic progress.



nutrition and illness,<sup>31</sup> Low-skill,<sup>32</sup> High Fertility,<sup>33</sup> Subsistence,<sup>34</sup> Farm Erosion,<sup>35</sup> Common Property Mismanagement,<sup>36</sup> Collective Action,<sup>37</sup> Criminality,<sup>38</sup> Mental Health,<sup>39</sup> and Powerlessness.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> While credit is needed, the wrong kind of debt from unscrupulous moneylenders can also be a trap. Smith (2005:13) notes that colluding moneylenders calibrate loan amounts and interest payments to ensure that a family can never get out of debt. He observes that sometimes the rate of pay for impoverished people working for their creditors is so low that it is insufficient even to pay back the interest they owe. He notes that, “Such is the plight of tens of thousands of low-caste salt workers in rural India”. Although bonded workers may be allowed to keep a subsistence income so that they can survive to work, essentially all the surplus is extracted by the moneylender in an endless cycle of debt. Terms are designed so that the more one works, or the more productive one becomes, the more one must pay to the master: the quick sand of poverty. The children of such bonded labourers will be born into bondage, never to escape. This is slavery, but by another name.

<sup>30</sup> Impoverished labourers, including housemaids, and others among the poorest of the poor do work long hours each day just to “put one or two meals on the table”. Even though there may be existing options that would pay a higher remuneration, these people may have no time or energy to inform themselves about what these occupations pay, or how to work in them. In such cases, their employers may not have incentives to help their workers to learn about better opportunities, and may even work to prevent such moves. Lack of access to information keeps the poor in poverty and conditions of poverty prevent the poor from getting information needed to escape from poverty (Smith, 2005:14).

<sup>31</sup> In a situation where an undernourished person is too weak to work productively, her resulting income is too small to pay for sufficient food, so that she continues to work with low productivity for low wages. This is an under-nutrition trap, and it is an extreme form of structural poverty, which is found in families and deeply impoverished areas. A comparable vicious cycle may keep chronically ill, but treatable people, in bondage of poverty. Poor shelter from severe weather, can cause sleeplessness and prolonged illness, therefore, reducing one’s earning power along with the chance of affording better housing (Smith, 2005:14).

<sup>32</sup> Under circumstances where there is no employer in a particular region who would be seeking skilled workers, (for example, basic manufacturing jobs) there would be no visible incentive for individuals to invest in attaining such skills. On the other hand, if there is no workforce available with these skills, outside investors may not invest in the region. This kind of trap is the “chicken or the egg problem”, which one comes first, the investment or the skills? Although governments may be called to help, some governments may be lacking in resources due to such conditions as high debt burden. A way out of such poverty would be difficult or impossible from within the trapped economy (Smith, 2005:14).

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<sup>33</sup> High fertility traps is found in situations where families have many children, and few decent jobs to go around. In such cases, families give birth to too many children with the hope that these children would take care of them (parents), when they grow old. There is a possibility that such people could be better off if they had a low fertility rate, but how can one expect a poor, powerless woman in an obscure village to make such a change? (Smith, 2005:15).

<sup>34</sup> Overall, the majority of the poor do not specialize. However, people can only specialize if, for example, they can trade their skill for the other goods and services they need. When, for example, everyone within a particular region practices subsistence agriculture, there would be no one to sell to, and one will be faced with the sad reality of producing for subsistence with perhaps a little trading on the side. An alternative to such a situation would be to produce for more distant markets. However, to do so, one must first know of them, must somehow get the product to these markets, and indeed must convince distant buyers of its quality. The result of the inability to do so can be an underdevelopment trap in which a region remains stuck in subsistence agriculture (Smith, 2005:15).

<sup>35</sup> Smith (2005:15) observes that in farm erosion traps, the poor are so desperate for food that they have to overuse their land even though they know the results will be reduced soil fertility and productivity, and ultimately even desertification. During famine periods, poor farmers have been known to feed on the seeds they had saved from the previous harvest. In such cases, their families are faced with the sad reality of starvation. Smith (2005:15-16) notes that, “This is a metaphor for the basic problem. Even though you know you are overusing your soil and that it will degrade if you do not rest it or plant less aggressively, the degradation happens at some point in the future. You have to grow more food today to keep your family from becoming badly undernourished. But in the end, you are simply trapped into the cycle of poverty.” Any gains obtained in productivity from learning new techniques may be undermined by the poorer quality of the soil, and while fertilizers and other land improvements might be a good investment by conventional calculations, they are of no help if one cannot afford them or borrow to finance them.

<sup>36</sup> Mismanagement of common property involves situations, for example, where lakes are over fished, forests are not managed in a sustainable manner, and land is overgrazed. What constitutes such a problem is the reality that community management of common resources has broken down, coupled with a legacy of greedy colonial practices, and now all too often imitated by post-colonial regimes. Smith observes that, “Once broken down, responsible use of shared resources is difficult to restore. Put in stark terms, someone in this predicament may think, *“if I do not fish today even at sustainable levels, someone else will catch those fish instead of me – either way, I will catch fewer fish tomorrow”* [Italics, mine] (2005:16).

<sup>37</sup> Time and again, a community of poor people can improve its conditions by working collectively on joint projects. However, such joint projects require leaders who have time to organize. Generally, the poor do not have the time

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and the resources to do this. Furthermore, for the reason that the payoff of group action goes to the group and not just the coordinator, the reward rarely makes up for the risk. Consequently, it can be difficult for individuals to take the initial steps (Smith, 2005:16).

<sup>38</sup> Smith (2005:16) makes a note of the fact that young people (youths) who do not have access to useful education, and who see little future in legitimate work are drawn to gang membership, and other cultures of criminality. The emotional scars from the experience of violence also reinforce such trends. The results from such a way of life include fights, thefts, and criminal activities, which in the long run multiply the community's poverty trap by destroying assets, diverting resources to provide for personal and property security, and even taking the lives of able-bodied young men. In many cases, majority of the victims are innocent, and poor. Such a situation of worsening social and economic conditions draws people into criminality, a vicious circle that reinforces poverty.

<sup>39</sup> Depression and anxiety are pervasive among the poor in many developing countries, due, in part, to poverty and its associated powerlessness. In Smith's (2005:16) words, "Being unsure where your family's next meal is coming from creates tremendous emotional stress. Many poor people are deeply ashamed of their poverty, even when it is not their fault. They commonly have to endure daily mocking and humiliation for their circumstances. And they usually feel terrible that they are unable to provide adequately for their children. This inability creates chronic feelings of hopelessness and anguish." In addition, depression and anxiety are inflicted upon the poor, especially when the rich abuse and terrorize the poor to keep them from gaining any bargaining power. To compound the situation, the women face domestic violence and abuse, along with a lack of personal identity, factors which contribute to the much higher incidence of depression among women than men. Once depression takes root, a poor person can become listless, exhausted, and unable to take initiative. Drug and alcohol abuse also become increasingly common – and so depression also becomes a cause of poverty. A vicious cycle ensues, making poor mental health a form of poverty trap (Smith, 2005:16-17).

<sup>40</sup> Smith (2005:17) notes that the condition of powerlessness is a trap in which it is not only the relatively impersonal forces such as the environment or even the market that keeps the poor ensnared, but the active convenience of the rich, who benefit from low wages and subservience. He further states that, "*Poverty entrapment is poverty of, by, and for the rich*" [italics mine]. The poor, then, remain in poverty not because they want to, but because of the many barriers deliberately built around them by those who benefit from their poverty. Such barriers would include nexus of landlords, colluding moneylenders, corrupt officials, and the very few in the world who would be better off if poverty continued than if it was ended.

From the discussion of the poverty traps above, the indication is that, not only is poverty not the fault of the poor, the underlying cause of poverty usually blamed on the poor such as high fertility, may also be a result of poverty.

It is, however, important to note that these traps are pure types, not an exact description that necessarily applies to any one person. In particular, some poor people may show many of these “symptoms” and others may not appear to be affected by any. These traps are guides to general understanding, not a ready-made checklist to diagnosis and action.

## **2.5 Globalization and Poverty**

In this short section of the chapter, an attempt is made to show the connection between globalization and poverty. Awareness of the existence of such a connection is helpful in understanding the negative effects of globalization and may inform efforts and the kind of approaches chosen to respond to these effects when responding to poverty and the concerns of the poor and vulnerable. The benefits and the disadvantages of globalization will be discussed briefly below.

In her book, *Globalization at What Price?*, Pamela K. Brubaker notes that the term globalization has been widely used for more than a decade. It was first used to refer to rapidly expanding political and economic interdependence, particularly among Western states (Brubaker, 2007:13). In a book they edited, *The Global Transformations Reader: An Introduction to the Globalization Debate*, David Held and Anthony McGrew are of the view that globalization is “the expanding scale, growing magnitude, speeding up and deepening impact of interregional flows and patterns of social interaction”. They point out that the process of globalization is deeply divisive and vigorously contested because a significant portion of the world’s population is largely excluded from its benefits (Held & McGrew, 2007:1, 3-4).

Rebecca Todd Peters, in her book, *In Search of the Good Life: The Ethics of Globalization*, writes that the effects of globalization differ depending on one’s relative status as - wealthy versus poor, “first” world versus “two-third” world, and not formally educated versus formally

educated. It is, primarily, the lifestyle of the wealthy privileged “first” world constituencies that produce globalization through their habits and practices (Peters, 2004:26).

In his book, *Globalization and Its Discontent* Joseph E. Stiglitz<sup>41</sup> discusses some of the benefits and the disadvantages of globalization. In his view:

- Has opened up international trade, which, in turn, has helped many countries grow far much more quickly than they would have done. He writes that international trade helps economic development when a country’s exports drive its economic growth. The closer integration of countries and peoples of the world has been brought about by the enormous reduction of costs of transport and communication, and the breaking down of artificial barriers to the flow of goods, services, capital, knowledge, and people across borders. The globalization of the economy has benefited countries which took advantage of it by seeking new markets for their exports, and by welcoming foreign investment (Stiglitz, 2002:4, 248).
- Has made many people in the world to live longer than before, and their standard of living is much better. People in the West may regard low-paying jobs at Nike as exploitation, but for many people in the developing world, working in a factory is a far better option than staying down on the farm or growing rice. Globalization has helped hundreds of millions of people attain higher standards of living, beyond what they, or most economists thought imaginable several years ago (Stiglitz, 2002:4, 248).
- Has reduced the sense of isolation felt in much of the developing world, and has given many people in the developing countries access to knowledge well beyond the reach of even the wealthiest in any country a century ago. Links forged through internet communication, led to the pressure to sign the international landmines treaty, despite the opposition of many powerful governments. A similar, well-orchestrated public pressure

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<sup>41</sup> In 2007, Joseph Stiglitz wrote another book, *Making Globalization Work*, to shift and further the debate the merits of particular reform measures in an attempt to make globalization work. In this book, Stiglitz proposes that we can bring ethics back into business, that corporate governance can recognize the rights not only of shareholders but also of others who are touched by the actions of the corporations. He is of the view that an engaged and educated citizenry can understand how to make globalization work, or at least work better. An educated citizenry can demand that their political leaders shape globalization, accordingly.

forced international community to forgive the debts of some of the poorest countries. Globalization of ideas on democracy and of civil society has changed the way people think, while global political movements have led to debt relief (Stiglitz, 2002:4, 248).

- Has brought in foreign aid. Foreign aid is an aspect of a globalized world. World Bank-financed projects have included irrigation projects and education projects. In a few countries, AIDS projects have helped to contain the spread of this deadly disease (Stiglitz 2002:5).

For many in the developing world, especially Africa,<sup>42</sup> where the majority live in poverty, globalization has not brought the promised social and economic benefits. Stiglitz (2002:5) writes that the proponents of globalization have been unbalanced. To the proponents, globalization is progress, which the poor developing countries must accept if they are to grow and to fight poverty effectively.

Some of the disadvantages of globalization noted by Stiglitz are:

- A growing divide between the *haves* and the *have-nots*. Such a division has left increasing numbers in the Third World in dreadful poverty, living on less than a dollar a day. Despite repeated promises of poverty reduction made over the last decade of the twentieth century, the actual number of people living in poverty has increased by almost 100 million.<sup>43</sup> Many have actually been made worse off by globalization, as they have seen their jobs destroyed and their lives become insecure (Stiglitz, 2002:5, 248).

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<sup>42</sup> For a discussion on both the political and economic aspects of globalization, especially in South Africa, see Russel Botman's article, "Human dignity and economic globalization", in *NGTT* (2004:317-327). In this article, Botman addresses the question of whether the achievements of the human rights discourse may be at stake in what he calls "the current context of economic globalization."

<sup>43</sup> Stiglitz's (2000:29) view coincides with the World Bank's statement that, in 1990, 2.718 billion people were living on less than \$2 a day. In 1998, the number of the poor living on less than \$2 a day is estimated at 2.801. Additional data is found in the *World Development Report and World Economic Indicators*, an annual publication of the World Bank. Information on health can be found in UNAIDS/WHO's, *Report on the HIV/AIDS Epidemic*, 1998.

- Globalization has succeeded in neither reducing poverty, nor ensuring stability. Crisis in Asia and in Latin America have threatened the economies and the stability of all developing countries. There are fears of financial contamination spreading around the world that the collapse of one emerging market currency will mean that others will fall as well (Stiglitz, 2002:6).
- Globalization and the introduction of a market economy have not produced the promised results of unprecedented prosperity. For example, in Russia, it has brought unprecedented poverty (Stiglitz, 2002:6).
- The Western countries have pushed the poor countries to eliminate trade barriers, but kept up their barriers, preventing developing countries from exporting their agricultural products and so depriving them of desperately needed export income (Stiglitz, 2002:6).
- Globalization seems to undermine traditional values. Economic growth results in urbanization, undermining traditional rural societies (Stiglitz, 2002:247).
- Globalization seems to replace the old dictatorship of national elites with new dictatorship of international finance. Poor countries are required by the IMF to follow certain conditions, the capital markets, or risk financial support. Many have felt increasingly powerless against forces beyond their control. They have seen their democracies undermined, their cultures eroded (Stiglitz, 2002:247-248).

It is manifest, from the perspective of the poor and vulnerable, that as much as there are benefits to what globalization has brought, the disadvantages continue to prevail over the benefits. The price, which the poor have had to pay, has been great, as the environment has been destroyed, political processes have been corrupted, and the rapid pace of change has not allowed countries enough time for cultural adaptation. The cries of massive unemployment have been followed by longer-term problems of social dissolution - from urban violence to ethnic conflicts in poor countries (Stiglitz, 2002:8).

Peters (2004:206-207) also argues that, in the context of global inequality, where two hundred richest people may control \$1 trillion in assets and have a tremendous amount of power in shaping the engines of globalization in the form of corporations and international financial institutions, the reality is that the “economic” success of our globalizing economy is dependent

on the consumer behaviour of a far larger group of people. The responsibility, therefore, for addressing economic globalization falls on more than just the top one percent of the world's wealthy. Peters is of the view that the comfort and success of the global elite around the world are a direct result of a system that offers garbage scavenging as an acceptable way of life. In such a world, Peters retorts, we are obligated to expose this system as morally untenable and to discern our own role in perpetuating it.

Despite the advantages of globalization, namely, decline in transportation and communication, reduction of human-made barriers to the flow of goods, services, and capital, unfortunately, there is no world government accountable to the people of every country to oversee the globalization process in a fashion comparable to the way national governments guide national processes. What the world has, in the words of Stiglitz (2002:21-22), is:

...a system that might be called *global governance without global government*, one in which a few institutions – the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO – and a few players – the finance, commerce, and trade ministries, closely linked to certain financial interests – dominate the scene, but in which many of those affected by their decisions are left almost voiceless.

The current situation is clearly inadequate; and change, particularly regarding the rules which govern the international economic order, is necessary. There has to be a re-thinking of how decisions are made at the international level, and interests of who is being served. Less emphasis should be placed on ideology, but on what works especially from the perspective of the poor in vulnerable countries. Stiglitz (2002:22) urges that:

Globalization can be reshaped, and when it is, when it is properly, fairly run, with all countries having a voice in policies affecting them, there is a possibility that it will help create a new global economy in which growth is not only more sustainable and less volatile but the fruits of this growth are more equitably shared.

It will not be easy to change how things are done. Bureaucracies, like one who got into a bad habit and is adapting to change, can be painful. However, the international institutions must undertake the possibly painful changes, which will enable them to play the role they *should* play in making globalization work, not just for the benefits of the well off and the industrialized countries, but for the poor and the developing countries.



The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) adopted the Accra Declaration<sup>44</sup> in 2004,<sup>45</sup> which highlighted and criticized the negative consequences of globalization. A joint research project of the *Evangelisch Reformierte Kirche* (ERK) in Germany, the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), and the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology (BNC) at University of Stellenbosch has investigated the role which globalization plays in the growth of poverty and inequality in the world.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The Accra Declaration is a document of forty-two paragraphs, which comprises of the introduction and three other sections. The second section sheds light on the nature of our world and the way it is to be interpreted. The third section is about the confession of faith in the face of economic injustice and ecological destruction while the fourth section titled, “Covenanting Justice”, suggests practical commitments and calls. Dirkie Smit wrote an article, “Theological Assessment and Ecclesiological Implications of the Accra Document ‘Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth – Tentative Comments for Discussion’”, in Boesak and Hansen (eds), *Globalization: The Politics of Empire, Justice and the Life of Faith*. In this article, Smit writes that, “...the Accra document is not and cannot be the final word – and it does not claim or want to be that. It is... a call to the many social forms of the church to commit themselves to the process, because they confess that nothing less than the integrity of their Christian faith, life and witness is at stake. It is a matter of life. It is a call to consider together with one another and together with other social institutions and powers – and critical questions will be with whom, and with whom not, and why – what could and should be done to love and serve justice in the face of injustice and exclusion of the global economy today, and in the face of ecological destruction and impending disaster. In asking what could be done, it would be important for Reformed churches not to exclude and disempower the poor, the marginalized and the weak, the oppressed, the suffering and the downtrodden, but precisely to help them to live actively according to their calling” (Smit, 2009:184).

<sup>45</sup> Boesak and Hansen. 2009. *Globalization: The Politics of Empire, Justice and the Life of Faith*, Page i.

<sup>46</sup> The joint research project produced a book in 2009 titled, *Globalization: The Politics of Empire, Justice and the Life of Faith*, edited by Allan Boesak and Len Hansen. This book captures insights and perspectives of participants in the discourse of globalization from diverse disciplines and contexts. Other publications include *Dreaming a Different World: Globalization and Justice for Humanity and the Earth. The Challenge of the Accra Confession for the Churches*, published in May 2010, and edited by Allan Boesak, Johann Weusmann, and Charles Amjad-Ali; Conference Proceedings published in *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, Vol. 65, No. 1, 2009; *Global Crisis, Global Challenge, Global Faith: An Ongoing Response to the Accra Confession*. Beyers Naudé Centre Series on Public Theology, Volume V. Edited by Allan Boesak & Len Hansen.

The church may not have the capacity to provide all the answers in the fight against the negative effects of globalization, but it can provide a framework within which to offer alternative, ethical responses to the process. This brief analysis has demonstrated that poverty has become more intense and globalized for many vulnerable people, as a result of the negative impact of some global economic forces.

## 2.6 Measures Undertaken to Eradicate Poverty

In this section, certain measures that have been undertaken to eradicate poverty are discussed. The measures include economic growth, direct aid, improving the social environment and abilities of the poor, Millennium Development Goals, and foreign aid.

### 2.6.1 Economic growth

The World Bank has an anti-poverty strategy. This strategy is based on reducing poverty through the promotion of economic growth<sup>47</sup> ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty#Poverty\\_reduction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty#Poverty_reduction)).

Economic growth is understood as:

...the increase in value of the goods and services produced by an economy. It is conventionally measured as the percent rate of increase in real gross domestic product, or *GDP*. Growth is usually calculated in *real* terms, i.e. inflation-adjusted terms, in order to net out the effect of inflation on the price of the goods and services produced ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic\\_growth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_growth)).

As shown in the above webpage, the real GDP *per capita* of an economy is often used as an indicator of an average standard of living of individuals in a country. The challenges, nonetheless, with using growth in GDP per capita to measure general wellbeing include the fact that GDP *per capita*:

- Does not provide any information relevant to the distribution of income in a country;

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<sup>47</sup> See article:

(<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/EXTPGI/0,,contentMDK:20263370~menuPK:342777~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:342771,00.html>).

- Does not take into account negative externalities from pollution consequent to economic growth; thus, the amount of growth may be overstated once we take pollution into account;
- Does not take into account positive externalities that may result from services such as education and health;
- Excludes the value of all the activities that take place outside of the market place (such as cost-free leisure activities like games).

This approach has not been able to work directly and actively to reduce or eliminate poverty ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty#Poverty\\_reduction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty#Poverty_reduction)).

### **2.6.2 Direct aid**

By direct aid is meant a situation where the government of a country formulates policies that would enable it to help those citizens who are in need directly. This has been applied with mixed results in most Western societies during the twentieth century in what became known as the welfare state. Direct help is given to those who are most at risk, i.e. the elderly and people with disabilities. Such direct help would come in the form of monetary or food aid ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty#Poverty\\_reduction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty#Poverty_reduction)).

By direct aid, is *also* meant aid from private charities. This “...is often formally encouraged within the legal system”. Examples would include charitable trusts and tax deductions for charity ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty#Poverty\\_reduction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty#Poverty_reduction)).

### **2.6.3 Improving the social environment and abilities of the poor**

Improving the social environment and abilities of the poor could take the form of subsidization. It would include subsidized housing, education, and healthcare. It also takes the form of assistance in finding employment, encouragement of political participation and community organizing ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty#Poverty\\_reduction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty#Poverty_reduction)).

#### 2.6.4 Millennium Development Goals

The Millennium Development Goals are goals that 191 United Nations member states have agreed to try to achieve by the year 2015 ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Millennium\\_Development\\_Goals](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Millennium_Development_Goals)). The United Nations Millennium Declaration that was signed in September 2000 commits the states to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability, and develop a global partnership for development ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_Nations\\_Millennium\\_Declaration](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Millennium_Declaration)).

#### 2.6.5 Foreign aid

Some developed and wealthy countries provide *foreign aid* to developing nations. One major type of foreign aid is development aid, which is given by developed countries to support economic development in developing countries. Humanitarian aid, on the other hand, is a short-term foreign aid used to alleviate suffering caused by a humanitarian crisis such as genocide, famine, or a natural disaster. Finally, military aid is used to assist an ally in its defense efforts, or to assist a poor country in maintaining control over its own territory ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foreign\\_aid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foreign_aid)).

Some think tanks and NGOs have argued, however, that Western monetary aid often only serves to increase poverty and social inequality, either because it is conditioned with the implementation of harmful economic policies in the recipient countries, or because it is tied with the importing of products from the donor country over cheaper alternatives. Critics also argue that much of the foreign aid is stolen by corrupt governments and officials, and that higher aid levels erode the quality of governance. Policy becomes much more oriented toward what will get more aid money than it does towards meeting the needs of the people

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty#Direct\\_aid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty#Direct_aid)),

(<http://www.heritagekonpa.com/archives/Haiti;s%20rice%20farmers%20suffered%20since%20trade%20barrier%20in%201994.htm>), (<http://ipsnews.net/interna.asp?idnews=24509>), and

(<http://abcnews.go.com/2020/story?id=1955664&page=1>).

Supporters of the idea of foreign aid argue that these problems are solved with better audit of how the aid is used. Aid from non-governmental organizations may be more effective than governmental aid; this may be because it is better at reaching the poor and better controlled at the grassroots level ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty#Foreign\\_aid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty#Foreign_aid)).

The approaches so far mentioned are attempts at eradicating poverty. In some ways, these approaches seem to alleviate the plight of those in poverty. The two measures mentioned above, which have not provided meaningful relief to the poor are, promotion of economic growth and foreign aid. Promotion of economic growth has not eliminated poverty. Foreign aid is seen to have increased social inequalities, implementation of harmful economic policies by the recipient countries, and cases where corrupt officials have stolen that aid. The other measures discussed include direct Aid, improving the social environment and abilities of the poor, and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The scope of poverty, globally, and Africa, in particular, is an indication that the efforts which have been put in place to respond to poverty have not been very successful in eradicating poverty.

An evident factor is the fact that the majority of the poor people, globally, are black. Such a phenomenon raises the question of whether there is any link between poverty and blackness.

## **2.7 Poverty and Blackness**

The relationship between poverty and blackness is examined in this section. In the foregoing analysis, it has been shown that poverty is expressed in its most extreme forms in Africa, more than in any other continent. This, therefore, demonstrates that there is a link between poverty and blackness. Although one would like to avoid generalizations, it is notable that the majority of the poor on earth are black people. Africa is referred to as the third world, while the West and Asia are referred to as the first and second worlds respectively.

It is also notable that not only the black people in Africa continue to ravage in poverty. In fact, the majority of black people out of Africa, e.g. in the USA and Europe, are poor compared to non-blacks.

To illustrate this point, one would consider the case of Hurricane Katrina.<sup>48</sup> In an article written by Virginia R. Dominguez<sup>49</sup> titled *Seeing and Not seeing: Complicity in Surprise*, it is observed that the majority, if not all, who suffered the hurricane were black people. Dominguez reports that:

New Orleans is really a very American city, its French and Spanish history notwithstanding. Poverty and blackness are very American things. They are the way of life of many homegrown Americans and not just foreign-born Americans. A very disproportionate part of the American population of African origin is poor, without decent healthcare, and with inadequate economic opportunities or means. Yes, the poverty rate is higher in the State of Louisiana (19.6%) and higher still within New Orleans city limits, and the percentage of the population that is recorded as black is closer to 1 in 3 for the State and two-thirds within New Orleans city limits (<http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/Dominguez/>).

Le Bruyns and Pauw, in their 2004 article, “Looking in two ways: Poverty in South Africa and its ecclesiological implications”, are of the view that the vast majority of black people in South Africa live in rural areas, and almost all the poor are black. They write that in the year 2000, almost 95% of the poor in South Africa were black. For this reason, poverty becomes an issue

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<sup>48</sup> Hurricane Katrina was the costliest and one of the deadliest hurricanes in the history of the United States. It was the sixth-strongest Atlantic hurricane ever recorded and the third-strongest hurricane on record that made landfall in the United States. Katrina formed on August 23 during the 2005 Atlantic hurricane season and caused devastation along much of the north-central Gulf Coast of the United States. Most notable in media coverage were the catastrophic effects on the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, and in coastal Mississippi ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hurricane\\_Katrina](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hurricane_Katrina)).

<sup>49</sup> Virginia R. Dominguez is the current editor of *American Ethnologist*, co-director of the International Forum for U.S. Studies, and professor of anthropology and international programs at the University of Iowa. A political anthropologist, she is the author of *White by Definition: Social Classification in Creole Louisiana* (Rutgers, 1986 and 1994) as well as books on public discourse and cultural politics in Israel, East Asia, and the Pacific (<http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/Dominguez/>).

inseparable from racial dimensions<sup>50</sup> (2004:204). Similarly, Punt (2004:263) notes that, “...in South Africa poverty is largely synonymous with being black.”<sup>51</sup>

In his book, *The New Politics of Race*, Howard Winant<sup>52</sup> describes how race has been, and remains fundamental to politics. He locates race at the crossroads of identity and social structure, where difference frames inequality and where political processes operate with a comprehensiveness, which ranges from world-historical to the intimately psychological. Such practices as slavery, imperial conquests (colonization), among other social injustices have elements of racism. He writes that:

The accumulation of capital, the organization of the labor process, the construction of the modern nation-state, the rise of movements for popular sovereignty, and our very understandings of cultural and personal identity were all fashioned in the global racial work-shop that is modern history (Winant, 2004: ix).

One could deduce from Winant’s observations that historical (i.e. slavery, colonization, apartheid, etc.) and present (north-south trade imbalance, neo-colonization, etc.) forms of injustice continue to twist inequality to the disadvantage of many black people in Africa, and globally. It is also important to note that people from other races than Africans may be poor. Poverty is not unique to Africans but by and large, Africans do bear the brunt of poverty.

This section of the research has sought to show the link between poverty and blackness.

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<sup>50</sup> Such views coincide with those of Van de Berg, S. 2003. *Poverty in SA – An Analysis of the Evidence*. Presented at EFSA Colloquium on 7<sup>th</sup> August 2003, Johannesburg.

<sup>51</sup> See also Isichei, E. 1995. *A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present*. Grand Rapids/Lawrenceville: Eerdmans/ Africa World Press (p.3).

<sup>52</sup> Howard Winant is a professor of sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

## **2.8 A Summary of Findings**

This chapter has sought to analyze poverty through aspects such as understanding poverty, global indicators of poverty, structural causes and effects of poverty, poverty traps, measures taken to eradicate poverty, and poverty and blackness.

The chapter has given attention to the meaning of poverty. It has been shown that to be poor means, among other things, suffering malnutrition and poor health, subjugation to constant physical abuse and violence, subjugation to humiliation and indignity, and exploitation especially by the powerful and wealthy. To be poor entails humiliation, helplessness, powerlessness, insecurity and injustice.

The majority of the poor tend to come from poor, rural and agricultural countries, dwell in farms, which are agriculturally unproductive, and have very poor access to technology. They lack personal and political power. Majority of the poor come from large families with few income earners.

The chapter further shows that poverty encompasses situations of inability to satisfy one's basic needs. It is connected with the lack of relations, and it is a state of lack especially of material and social needs. It also encompasses lack of sufficient income and wealth.

In addition, it has been noted that poverty is either absolute or relative. Absolute poverty is measured in terms of living on less than US\$1 per day, low life expectancy, and high child mortality. It is characterized by deprivation of such basic human needs as food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education, and information. Relative poverty measures inequalities. It is socially defined and is dependent on social context, based on comparisons with others in the community.

Some of the causes of poverty discussed above include unemployment, lack of freedom, ideologies, lack of infrastructure, corruption, lack of a functioning democracy, lack of integration, natural disasters, substance abuse, historical factors such as slavery and colonialism, over population, wars, illiteracy, lack of social skills, and exploitation. Other causes include



individual beliefs, actions and choices, illnesses and disability. Notable factors that cause poverty include inadequate nutrition, improper taxation, high government spending, discrimination, and high cost of goods. In Africa, slavery, colonialism, north-south trade imbalance, debt crisis, ruthless dictators, oppressive military regimes, greed, corruption, crime, ethnicity, fast growing populations, poor management, ineffective economic policies, declining productivity in agriculture, economic policies of the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), natural disasters, wars, apartheid, improper taxation, and high government expenditure are blamed for the poverty that continues to ravage the peoples of the continent.

Some of the effects of poverty mentioned in the chapter include crime, substance abuse and illnesses, starvation, lack of sanitation, human trafficking, homelessness, low life expectancy, low income, and high mortality rates. Injustice, increased loss of political freedom, and poverty traps are other effects of poverty mentioned in this chapter.

Some of the measures that have been undertaken to eradicate poverty discussed above include promotion of economic growth, direct aid, improving the social environment and abilities of the poor, introduction of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and foreign aid. It is also noted that poverty may, and in many instances does, breed more poverty. In such a situation, one may be caught in what has been referred to as a poverty trap. Lastly, there seems to be a remarkable link between globalization and poverty and between poverty and blackness. The majority of the poor, globally, are black people.

# CHAPTER THREE

## A CURSORY OVERVIEW OF BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON POVERTY

### 3.1 Introduction

A cursory overview of biblical perspectives on poverty is offered in this chapter, as the purpose is not to give an exhaustive analysis. This investigation is done from a Christian ethical perspective. Some guidelines on poverty are drawn from the Old and New Testament, which pertain to the forms and causes of poverty, as well as indications on how poverty might be overcome. The assumption is that an understanding of biblical perspectives on poverty provides helpful guidelines for understanding poverty in contemporary times.

The cursory overview will offer insight into the nature of poverty, the causes of poverty, the consequences of poverty, as well as ways to address poverty. This analysis will also help, eventually, to assess the place and priority of the poor in both Black Theology and Public Theologies.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> For an inter-disciplinary and intra-disciplinary theological study of the phenomenon of poverty, see the publication of the Stellenbosch University's Faculty of Theology in *NGTT* (Deel 45, Number 2, Supplementum 2004). In this study are articles by Smit D J (*See, Judge, Act? On Theology and Poverty*); Ndungane N (*Poverty and the Church*); Le Bruyns C and Pauw C (*Looking into Ways. Poverty in South Africa and Its Ecclesiological Implications*); Ackermann, D M (*Seeing HIV and AIDS as a Gendered Pandemic*); Claasens L J M (*When God Withholds Food: Joel 1 in the Context of World Hunger*); Meyer E E (*Land in the Holiness Code*); Bosman H (*Poor or no poor? Pragmatic and Idealistic Perspective on the Poor in Deuteronomy 15:1-11*); De Villiers PGR (*Poverty and Community in the Lukan Texts. Aspects of Lukan spirituality*); Punt J (*Remembering the Poor: Pauline Perspectives on Poverty*); Mouton E (*Poor and Worthy of a Human Being? Perspectives on God and Humanity in 1 Timothy 2:8-15*); Simon D X (*Witnesses as Strangers Responding to "Bodily Imperatives" of the Poor*); Odendaal M (*Meditating on Poverty: Seeking Guidance from the Psalms*); Ackermann D M (*Tamar's Cry: Re-Reading an Ancient Text in the Midst of a Contemporary Pandemic*); Botman H R (*Human Dignity and Economic Globalization*); Louw D (*The Healing Dynamics of Space: Rational and Systematic Therapy in Pastoral Care to the*

In *Life beyond Infection: Home-based Care to People with HIV-Positive Status within a Context of Poverty*, Magezi (2005:52) notes that:

...in this culture where epistemology is contested, it is crucial for any theological endeavor to appeal to the Christian epistemological foundation, i.e. Scripture. Failure to do so means that a theological pursuit could risk being indistinct from the social sciences...

Magezi prefers that any Christian theological endeavor be centered on and shaped by the Christian Scripture. It is fitting at this point to investigate poverty as a concept - as is understood and used in the Bible, both the Old and the New Testaments.

According to Walter E. Pilgrim, in his, *Good News to the Poor: Wealth and Poverty in Luke – Acts*:

World hunger, global inequalities, human rights and diminishing energy resources have forced the church to come to terms with the Christian response to these issues. Liberation theologies from developing countries and the work of ecumenical groups such as the World Council of Churches have pressed the question most urgently from within the community of faith. Thus the times themselves are especially ripe for doing all we can to listen anew to our sources, the Scriptures ... (Pilgrim, 1981:15).

In his, *There Shall Be No Poor among you: Poverty in the Bible*, Leslie J. Hoppe observes that the Hebrew Bible has an unusually extensive vocabulary on the poor. He further notes that the Hebrew Bible's books use various terms, each with a specific connotation, while the New Testament has a less extensive vocabulary (Hoppe, 2004:15).

### **3.2 The Poor and Poverty in the Old Testament**

In this section, the notion of poverty in the Old Testament will be discussed under the following headings: Hebrew words for poor and/or poverty, the poor and poverty in the Torah, the poor and poverty in the Former Prophets, the poor and poverty in the Latter Prophets, the poor and poverty

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*People Suffering from Poverty*); Smit D J (On the church and social challenges in our country); Bowers N & August K (*Engaging Poverty: The Church as an Organisation for Change*); Koopman N (*Let the Plight of the Voiceless be Heard. Prophetic Speaking about Poverty Today*); August K & Wyngaard J G (*Congregations of Poverty in Communion with the Poor*); and Smit D J (*Land Reform in South Africa as a Means to Combat Poverty*).

in the Wisdom literature, the poor and poverty in the Psalms, and the poor and poverty in the Apocalyptic literature. A brief observation will then be made.

### ***Hebrew words for poor and poverty in the Old Testament***

The Hebrew words for poverty and poor in the Old Testament will be examined here.

Like Pleins, Mott, and Braaten,<sup>54</sup> Magezi (2005:52-53) identifies six Hebrew words which are translated as poor or poverty in the Old Testament. These words are *`ebyon*, *dal*, *mahsor*, *misken*, *ras*, *'ani*, and *anawin*. Magezi agrees with Pleins, Mott, and Braaten on the meaning of the words thus:

- i. *`ebyon* – this word denotes one who is economically or legally distressed. It denotes a destitute, a beggar or, as Magezi (2005:52) puts it, the “beggarly poor.”
- ii. *dal* – this word could be designated as poor, weak, inferior or lacking. In many instances, it is representative of the troubles of the struggling peasant farmer.
- iii. *mahsor* – this word represents “a lack of” or need for material goods. Magezi (2005:53) claims that its rarity in other parts of the Bible suggests that it is a wisdom term, since it occurs thirteen times in the Hebrew Bible and, mainly, in the book of Proverbs.
- iv. *ras* – the word stands for a person who is politically and economically lower than the ordinary folk and it commonly refers to a lazy person.
- v. *'ani* – this word signifies one who is economically poor, oppressed, exploited and suffering. Magezi (2005:53) notes that this Hebrew word is the common term used in the Hebrew Bible for poverty.
- vi. *'anawin* –according to Magezi (2005:53), this word is a rare word used to denote “poor”; however; scholars suppose it is a conjugation of poverty and piety, i.e. poor, pious, humble.

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<sup>54</sup> For further reading, see Pleins, J.D. 1992. “Poor, Poverty”. In *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery: An Encyclopedic Exploration of the Images, Symbols, Motifs, Metaphors, Figures of Speech and Literary Patterns of the Bible*. London: Intervarsity Press; Mott, S.C. 1985. “Poor”. In Brown, C (ed). *The Harpes Bible Dictionary*, (ed) Achtemeier, P.J. San Francisco: Harper and Row; Braaten, L J 2000. “Poor”. In *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 2 Michigan: Zondervan.

Magezi states that these Hebrew words, which could be rendered as “poverty”, may not imply much to a reader outside their context. He quotes extensively from Pleins to elaborate the importance of context regarding these Hebrew words. He notes that, “...in his analysis Pleins... discourages an etymological approach to the study of words but encourages a consideration of context and usage” (2005:53).

Plains, asserts that:

It is important to note the distribution of the vocabulary throughout the Hebrew Bible: no one biblical writer or text uses all the Hebrew terms for poor/poverty. In fact the distribution reveals selectivity on the part of the biblical authors: *ras* for example, is a wisdom word and not a prophet word. This selectivity should also alert us to the fact that even when the various blocks of the biblical text make use of the same Hebrew term, the writer may not mean the same thing by that term: In Proverbs, for example, the *dal* is a lazy person, whereas for the prophets, the *dal* is an object of exploitation (1992:403).

Although it could be an intricate task to embody the various concepts of poverty as represented by these Hebrew words within their context, Magezi is of the view that, “... there is an insightful trend that may be adopted” (2005:53). On his part, Braaten (2000:1070-1071) shows that the Old Testament traditions do accentuate different features. For example, the legal texts regulate the treatment of the poor, seeking to protect the poor, widows, orphans, or strangers (Lev. 19:9; 25:25, 35). Whereas the Prophets show a concern for those economically exploited (e.g. Isaiah and Amos), the Wisdom traditions view poverty from different perspectives. Proverbs sees poverty as one’s own fault (e.g. Prov. 6:10-11; 10:14; 13:18) while for Job, poverty results from political and economic exploitation (e.g. Job 29:12, 16; 30:25; 31:16). The Psalms present God as the defender of the poor (e.g. Ps. 22:26; 35:10). The narrative literature and the Pentateuch and Deuteronomistic history show little interest in the poor, but they are concerned more with criticizing the kingship.

Thus far, it has been shown that to understand and properly translate the six Hebrew words *’ebyon*, *dal*, *mahsor*, *misken*, *ras*, *’ani*, and *anawin*, represented as poor and/or poverty, context should not be ignored. When all these Hebrew words are put together, poverty is represented as a situation of economic distress, need for material needs, weakness, inferiority, exploitation, and

suffering. It also represents a person who is struggling, someone who is humble, as well as someone who is lazy.

### ***The poor and poverty in the Torah***

The Torah consists of five books namely Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The stories of the patriarchs (Gen 12-50) portray ancient Israel's ancestors as people of means. Abraham was a wealthy man (Gen 13:2). His son Isaac was a very wealthy man (Gen 26:13). Jacob too was wealthy (Gen 32:17ff). On the other hand, Hagar twice cried out to God because of the oppression that she experienced at the hands of Sarah, and each time God heard her and responded (Gen. 21:1ff). Joseph's story illustrates God's vindication of the oppressed (Gen 37, 39-50). The story of Joseph's master paints a positive picture of a wealthy and powerful man using that power for the sake of those in need. Joseph's experience as a slave and a prisoner made him attuned to the voices of the poor (Gen 41:52ff).

According to Hoppe:

A common thread in the patriarchal narratives is that people of means and people with power create "poverty." They will expel an unwanted slave, defraud, withhold wages, enslave the free, falsely accuse, and otherwise fail to meet their obligations to give justice. Poverty, then, does not just happen. It is a creation of the wealthy who, for a variety of reasons, choose to oppress those in their power. What is most surprising is that the guilty parties in most of these stories are the revered ancestors of the Israelites. Not surprising, however, is that God takes the side of the oppressed and poor, ensuring that they have justice done to them despite the intentions of their wealthy and powerful oppressors (Hoppe, 2004:21).

Hoppe's observation above coincides with that of Pilgrim (1981:19), who observes that with their large flocks and families and numerous servants and slaves, the patriarchs bear the covenant promise of God without any hint of God's displeasure over their wealth. Pilgrim further observes that, "Along with this goes an emphasis upon their generosity and hospitality to friends and foes alike. But magnanimity and wealth are comfortably compatible in these early traditions" (Pilgrim, 1981:19)

The most intriguing of the Torah's narratives are those about Moses and the Exodus. The descendants of the free and wealthy patriarchs are reduced to slavery and poverty by the

Egyptians. The story begins with the accession of a “new king ... who did not know Joseph” (Exod 1:8). The new pharaoh decided to enslave the Hebrews because they posed a threat to the Egyptians. Hoppe (2004:21) claims that the impoverishment of the Israelites was the result of the fear of the Egyptian upper class. Those with political and economic power in Egypt wished to preserve their position of dominance by diluting the strength of those below. They, therefore, forced the Israelites into slavery and carefully controlled their birth rate by having the male children thrown into the Nile (Exod 1:8-21).

The Egyptians used their economic, social, political, and, sometimes, military power to maintain their position. This shows that oppression and poverty are human inventions. The episode of the plagues (Exod 7:8-11:10) shows how irredeemable the system that kept the Israelites impoverished and enslaved was. The system was beyond reform, it had to be destroyed. In the end, Pharaoh was compelled to let the Hebrews go. God brought the oppressive Egyptian system to an end. God accomplished that liberation “with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders” (Deut 26:8). God then led the Israelites through the wilderness and gave them “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Deut 26:9). Hoppe (2004:24) notes that Moses was humble and the Hebrew word translated as humble is *‘ānāw*, which is derived from the verb *‘ānā* (to be afflicted, oppressed).

It is notable that Exodus 22:21-22 is very harsh on those who mistreat widows, orphans, and aliens. It warns any potential abusers that their own families will experience the same kind of exploitation that they inflict on the defenseless. Widows and orphans had no right of inheritance and were particularly vulnerable. Deut 27:19 places those who exploit the defenseless under a curse. Deuteronomy not only forbids exploitation of the people who find themselves outside of the economic mainstream, it also calls the Israelites to take specific actions to prevent the precarious position of those on society’s margins from degenerating (Deut 10:14-19; 24:14-22). To accomplish this, Deuteronomy calls on the generosity and concern of the wealthy. The basis of Deuteronomy’s legislation regarding economically dependent people is the statement on the way God acts: “[God] executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and... loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing” (Deut 10:18). The generosity of the wealthy can prevent the

cycle of poverty from becoming a downward spiral. Deuteronomy associates God's blessings upon Israel with Israel's care for the widows, orphans, and aliens.

The Torah insists that those in need are to be helped by their fellow Israelites with interest-free loans (Exod 22:25; Lev 25:35-38; Deut 23:19-20). Hoppe comments on these loans thus:

The loans envisioned by the Biblical legal tradition have no resemblance to those central to today's capitalist economy. The interest-free loans to those in critical need were not given in order to raise capital for expanding holdings or operations. The biblical legislation envisions loans of food to prevent hunger or starvation and of seed to raise the next year's crop (Hoppe, 2004:26).

Both Exod 22:26 and Deut 24:10-13 forbid keeping overnight a person's outer garment taken as surety for a loan, and taking a family's millstone as a surety (Deut 24:6). Without a millstone, grain could not be ground to prepare bread, the staple of the Israelite diet. Demanding such would involve a hardship for any family especially a poor one.

Again, one of the main sources of slave labor in Israel was the debtor class. The Torah deals with the debt-slavery in Exodus 21:2-11; Leviticus 25:39-43; and Deuteronomy 15:12-18. Debt-slavery was not to be a permanent condition. Those who were forced by circumstances to sell themselves could not be kept in slavery for more than six years. The motivation for freeing the debt-slave and his family is the remembrance of the Exodus, when God purchased all Israel and made them God's servants. No Israelite, therefore, could be sold as a permanent slave to another Israelite since doing such a thing would constitute stealing from God. Deuteronomy considers slavery to be an embarrassment because the existence of this institution was in tension with the basic datum of Israel's tradition: the God of Israel frees slaves.

Another way in which Deuteronomy aims to prevent a permanent debtor class from arising in Israel was its provision that debts were to be forgiven at the end of every seven years (Deut 15:1-11). Deuteronomy considers unwillingness to aid the poor as sin (Deut 15:9) and asserts that



Israel's relationship with God was reflected in the kind of relationship that existed among the Israelites themselves.<sup>55</sup>

Leviticus 25 describes another Israelite practice that was designed to eliminate social and economic stratification, namely, the Year of Jubilee, which was the seventh in a series of sabbatical years. The Year of Jubilee was to be marked not only by the release of Israelites in bond slavery but also by the restoration of land to families forced to sell their ancestral land during the previous forty-nine years. The purpose of the Year of Jubilee was to restore the economic equilibrium of the Israelite society, ensuring a right relationship with God.

A laborer whose wages were withheld could not purchase food for his family. Both Leviticus 19:13 and Deuteronomy 24:14-15 forbids such a practice, and call such a practice oppression and robbery. A laborer in question is referred to in Deuteronomy 24:14 as "poor and needy" and warns those who exploit workers that the cries of the poor will be heard by God, who will regard the oppression of the poor as a sin (Deut 24:15). Deuteronomy seems to deal with the symptoms rather than the causes of poverty (Deut 15:11)

What the Torah expects of the wealthy is the willingness to give up what is rightfully theirs in order to help the poor. It is evident that concern for the poor, for a just economic system, and for the elimination of the exploitation of the vulnerable members of society is at the heart of the Torah. The Torah does not idealize poverty as a state that brings one closer to God. In fact,

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<sup>55</sup> In his article, "Poor or no poor? Pragmatic and idealistic perspectives on the poor in Deuteronomy 15:1-11", , Bosman (2004:238-243) discusses Deuteronomy 15:1-11 as an example of how the Old Testament engages with the challenge of poverty in what he calls "pragmatic and idealistic way." He is of the view that the provisions in this portion of the Bible are linked to the third commandment concerning the keeping of the Sabbath. These provisions concern the release of those in debt, the poor and slaves. He writes that such a hypothesis has significant implications for our theological-ethical reflection on why believing communities should address the problem of poverty in Africa. He notes that, "Deuteronomy 15:1-11 is quite rightly considered as a significant command... since it is concerned that no permanent economic underclass can be tolerated in a society where the members have become brothers and sisters of one another... In the final analysis, an appropriate response to Deuteronomy would entail being actively involved in the eradication of poverty..." (2004:242).

poverty is clearly portrayed as a curse in Leviticus 26:14-26. Poverty was not to exist in Israelite society.

The Torah offers three solutions to poverty. The first is that the people of means have certain obligations towards the poor and the economically vulnerable in society. Secondly, priests were not to expect the poor to make the same type of offerings that the wealthy brought to the Temple (Lev 5:7-13; 14:21-32). Thirdly, during harvest, farmers were to be careful to leave something in the fields for the poor to glean.

Legislations were in place to forbid exploitation of the economically vulnerable. The most significant of Torah's legislation regarding the poor was the prevention of the emergence of a permanent debtor class in Israel. Hoppe writes that:

The Torah's approach to poverty is both comprehensive and enlightened. It recognizes that poverty is the result of economic exploitation, a corrupt legal system, and lack of resources. The Torah's views are based on two fundamental assumptions. First, God remains the owner of land. Israel receives that land as an "inheritance" but not as a permanent possession. The land, then, can be held only in accordance with the prescriptions of the Torah. Second, the Israelite community is a family. All the members of that family are to have access to the land and its bounty. It is wrong for some members of the Israelite family to enjoy the bounty while others live in poverty. Alleviating the suffering of the poor, then, is not a matter of charity but of justice (Hoppe, 2004:40-41).

### ***The poor and poverty in the Former Prophets***

Hoppe (2004:42) writes that the books of the Bible that the rabbis called the "Former Prophets" are Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. These books tell a tragic story. They describe the odyssey of the people of Israel in the land that was promised to their ancestors. The story begins with how Israel came to possess that land and goes on to relate how Israel came to lose it. The book of Joshua relates the story of Israel in the land. Joshua and Israelite armies succeeded in taking control of the land (Josh 2-11). A good portion of the book is devoted to the distribution of land (Josh 12-21) and an evaluation of Israel's first years in the land under Joshua is recorded in Josh 24:31, which says that, "Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua..." One conclusion that clearly flows from the book is that all Israel were to share equally in the gift of the land that God had given them in fulfillment of the promise made to Israel's ancestors. Poverty, want, and deprivation were not to be part of Israel's experience.

The stories in the book of Judges are thinly veiled critiques of the type of injustice that was endemic to the two Israelite kingdoms. The first detailed narrative of a judge called Ehud who led the Israelite peasants against their oppressors appears in Judges 3:12-30. The economic and political oppression that Israel experienced was a consequence of their infidelity. The story of Deborah (Judges 4-5) is a tale of peasants' uprising against a coalition of Canaanite kings, and in Judges 6-8, the story of Gideon shows that the pressure brought to bear on Israel reduced Israel to poverty. The son of a prostitute, Jephthah, became a judge (Judg 11:1-12:7). His military success led to a dramatic change in his social status (12:7). Another person who was "outside" the system was the unnamed secondary wife (concubine) of a Levite from Ephraim. While the concubine did not suffer any deprivations because she belonged to a wealthy household of a wealthy man, she was poor because she did not control her own person and her own destiny, and such a scenario was not the kind of society envisioned by God.

The stories of Ehud, Deborah, and Gideon shows that ending oppression may require armed rebellion against a political system that is responsible for that oppression. Abimelech's attempt to establish a monarchy reveals how destructive such a political system can be. The story of Jephthah and of the Levite's concubine reveals that a social system that relegates some people to the margins of society can lead to the destruction of that society (Hoppe, 2004:51). The book of Judges ends with the Israelite tribes at the brink of self-destruction. Certainly, the unjust social and economic system of the Israelite kingdoms made the fall of those kingdoms predictable.

On the other hand, 1 and 2 Samuel feature the stories of Hannah, the establishment of the monarchy, and the reign of David, etc. The story in the book of 1 Samuel begins with one on the margins of Israelite society, an infertile woman. In her song and prayer (1 Sam 2:1-10), she is described as poor. Her song acclaims a God who reverses the fortunes of the poor so that they can enjoy the good things of this world. The story of the elders' request for a king in 1 Samuel 8 exposes the monarchy as a prime cause of poverty in Israel. The passage narrates the experiences of being in a monarchy and the economic system that it produced. Instead of preserving justice, the monarchy created injustice. The forced labor, burdensome taxes, and confiscation of property made life very difficult for the Israelite peasant farmer. The forced labor took him away from his land when it needed to be worked. Taxes amounted to royal confiscation of what subsistence

farmers needed for survival. In this light, the monarchy created poverty in Israel. David's adultery and murder (2 Sam 11-12) were actions of a king who was ready to use all his power to achieve his ends, despite the cost to anyone else. David used his absolute royal power to secure his own position at the cost of another man's marriage and life. Such abuse of power often leads to popular discontent, and David had to deal with two revolutions to remain on the throne (2 Sam 15:1-18:18; 20:1-22). Israel kings after David included Solomon, Rehoboam, Omri, Jehu, and Jeroboam II.

Hoppe (2004:67) observes that the Former Prophets tell a very sad story, which begins with so much promise but ends in tragedy. Hoppe notes that, at the beginning and at the end of the story, are found the poor and dispossessed. The book of Joshua, for example, describes the miracle of divine power that enabled escaped slaves to establish a new social and economic order in the land that God had promised to their ancestors - "a social order without distinctions based on economic power, for all Israelites society were to have their share of the land." The foundation of Israelite society was to be loyalty and commitment to Yahweh. Hoppe further states that the Former Prophets tell a story that highlights Israel's disloyalty and failure to remain committed to the service of Yahweh alone:

The people asked for a king to ensure their security but that institution served only to accelerate the process that led to the fall of the two Israelite national states. These states fell because some Israelites were not content with their share of Israel's inheritance, but sought to accumulate as much as possible for themselves at the expense of the powerless. In the end, however, it was the powerless who were left in the land while the people of means found themselves in exile from the land that was supposed to be Israel's everlasting inheritance (Hoppe, 2004:67).

### ***The poor and poverty in the Latter Prophets***

Hoppe (2004:68) argues that while there could be some disagreement about the importance of the motif of the poor and poverty in the Former Prophets, there can be none regarding the centrality of these themes in the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve). The books of the Bible referred to as the Twelve are Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

For Pilgrim (1981:24), the most familiar section of the Old Testament on the theme of the poor are the prophetic warnings and judgments addressed to the wealthy and powerful during the

various periods of Israel's monarchy. Pilgrim shows that it was during the period of the monarchy, in particular, that greater social disparities developed in both the northern and the southern kingdoms, bringing with them increasing oppression and exploitation.

As Hoppe (2004:68) observes, among the special characteristics of prophecy in ancient Israel is an intense criticism of the monarchy and the associated institutions especially the judicial system as portrayed in Amos 5:7, Isaiah 5:23, Micah 3:9-11, and Jeremiah 22:13-17. Other objects of prophetic criticism were the wealthy landowners and creditors who foreclosed on peasants who were unable to repay loans. It is evident from Isaiah 5:8, Micah 2:1-3, Ezekiel 22:29, and Habakkuk 2:5-5 that ancient Israel witnessed the gradual concentration of land in the hands of a few and the creation of a great number of landless farmers who were reduced to hiring themselves out as agricultural workers to survive. The prophets condemned the merchants who defrauded their customers in Hosea 12:7-8, Amos 8:5, Micah 6:10-11, Isaiah 3:14, and Jeremiah 5:27.

It becomes apparent that Israel's prophets were not economic theorists, nor were they social critics. However, what they did was to make Israel appreciate the consequence of the injustice that infested the ancient Israelite social and economic system. The prophets never regarded poverty as the result of chance, destiny, or impersonal forces. Poverty was the creation of the rich who disregarded the norms of traditional Israelite morality because of their greed as shown in Amos 3:9, Habakkuk 2:9, Jeremiah 5:27, Ezekiel 45:9, and Malachi 3:5 (Hoppe, 2004:68). Thus:

The wealthy used their economic power and political influence not to build up the community but to advance their goals of becoming wealthier and more powerful. The prophets believed that behavior, which ignored traditional Israelite values, called forth divine judgment. They were certain that God called them to announce the inevitability of that judgment (Hoppe, 2004:68).

A study of the writings of Prophet Amos shows that he clearly blamed the royal establishment and the people of means for creating poverty in the kingdom of Israel. The people of means used their power to control the judicial system, depriving the peasants of their ancestral land and even of their personal liberty (Amos 8:5-6). By corrupting the judicial system, the wealthy created poverty and an underclass in Israel (Amos 2:7; 5:11). What is notable in the book of Amos is

how the prophet equates the poor with the righteous in Amos 2:6 and 5:12. Amos 2:6-7<sup>56</sup> illustrates the situation that incited the prophet's condemnation of the Israelite economic system. The prophecy of Amos is an unrelenting attack on the social evils that helped create poverty and a dependent underclass in Israel. In the book of Amos, the prophet does not idealize the poor or poverty. However, as Hoppe (2004:71) notes, the poor were righteous not because of their poverty but because they had been denied their rights by people of means. The poor were faithful to their covenantal obligations while the rich were not. Hoppe observes that:

It almost appears as though Amos is describing a class conflict in the style of the twentieth-century Marxist. For Amos, however, the poor do not really form a "class" in opposition to the wealthy. The poor are simply those members of Israelite society who are alone and defenseless. They are not in any way organized in opposition to the wealthy in some sort of a class struggle. But the prophets did see the rich not simply as individuals but as a group that marshaled political, judicial, and social forces to undercut the poor and thereby increase their own wealth (Hoppe, 2004:72).

Amos the prophet did not see a class struggle or revolution as the outcome of the oppression of the poor by the wealthy. His position was that God alone would bring judgment upon Israel.

Like Amos, Isaiah viewed poverty as the creation of the wealthy. Their greed led them to transform the judicial system into a vehicle to enhance their social position and economic power. A reading of the book of Isaiah shows that poverty is not a state that makes one closer to God, but poverty is the result of being denied one's fundamental rights. Indeed, the corruption of Judah's political and economic system led to the oppression of the poor and the enriching of the elite. Such was an evil that had to be eliminated. Because Judah did not reform its system, God would take the side of the poor to as to ensure the victory of justice as in Isaiah 29:19. It is evident that Isaiah anticipated a new order in which God would vindicate the poor (cf. Is 14:30, 26:6, and 32:7). Isaiah's message is rather engaging because he has such great confidence in the eventual triumph of justice. In Isaiah 41:17; 51:13-16; and 54:11, the word poor becomes a

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<sup>56</sup> Amos 2:6-7 reads: This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back {my wrath}. They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name (NIV).

metaphor for the exiles that wait with faith and confidence for the coming day of their salvation (Hoppe 2004:97).

On his part, prophet Micah focuses on the judgment that Judah would face because of the injustice that was so endemic to its social and economic structure. Micah was unrelenting in his criticism of those who stole the land from the poor (Mic 2:1-5). Micah addresses the people who had economic and political power in Jerusalem, focusing on the power to amass property. Micah promises the wealthy that there would come a time when God would restore justice, but they and their descendants would find that they had no share in that new allotment of land (2:3-5). Micah's prophecy reflects the perspective of the peasantry. Micah does not make outlandish demands in the name of the poor (4:4)<sup>57</sup>. However, those who deny the poor such simple pleasure(s) stand under divine judgment. Micah proclaimed that God would not allow crimes against the poor to continue with impunity.

Zephaniah pronounced the harshest words of judgment that any prophet ever uttered (Zeph 3:1-2, 3:3-4, 3:8). Hoppe (2004:84) observes that Zephaniah did not address the poor but spoke of the wealthy and powerful, describing their sin and their judgment. However, in two instances, the prophet uses words that normally refer to economically and socially dependent people, i.e. *'anawê hā'āres* ("the poor of the land"; Zeph 2:3), *'ānî* (needy), and *dāl* (oppressed, powerless; Zeph 3:12) to speak of those who recognized their complete dependence on God. According to Zephaniah, the judgment upon Jerusalem was not God's revenge or punishment on the city, but it was God's action to transform the people of Jerusalem from being oppressive and self-sufficient to being "humble and lowly."

Jeremiah the prophet announced that Judah was under divine judgment for its crimes – idol worship (11:13; 19:4, 13), pride (13:9), and failure to keep the Sabbath (17:19-27). However, as was the case with Isaiah and Micah, Jeremiah held that God's principal complaint against Judah

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<sup>57</sup> Micah 4:4 reads: "Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken" (NIV).

was its unjust social, political, and economic system (Jer 2:34-35; 5:26-28). It was the oppression of the poor that would bring destruction upon Jerusalem (Jer 6:6-12). Included also in the book of Jeremiah, as observes are summaries of passages from 2 Kings (Hoppe 2004:91).<sup>58</sup> From these summaries, one notes that following the Babylonian conquest of Judah and Jerusalem and the exile of the upper class, only the poor were left behind to care for the land (Jer 39:10; 40:7; 52:15-16). Hoppe (2004:91) further observes that instead of Judah's kings ensuring that the land was returned to its rightful owners, it was a Babylonian officer acting in the name of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who returned the land stolen from the poor.

Habakkuk the prophet, on his part, begins by complaining not only about the injustice he witnessed but especially about what appears to be God's failure to deal with it (Hab 1:2-4). Habakkuk demanded justice from God, and got a response from God that God would take action against a society that perverts justice by using the Chaldeans, a fierce and impetuous nation (Hab 1:6). It appears here that Habakkuk believed that despite Judah's perversion of justice and oppression of the poor, God would not abandon Judah to its fate.

Again, Ezekiel the prophet equated the oppression of the poor, the failure to restore a garment taken in pledge, and the taking of interest, with idolatry (Ezek 18:12-14). These were capital crimes that called for a sentence of death upon Judah and Jerusalem. It appears that Judah's failure to deal with the social and economic evils that turned God against Jerusalem made Ezekiel to equate the oppression of the poor with idolatry. The vision, of a restored Jerusalem that Ezekiel had suggests a situation where justice and righteousness were to replace violence and oppression (Ezek 45:9).

In the book of Haggai (1:6, 9-11, and 2:15-17), a succession of poor agricultural yield brought about a sense of frustration. The crop failure left many farmers without adequate food and clothing. Hoppe (2004:98) notes that what compounded the problem of the restoration period

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<sup>58</sup> Some of the passages include Jeremiah 39:1-10, which summarizes 2 Kings 25:1-12, and Jeremiah 52:1-34, which repeats much of 2 Kings 24:18-25:30. It is important to note that the passages from Jeremiah, however, contain some additional information that compliment 2 Kings.



was the conflict between those who returned from exile and those who had never been in exile. The Samaritans who lived in the highlands north of Jerusalem considered Judah an adjunct to their territory and sought to exercise control over it. They regarded the returnees as illegal interlopers and tried to frustrate their plans to rebuilt Jerusalem and its Temple (Ezek 4:1-23). On the other hand, the people of Judah who never went into exile regarded the land as theirs (Ezek 11:15; 33:23-33) and so did not readily acquiesce to the claims of the returnees. The exiles, on their part, regarded themselves as the purified remnant of the true Israel and regarded both the Samaritans and the people of the land as unclean (Zech 8:10). The prophets Haggai and Zechariah suggested that Judah's circumstances would improve following the rebuilding of the Temple (Hag 1:1-11; Zech 1:16). Hoppe (2004:98) observes that the temple played a key role at the time, because temples were administrative institutions dealing with political, economic, and judicial matters along with the religious and liturgical.

The prophets' critique against the social evils and abuses within the society was grounded, theologically, in God's covenant with Israel – His act of election. The covenant had called for faithful obedience as expressed in the Torah. However, Israel had become indifferent, and unfaithful to the covenant, which resulted in trampling on the poor, and the neglect of the needy. According to Pilgrim (1981:25), the evidence against Israel's leadership included unjust courts (Amos 5:12; Is 10:1-2; Jer 5:28), fraudulent trade (Amos 8:4-5), unfair taxation (Amos 5:11-12), theft of land (Mic 2:1-3), violence against the poor (Ezek 16:48), wasteful affluence amid poverty (Amos 4:1; 6:4ff.), selling debtors into slavery (Amos 2:6; 8:6), and suffocating tithes (Is 3:14-15).

The prophets mentioned above took the traditional Israelite belief that God was the protector of the poor and made it seem as if poverty guaranteed the people God's favour. Several prophetic texts call the poor to have confidence in God. The prophets in no way idealized poverty, they saw it as an evil created by Israel's elite class, who engaged in immoral practices to enrich themselves at the expense of those without power and influence. The prophets saw such people as the cause of God's basis for divine judgment on Israel. It is also notable that the prophets did not, in any way, portray the poor as people who were especially close to God because of their exploitation. The poor were portrayed as victims of the wealthy who violated the most

fundamental stipulations of the covenant. The prophets protested against the people who maintained a social and economic order built on injustice. Spiritualizing poverty leads to an acceptance of injustice – something the prophets never did. Ancient Israel’s prophets presented poverty as a terrible evil that could only bring divine judgment upon Israel. They longed for the day when God would end injustice and bring the blessings of peace and prosperity to all Israel.

### ***The poor and poverty in Wisdom literature***

The books of the Bible that constitute Wisdom literature are Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes (Hoppe, 2004:104). It is notable that while Wisdom literature deals with the themes of the poor and poverty, Hoppe (2004:104) observes that its approach to these two motifs differs markedly from that of the Torah and the Prophets. This is because of the Wisdom tradition’s elitist origins and its special concerns. In Wisdom literature, “the wise” approach the question of poverty from an angle that is quite different from the rest of the Old Testament canon. An example to this is the word for the poor, *‘ebyôn*, which, according to Hoppe (2004:105), appears frequently in the prophetic corpus. The word appears seventeen times in prophetic literature and usually refers to those without the security that wealth gives (Isa 14:30; 25:4; Amos 8:4), those who are exploited by the powerful (Amos 2:6; 8:6), those whom the judicial system oppressed (Isa 32:7; Jer 20:13), and those mistreated by officials (Isa 32:6-7). Hoppe notes that this word only appears four times in Proverbs (14:31; 30:14; 31:9, 20). Wisdom literature prefers the Hebrew word *rāš* when speaking of the poor. This word refers to one who has little economic or political status, usually because of laziness. Hoppe observes that this word occurs twenty-two times in the Hebrew Bible, with seventeen of in Wisdom literature (e.g. Prov 10:4; Eccl 5:8). A synonym of *rāš* is *mahsor*, which is found usually in Wisdom texts (e.g. Prov 6:11).

The book of Proverbs sees poverty as a consequence of laziness and negligence (Prov 10:4; 20:13; 21:17). In her book, *Good News to the Poor: The Challenge of the Poor in the History of the Church*, Julio De Santa Ana notes that Proverbs portrays poverty as the result of laziness (Prov 6:6-10; 10:4; 20:4-13; 24:30-34), the product of idle chatter (Prov 14:23), the product of worthless pursuits (Prov 28:19), or the search of pleasure (Prov 21:17; 23:20-21). The book of Proverbs seems to be harsh in its approach to poverty, appearing to blame those whom the prophets regard as victims. Hoppe (2004:106) makes an important observation regarding this

matter. He writes that it is important to remember that Proverbs does not engage in a sociological analysis of poverty or even in theological reflection on its significance for the community of believers. The book does not address the poor but the sons of the wealthy, who must realize that poverty is a threat to their social and economic standing if they are lazy (Prov 10:4), or waste resources foolishly (Prov 21:17). In Proverbs (21:13; 22:9), concern for and assistance to the poor is considered a value, and assurance of justice for the poor as a fundamental duty of the king (29:14). However, just like the Torah and the Prophets, the book of Proverbs extends such duty to all Israelites, describing an act of compassion to the poor as an act of kindness to God (19:17), and neglect of the poor as an insult to God (14:31; 17:5). Proverbs also shows that God defends the poor so that any crime against them calls for divine retribution (22:22-23). The book closes with a poem that lauds the ideal wife (31:10-31). It is notable that one of the virtues of this woman is that “she opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy” (31:20). The closing text presents generosity to the poor as the kind of behaviour that embodies true wisdom. Hoppe (2004:108) writes that, “No matter what the reason for a person’s poverty, generosity toward the poor is the response that should be characteristic of a true sage.”

The book of Job, especially chapters 3-41, contains long poetic sections, which are the speeches of Job’s friends and Job’s replies. The friends attempted to convince Job that there is no suffering without sin. Job responded that his case could be an exception to such a rule. The section ends with God reminding Job that he was incapable of understanding the ways of God. Job’s friends argued that God saves the poor and gives them reason to hope (Job 5:15-16; 34:19; 28; 36:6, 15). The assumption in these passages is that God is just, and that sin and suffering are connected. The friends concluded, therefore, that Job’s suffering ultimately had its roots in his behaviour, probably, as Zoar, one of the friends suggested, Job may have failed in the area of proper concern for the poor (20:10, 19). Job used a variety of approaches to show his friends that there are exceptions to the doctrine of “no suffering without sin.” In 24:1-14, Job offered a variety of ways that people of means treated the poor and the consequences thereof. Job asserted that the plight of the poor is completely undeserved and asked God why He did nothing to end their oppression, since the defenseless poor were the people who were supposedly protected by God. Israel’s poor, therefore, represented another example of innocent suffering, and Job was not the only exception to the doctrine of “no suffering without sin”. It is also notable that, in his

defense, Job mentioned that he had done what needed to be done to assist the poor (29:12-20; he was explicit about the specific actions he took on behalf of the poor. Job is, therefore, a model of the kind of behaviour that the prophets called for, which was lacking in Israel. On this matter, Hoppe (2004:110) writes:

The book of Job offers a bleak picture of the treatment that the poor usually received at the hands of their oppressors. But it also describes the kind of treatment they should receive from people of means. Job's arguments imply that poverty is caused by callousness of the wealthy. It is the result of actions that the wealthy take, not of the actions that the poor do or do not take, since the poor are not masters of their fate. The book also assumes that the wealthy are to take actions that benefit the poor rather than harm them. God will judge their actions in this area.

Like Proverbs and Job, Ecclesiastes reflects the experience of Israel's elite (Hoppe, 2004:110). The book does not deal with poverty and wealth in any systematic way; however, poverty and the injustice that causes it are discussed. The author does not know whether anything could be done about the pervasiveness of injustice in the society (Eccl 3:16-18; 4:1). He notes that official corruption abetted the oppression of the poor (5:8-9). Ecclesiastes 9:14-16 describes the status of the poor showing the effects of a social system based on economic status. The poor man in the passage could not extricate himself from his poverty even by saving his city. This story shows how trapped the poor are, i.e. in the sense that none of their achievements, no matter how great, can bring them out of poverty. The foolishness of greed is shown in 5:10-6:9; greed leads to avarice (materialism) and to the subjugation of the poor (4:1). Notable is the fact that Ecclesiastes does not offer any advice on how to improve the lot of the poor. This was probably because he could not see how any such action could really change anything. His only advice in 9:7-10 is for people to enjoy the simple pleasures of life before it is too late. Such simple pleasures are accessible to both the wealthy and the poor.

From the above discussion of the poor and poverty in Wisdom literature, it is notable that the origin of poverty is attributed to laziness, folly, oppression, and injustice. Laziness, folly, oppression, and injustice are portrayed as the root causes of poverty. It is also notable that the causes of poverty in Wisdom literature stand in sharp contrast with the view of the prophets. The prophets condemned the avarice (greed/materialism) of the wealthy, which created the social and economic conditions that led to the impoverishment of the Israelite peasant. It also comes across clearly in Wisdom literature that the victim is never blamed. When Wisdom literature refers to

laziness as a cause of poverty, it does not condemn the peasant farmer but warns the sons of the upper class that they can lose their social standing if they are not careful. Wisdom recognizes that the people of means were responsible for creating and perpetuating poverty but it calls on the wealthy to accept their responsibility towards the poor. Stated differently, Wisdom literature argues that the poverty of the peasant calls for action from the wealthy to alleviate the burdens that their fellow Israelites bear. Wisdom literature calls for generosity towards those in need.

### *The poor and poverty in the Psalms*

Hoppe (2004:122) observes that:

The oppression of the poor is a frequent subject of ancient Israel prayers, which are preserved in the book of Psalms. The psalms of lament, in particular, describe the suffering of the poor and call upon God to judge upon those responsible for it and thereby end the oppression of the poor... Sometimes the psalms do use the vocabulary about the poor metaphorically, especially as it describes the marginalization of the pious by those who did not take their ancestral religion seriously.

It has been observed, so far, that the biblical tradition viewed poverty and its effects in ancient Israel as a tragic evil and called upon God to end such evil, which was threatening to destroy the very fabric of Israel. In studying the Psalms, one should certainly be sensitive to the metaphorical use of language. The basic question of interpretation related to the Psalms is the identification of “the poor and needy” (Hoppe, 2004:123). The question here, therefore, is, are the poor of the Psalms the economically poor? Furthermore, does the word “poor” in Psalms represent a spiritual quality?

Psalms 72 mentions the poor nine times (vv. 2, 4[2 times], 13[3 times], 14[2 times]). The poor in these verses are spoken of in terms of their powerlessness rather than of their deprivation. The psalm asks God to empower the king to perform one of his most fundamental duties - the defense of the poor against those who exploit them. This psalm represents the king as the instrument by which God’s justice and righteousness come to the people especially the poor (vv. 1-2). Indeed, the very basis of the king’s legitimacy rested on his taking the side of the poor as an instrument of divine justice (vv. 12-16). It is also notable that the psalm concludes by acknowledging that God is the source of justice no matter who the human agent may be (vv. 17-19). Poverty is not

spiritualized in this passage. The poor and the needy are those who lack material resources; this makes their exploitation a simple matter for the wealthy (Hoppe 2004:123-124).

The frustrations of the poor are captured in the laments that portray the damage done by the “enemies” (Ps 35:10-26 [v. 19]). These “enemies” of the poor are those who oppress the poor, exploit the needy, subvert the judicial process, and profit at the expense of the poor. Psalm 35:23-24 requests God to join in the lawsuit of the poor in order for justice to triumph. Psalms such as 10:4; 12:8; and 140:4, 8 use the term “the wicked” to describe those who oppress the poor. Psalm 109 brings to the open the economic origins of the social conflict. This passage calls the enemies of the poor “plunders” and “creditors” (v. 11). Furthermore, Psalm 86 is a prayer expecting an oracle of protection against overzealous creditors. Another lament is Psalm 12, which depicts God as on the side of the poor against their oppressors. Psalms 14:7; 22:26; 34:7; 35:10; 69:33; 70:5; 74:19, 21; 76:9; 86:1 affirm that God would bring an end to the suffering of the poor.

Again, Psalm 10:12, 18 calls upon God to remember the *‘ānāwīm* (Hoppe, 2004:128). It is clear from Psalms 25:9; 34:6; 69:33; 76:9; 147:6; 149:4 that God does guide the *‘ānāwīm* and rescues them from their difficulties. The problem of the *‘ānāwīm* was that they needed food and land on which to produce it (Pss 22:26; 37:11). Hoppe (2004:128) notes that the *‘ānāwīm* is equivalent to “pious” or “humble” which is a direct opposite of “evil” and “wicked.” The psalms describe the evil of the oppressors and calls upon God to take the side of the poor (10:1-15).

It is evident that the psalms portray God as the protector and deliverer of the poor. Those who experience exploitation ask for God’s protection and strength in their conflict with the rich (Pss 12:1; 69:33), for the poor are those who depend upon God (Pss 10; 25; 34; 37; 82). It is also stated that the poor turned to God in prayer, because they believed in God’s love and infidelity in the midst of oppression (Pss 69:13-15; 86:5, 15). The poor also prayed that God would vindicate them, by establishing justice according to his righteousness (Pss 35:23-24; 140:12).

Pilgrim (1981:30-31) is of the view that the book of Psalms shows a unique feature of the poor, that is, the “merging of identity between the socially poor and the religiously pious. He notes that

the “poor” and the “pious” become synonymous terms in the Psalms, and when that happens, the poor become “those who place their total dependence upon God” (Ps 88:1-2). Pilgrim further observes that even though there might be a spiritualization of the concept of the poor in Psalms - that is not all - the political and social life settings are also visible. The situations of distress remain those of literal poverty, persecution, oppression, and affliction.

The poor, therefore, are the victims of life and their enemies are the powerful and well to do. What makes the poor to be the *anawin*, is that their hope is in God and their cries reach out to Him with confidence in His promised deliverance.

### ***The poor and poverty in Apocalyptic literature***

The discussion here will concentrate on the poor and poverty in the book of Daniel. The book of Daniel mentions the poor only once (4:27), where the Babylonian king is advised that compassion toward the poor may atone for his sins. The first six chapters of Daniel demonstrate that God does not abandon those who remain faithful to the Torah. The question of justice, social conflict, and the exploitation of those on the margins seemed less important than affirming God’s concern for those who continued to be loyal to Judaism despite the pressure to abandon their religion (Hoppe, 2004:132-133).

In Daniel 7-12, however, the attitude of the Gentile rulers towards the Jews changed from tolerance and sympathy to opposition and persecution. These chapters see the final triumph of those who were faithful as the result of God’s actions through the archangel Michael (Dan 10-12). Hoppe (2004:133) notes that the book of Daniel deals with questions of justice from an apocalyptic perspective, which looks at the intervention of God to reverse the fortunes of the faithful. There is no place for human intervention against injustice since such are ineffective against the powers of evil that control this age. Oppression, persecution, and poverty are seen as passing phenomena, just as the kingdoms of this world are (Dan 7). The message of the book is that faith in the power of God to control the future enables the faithful to defy the forces of oppression.

Notable from the book of Daniel is that oppression is neither spiritualized nor idealized (11:32). The people who were loyal to God are praised not because they were persecuted, but because they remained faithful to their God despite the political, social, and economic consequences of their fidelity. The book of Daniel delivers the message that the suffering of the faithful is not in vain. God would overcome every power arrayed against the faithful including death, for they would be raised up to be like the stars (Dan 12:3).

In the book of Daniel, Gentile rulers were responsible for the oppression of the pious but the book assures its readers that the power of these rulers would end shortly and the faithful would be rewarded with everlasting life.

### **3.3 An Observation**

The Old Testament does exhibit a wide variety of attitudes towards the poor including the fact that the existence of the poor was a sign of Israel's infidelity to the covenant between them and God. It is also shown that God is the protector of the poor. The wealthy oppress the poor and, therefore, cause poverty.

It is noted that, in the age to come, the poor and the rich will have their roles reversed. The message is clear; people ought to be kind to the poor. Some of the Old Testament texts portrayed poverty as the result of foolish decisions that people make. The poor are also portrayed as those who have an attitude of total dependence upon God. In most of the texts considered, the poor in question are the materially poor. Even in the texts that "the poor" becomes a metaphor for a religious reality, the socio-economic meanings of this term are never excluded.

The ancient Israelite texts did not speak very often about "poverty." However, they usually spoke about the poor, the oppressed, the exploited, and the widow. There is no idealization of the poor in the Old Testament. The poor are blessed not because they are poor, but because God is their protector. Both the poor and the wealthy are to observe the law. The wealthy are condemned, not because they are wealthy, but because they do not observe the law and, thereby, call divine judgment upon themselves. Could these perspectives also undergird much of what the New



Testament says about the poor and poverty? How does the New Testament represent the poor and poverty? This question will be addressed in the next section.

### **3.4 The poor and poverty in the New Testament**

A discussion of the poor and poverty from a New Testament perspective will be outlined here. To begin, the Greek words used in the New Testament for the poor and poverty will be analyzed and this will then be followed by an investigation of the poor and poverty in the Gospels, the Pauline literature, and other New Testament texts. A brief conclusion will be offered.

Hoppe (2004:143) notes that:

The New Testament both exhibits strong lines of continuity with ancient Israelite and early Jewish traditions and reflects the Greco-Roman cultural environment in which those who first heard and read these texts lived... The New Testament speaks to that world and offers a more inclusive perspective that had its foundation in the religion of ancient Israel.

#### ***The Greek words for poor and poverty in the New Testament***

The New Testament was originally written in Greek. Scholars<sup>59</sup> have noted that two Greek words in the New Testament, *ptochos* and *penes*, are translated as “poverty or poor”:

- i. *ptochos* – This Greek word is the most commonly used term in the New Testament for poor/poverty as it appears 34 times. Its literal meaning is “beggarly poor”, and it signifies utter dependence on society. It refers to one who is so vulnerably needy that s/he would be at the mercy of other people (Brown, 1971:821; Hanks, 1992:415; and Magezi, 2005:54).
- ii. *penes* – This Greek word is used only on one occasion in the New Testament (2 Cor. 8:9). It denotes one who cannot subsist on his property or one who has little and must live meagerly. This word was most frequently used in ancient Greece despite the fact that it was scarcely used in the New Testament ( Hanks, 1992:415; Magezi, 2005:54).

The contexts, in which these two Greek words are used, are important for reasonable understanding. Out of the 34 occurrences of the word *ptochos*, 24 are found in the Gospels,

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<sup>59</sup> See Brown (1971:821) and Hanks (1992:45, 415).

especially in Luke. There is a plain and a spiritual use of this word. For example, in Matthew 10:21 and Luke 18:22, it is used in the literal sense while in Matthew 5:3, it is used in the spiritual sense. Although it is not an easy task to establish an exhaustive and fixed definition of the words for poor and poverty in the New Testament, it is clear that poverty would generally represent one who is lacking, in varying degrees, the necessities of life such as food, drinks, clothing, shelter, health, land, self-determination, dignity and honor (Hanks, 1992:415; Magezi, 2005:55).

### *The poor and poverty in the Gospels*

Hoppe (2004:144) claims that the significance of the sayings in the Gospels depends, in part, on the one who uttered them. He argues that, it is important to be certain of the perspective from which these statements were made. This is because it is necessary that interpreters know whether such sayings as, “Blessed are you who are poor” (Lk 6:20) and, “What will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?” (Mk 8:36) were uttered by someone who was rich or poor. Concerning these statements, Hoppe asks, “Were they calls to justice or were they content to leave the poor in their misery while conferring on them certain aura of holiness?”

A reading of the Gospels shows that Jesus and his disciples were not among the elite of the Roman Palestine, but shared the lot of the poor. Even though the disciples worked as fishermen, their labor barely provided enough to keep them from destitution, because their profits were diminished substantially by Roman taxes and Jewish tithes. The Gospels portray Jesus as a poor man. However, Jesus came from a family, which was not poor, since Joseph his earthly father was a builder, a contractor, a skilled laborer. The Gospels also record that Jesus left his family and occupation, and even asked the same of those who wished to follow him (Hoppe, 2004:144).

Generally, the following could be observed in the Gospels regarding Jesus and poverty: Jesus proclaimed a Year of Jubilee (Lk 4:18), when the poor would have their debts forgiven. Moreover, during his earthly ministry, Jesus did not have a place where he could lay His head (Matt 8:20; Lk 9:58). Jesus called upon His followers to trust in God and He disassociated Himself from possessions (Matthew 6:25-34). His solidarity with the poor is evident during His passion, when He died the death of a criminal (Php 2:70).

In the Gospel of Mark is the story of the rich man whose wealth stood in the way of his acceptance of the invitation to discipleship that Jesus offered him (10:17-22). The message that comes across from this story is that discipleship, or following Jesus, is costly, for it involves making oneself share the lot of the poor. This particular story ends tragically - the rich man was unwilling to part with his wealth. Another incident in the Gospel of Mark is where Jesus commended the actions of the poor widow who donated the last of her money to the Temple (12:41-44). She served as a perfect foil to the scribes who “devour widows’ houses...” because of their greed. One more incident in the Gospel of Mark involves an unnamed woman who anointed Jesus while having dinner at the house of Simon the leper, a few days before he was crucified (14:3-9). Hoppe (2004:147) notes that, in each of these three passages, the word “poor” refers to the destitute, and that poverty is not spiritualized as a state that places one closer to God. He notes that the poor in the Gospel of Mark are objects of charity, and that these texts do not provide the poor with a special aura of holiness because of their poverty.

Two of abovementioned texts from the Gospel of Mark are also found in the Gospel of Matthew (cf. Matt 19:6-21 and Mk 10:17-22; cf. Matt 26:6-11 and Mk 14:3-9). The Gospel of Matthew takes note of the “poor in spirit” in the beatitudes (Matt 5:3) and of Jesus’ response to the question from John the Baptist (Matt 11:5). Regarding these texts, Hoppe (2004:149) remarks that:

Matthew does not spiritualize the word “poor”. When he uses this word, he is speaking about one of the groups whose existence was on the margins of Jewish society in first-century Palestine. Their lack of power and influence left them particularly vulnerable to exploitation by the Roman occupiers but also to their Jewish collaborators and other people of means. Matthew’s eschatological vision sees that the circumstances of the poor and others on the margins will be reversed soon because Jesus is inaugurating the reign of God on earth. One certain signs of this is Jesus’ ministry that proclaims good news to the poor.

The poor seem to have a very privileged place in Luke-Acts. In Luke 1:46-55 is Mary’s song. Although the term “poor” does not appear in this text, there are allusions to three social evils experienced by the people of Judah in the first century. These evils were foreign domination, the Diaspora of the Jews, and the oppression of the poor by the wealthy. The passage deals with the oppression of the poor by calling upon a common biblical motif, God’s salvation of the lowly

and the associated rejection of the mighty (Hoppe, 2004:150). In verse 48, Luke marks out an important theme of his Gospel; the poor, the hungry, and the oppressed have received God's favor, while God has disregarded the rich and powerful. That point is illustrated in the peasant maiden who was chosen to bear the Messiah. In Luke 4:16-30, Luke writes that Jesus' mission was that of fulfilling the hopes of Israel's restoration (Is 58:6; 61:1-2). In Luke 6:17-49, Jesus calls the poor "blessed" because the kingdom of God is theirs. The poor are blessed because the kingdom of God will put an end to their poverty. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31), Luke explores the differences between the rich and poor. This parable is addressed to those who love money and it shows the fate of the rich man, who, in death, was suffering in hell. It describes how the rich ought to lead their lives in this life. The story of Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10) also mentions the poor. The principal character in the story was the "chief tax collector" (v.2). In responding to Jesus' call, Zacchaeus said, "...half of my possession ... I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much" (Lk 19:8). Jesus' response was, "Today salvation has come to this house" (v.9). Zacchaeus was the only rich man Jesus addressed in this manner in the Gospel of Luke. He serves as an example of those who want to experience salvation. In this text, the poor are those who are economically destitute.

In Acts of the Apostles, Luke does not focus on the destitute who need charity, but he describes the actions of the first Christians that eliminated poverty from their community (Acts 2:44-45, and 4:32, 34-35). The statement in Acts 4:34, "There was not a needy person among them", resonates with Deuteronomy 15:4, which implies that poverty should not exist in the Israelite community if that community observed the Torah.

It appears that, for Luke, the true disciple ought to be compassionate and generous toward those in need. That action would break the socio-economic barriers that separate members of the Christian community, just as the gospel that Luke proclaimed was to break down the barriers between Jews and Gentiles. In the book of Acts is shown the ideals of Jesus implemented in the first Christian community. The members of that community shared their goods and eliminated poverty. It is important to note that Luke portrays the poor as one of the central concerns of Jesus, as evident from Jesus' first words when He began His ministry in Luke 4:18a, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor."

The poor are mentioned also in the Gospel of John - in the story of the anointing at Bethany (12:1-8), and in the story of Judas' dismissal from the Last Supper (13:21-30). During the anointing, Jesus assured the disciples that the poor would not be deprived of help because of Mary's extravagance (12:8), while in the story of Judas, John comments that Judas was not thinking of the poor but himself (12:6). In other portions of the Gospel of John, Jesus is portrayed as actively seeking out those people who found themselves outside the "norm" of the Jewish society. Included in those on the margins were the poor, Gentiles, women, the sick, and the ritually unclean. Such people were vulnerable to oppression, exploitation, and exclusion. A case in point is the story of the man born blind (9:1-41). The blind man, because of exclusion from participating in the life of his community, was reduced to begging to support himself (9:8). He was destitute, depending on the charity of others. Jesus' act, served to push the blind man out of the margins of society. It is therefore noticeable in the Gospel of John that there was maintenance of the care of the poor through alms giving. Jesus also reached out to the poor and the marginalized in his society in order to include them among His disciples.

### ***The poor and poverty in Pauline Epistles***

Hoppe (2004:158) claims that, in his writings, Paul had an attitude towards the poor, which was colored by his expectations regarding the imminent return of Christ. Paul thought that if people worked, the lack of a comfortable life would at least be tolerable (2 Thess 3:7-9). Punt<sup>60</sup> (2004:256) also notes that, for Paul, poverty was not disconnected from other matters in the community such as righteousness and fellowship.

It is evident that Paul did not urge people to work for social change but, on the contrary, he advised them to maintain the *status quo* (1 Cor 7). Paul seemed to hold the view that one's social status was ultimately irrelevant (1 Cor 7:17, 22, 24). It is important to note that Paul belonged to the elite<sup>61</sup> (Acts 22:3; 9: 1-2; 16:37; 22:25); however, he chose to work with his hands, lived the

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<sup>60</sup> Punt J. 2004. "Remembering the Poor: Pauline Perspectives on Poverty". In *NGTT*, Deel 45, Number 2, Supplementum 2004, 256-264.

<sup>61</sup> Paul was an educated Roman citizen, who belonged to the elite, and enjoyed access to the high priest. He was also able to invoke the privileges of Roman citizenship.

life of an itinerant artisan and teacher, and accepted the dangers, humiliations and poverty that such a life entailed. He described himself as having no social status (1 Cor 4:10-12), and as being well acquainted with the burdens that flowed from the life that he chose - hunger, oppression, and marginalization (1 Cor 4:11-13; 2 Cor 4:8-9; 6:4-10; 11:23-28; 12:10).

Paul was a person of high social status, who took up a life of poverty for the sake of his mission. As a result, he could speak with integrity to Christians who were people of means as he urged them to be content with what they had (Php 4:4, 11), to be generous to those in need (2 Cor 8:7-15), and to live more simply (1 Cor 7:30-31). He could also speak to believers of lower social status, urging them to work (1 Thess 4:11), to avoid covetousness (Eph 5:3; Col 3:5), and to give alms to other poor people (Eph 4:28). Even though Paul believed that Christ's return would be sooner than later, this did not lead him to ignore the needs of the poor. Examples include his call upon Christian communities of means to share their resources with the Christian community in Jerusalem. He made appeals to the church of Corinth and the one in Rome (1 Cor 16; 2 Cor 8-9; see Rom 15:26; Gal 2:10).

It is also notable that Paul not only considered concern for the poor as part of his responsibility as an apostle (Gal 2:10), he also saw the example of Christ as the basis for that concern (2 Cor 8:9).<sup>62</sup> Paul also referred to himself as "poor"; however, in doing so, he was not describing his personal circumstance, since he was very reluctant to live off the charity of others (2 Thess 3:7-9). His economic independence was very important to him (Php 4:11), so he had to learn to be content with little.

In his first epistle to the Corinthians (1 Cor 11:18, 22, 29), Paul sounded like a revolutionary. There was a huge social difference among members of that community as the wealthy members of the church kept to themselves, feasted on their own food at the Lord's Supper, and neglected the hungry. Paul condemned such behavior because it undermined the unity of the body of

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<sup>62</sup> 2 Corinthians 8:9 reads, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (NIV).

Christ. He condemned the wealthy because they were introducing an unjust social system into the church. To Paul, God chose what is low and despised for His purposes (1 Cor 1:28-29).<sup>63</sup>

From a reading of his writings, it is evident that Paul made the collection for the poor of the Jerusalem Christian community a priority. He was, however, unwilling to allow collections to be taken up for himself. He did not wish to live off alms. He preferred to work and was content with little in order to preserve his independence. He, however, encouraged people to be generous to those in need (2 Cor 9:6-9), and he regarded giving to the poor an important virtue (1 Cor 13:3). Noting that Paul required his churches to be involved in alleviating poverty, Punt (2004:263) inquires:

How should the Christian church of today with its huge levels of affluence and riches, with its political ideological power, and its ability to influence political decision-makers, with world-wide religious organizations to its disposal, treat the growing global problem of poverty, especially in Africa? And how should it go about contributing to an alternative, positive economic dispensation?

Punt (2004:264) further observes that, “While Paul never justifies or glorifies poverty, it is in fact reasonable to place Paul firmly in line with the biblical and reformed protestant notion that God is on the side of the poor...”

### ***The poor and poverty in other New Testament books***

In texts such as Eph 4:28; 1 Timothy 6:17-19; James 1:27; 2:14-17; 1 John 3:17, the poor are the economically poor, who depend on the charity of others to survive. Although the letter to the Colossians does not use the vocabulary of the poor (Hoppe, 2004:162), there is a concern, in the letter, for those on the margins of both the Roman society and the Christian community. Christian masters are called to treat their slaves “justly” (4:1), because Christian slaves and

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<sup>63</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:28-29 reads: “He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him” (NIV).

masters are “brothers” (4:7, 9). The letter also expects Christian love to transcend social difference and include all believers, no matter their socio-economic status (1:4; 2:2). Greed is condemned (3:5) in an effort to eliminate a significant source of the exploitation of the poor. These views provide a foundation for social change.

In the first epistle to Timothy, the early Christians were to take responsibility for the support of widows, and members of their families who were in need (1 Tim 5:3-13). Deacons who ministered to the poor were to be chosen with care (3:8-13). Those with limited means were urged to be content with what they had to avoid covetousness (6:6-10). People of means were called to generosity (6:17-19). The book of Hebrews (11:24-26) cites the case of Moses, who refused to remain in the household of Pharaoh, but chose “to share ill-treatment with the people of God.” Moses became a slave, throwing in his lot with the poor.

Furthermore, in James 2:1-7, the Christian community was rebuked for keeping the poor on the margins of the community while people of means received preferential treatment. James views wealth and poverty from an eschatological perspective, and proclaims judgment on the wealthy for exploiting the poor (5:1-6).

The book of Revelation mentions the poor in 3:14-22. The wealthy believers in Laodicea were warned of their spiritual destitution. The economic prosperity of Laodicean Christians prevented them from recognizing their true status before God. They did not recognize their need for conversion; they were poor indeed. In 13:11-18, the rich and the poor will be marked with the sign of the beast. Hoppe (2004:163) notes that:

The eschatological perspective of James and the apocalyptic shape of Revelation imply that this age will not witness the final triumph of justice. In a sense, then, all efforts of transforming this world are provisional and incomplete. The final triumph of justice will take place when the reign of God is fully revealed. While that reign began with the coming of Christ, it will finally wrest control of this world from the powers of evil only in the age to come.

Certainly, there is a remarkable difference between the outlook of the poor in the Old Testament (the Hebrew Scripture) and the New Testament. The Torah and the Prophets expected ancient Israel to shape its life according to the demands of justice and impartiality, while the New Testament seems to look for the triumph of justice in the world to come.



### 3.5 An Observation

From the discussion in this section, it has been noted that the New Testament uses two Greek words are translated as poverty/poor namely *ptochos* and *penes*. *Ptochos* connotes the idea of a state of dependency and living at the mercy of others, while *penes* connotes the idea of one who has little and has to live meagerly. When the New Testament speaks of the poor it refers to the “working poor” and those who are genuinely destitute. The working poor and the destitute had little social status and no political power in their community. They lived on the margins of the society and were vulnerable to exploitation at the hands of the wealthy, i.e. both Jewish and Roman.

Furthermore, the New Testament does not idealize poverty and does not suggest that the poor have any special access to God. Despite the apocalyptic thrust of much of the New Testament, there is no suggestion that poverty should be ignored or that its existence be fatalistically accepted. Responding to Jesus’ call to repentance enabled the disciples to hear the call for justice that came from ancient Israel’s prophetic tradition. It propelled the disciples to sell what they had in order to give to the poor. In fact, one way for the wealthy to show a tangible sign of their repentance was by distributing their goods to people in need.

In the writings of Paul, on the other hand, there is no evidence of any spiritualization of poverty. To Paul, the poor were simply those in need. He showed attention to the church in Jerusalem, which had so many believers who were in need. He also advised people to follow his example by supporting themselves from their own earnings and by being happy with a less than comfortable lifestyle.

By and large, the New Testament paints a picture of Jesus, as one who could live without the security that came with political power, social status, or material possessions. Jesus’ followers are challenged to do likewise – to be content living on the margins – as the poor are blessed because the Kingdom of God belongs to them (Matt 5:3; Lk 6:20).

The apocalyptic orientation of early Christianity seemed to have shaped the New Testament’s assumption on the poor and poverty that whatever the believers did to help the poor or to end

poverty would be only partially successful. On the other hand, the Christian belief in the inevitable, final, and complete victory over evil at the end of the age gives believers the assurance that nothing they do to end injustice and oppression will be in vain.

### **3.6 God Identifies with the Poor**

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament emphasize God's special identification with poor people. Dirkie Smit<sup>64</sup> argues that the formulation that, in a situation of injustice, God is, in a special way, the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged, the Help of the helpless, rests on a solid biblical foundation. In support of his stance, Smit cites central biblical evidence from the Old Testament, which include laws such as the laws about the Sabbath, the Jubilee, tithes and usury; narratives about God's continual rescue of individuals and the people of Israel from danger and misery; the various ways in which the rights of the orphan, the widow and the stranger are protected.

Others include the doxological description of God as the Help of the helpless in the book of Psalms; the protection of the poor in the wisdom literature; the portrayal of God's justice as his active intervention to rescue and to restore; and the prophetic criticism of social injustice, exploitation, and the gap between rich and poor. Smit also mentions the role of the poor and of poverty in the gospels, especially the gospel of Luke, which is also called the gospel of the poor; Jesus' identification with the marginalized; the Messianic meaning of the miracles of Jesus such as the multiplication of the bread and fish and healings; and the remarkable teaching of Matthew 25:31-46 that compassion shown to the needy is compassion shown to Jesus Himself.

Finally, Smit mentions the pursuit of sharing and equality in the congregation, according to Acts, 1 Corinthians and the Pastoral Letters; the role of wealth and poverty in James; the urgent appeal of 1 John for concrete deeds of love and compassion (... *op 'n besondere wyse die God van die noodlydende, die arme en die veronregte ...*1982:61-62). It would not be an exaggeration to say that the theme of God's special identification with suffering people runs like a golden thread

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<sup>64</sup> Smit, DJ. 1982. "... *op 'n besondere wyse die God van die noodlydende, die arme en die veronregte ...*", in Cloete, G D en Smit, D J (eds.) *'n Oomblik van Waarheid*. Kaapstad:Tafelberg Uitgewers, 60-73.

through Scripture. This theme is not being referred to coincidentally. It cannot be ignored neither can it be countered with other evidence from Scripture. The vast biblical evidence shows that this theme has to do with the heart of the Christian faith.

In his book, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theological Mission*, Bosch (1991:436) shows how the theme of God's identification with the poor was accentuated within various periods in the history of the church. The early church preserved the ethos of this theological position. Bosch is of opinion that when the church became richer and more privileged after Constantine, it started to neglect this theme and it began to treat the poor and powerless condescendingly. However, in that situation, powerful voices rose such as those of the monastic movement who kept on proclaiming and practicing Jesus' position. Bosch cites Basil the Great as a champion for the poor in the Constantine period. During and after the Reformation, and early in the twentieth century, various branches of the Christian church accentuated the same theme. Examples are the Methodist movement, the Quakers, the Social Gospel Movement and, since the 1960s, various proponents of the so-called Liberation Theology.

Similarly, John de Gruchy explains that the notion was prominent at the birth of the Reformed tradition. De Gruchy<sup>65</sup> (1998:75-76) shows that this was the case because many of the earliest Reformed theologians and pastors, as well as congregations, were persecuted, and that much of Reformed theology was conceived in exile, in poverty, amidst adversity, and in the struggle against social and ecclesiastical tyranny. He cites the famous address of John Calvin to King Francis 1 of France in which he describes his fellow refugees as the "offscouring and refuse of the world" (*Liberating Reformed Theology: A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate* 1991; *Towards a Reformed Theology of Liberation? Can We Retrieve the Reformed Symbols in the Struggle for Justice?*, 1998:75-76). De Gruchy's explanation of how this notion influenced the Reformation is worth quoting:

The original impulse which led to the Reformation and to Calvin's interpretation of it, was a rejection of human tyranny of all kinds and the proclamation of the liberating power of the gospel

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<sup>65</sup> De Gruchy, JW. 1998. *Towards a Reformed Theology of Liberation? Can we retrieve the Reformed symbols in the struggle for justice?*, in Boesak, W A and Fourie, P J A. *Vraagtekens oor Gereformeerdheid*. Belhar: LUS Uitgewers, 71-93.

of Jesus Christ. It was this which first led to Calvin's break with Rome, and it was this that motivated his attempt to create a new, just and equitable (if not egalitarian) society. Likewise, this has been the motivation of all those prophetic Calvinists who have taken the side of the oppressed, whether in the past or in the present (De Gruchy 1998:78).

According to De Gruchy, this kind of theologizing from the perspective of the destitute faded, as Reformed Christians became part of the so-called middle and upper classes where the dominant political power also resided. It regained prominence in Reformed theology as a result of the challenge posed by Liberation Theology of God's preferential option for the poor. De Gruchy states that Liberation Theology did not challenge Reformed Theology to develop a commitment to the public square because, since its inception, Reformed theology takes the public square seriously. According to him, Reformed theology is essentially a Public Theology (1998:76).

De Gruchy (1998:76) reckons that Liberation Theology's real challenge to Reformed theology, however, was to rediscover and to revalue the notion, which was so central at the birth of Reformed theology namely to express its commitment to the public square from the perspective and in the interest of the victims of oppressive power. The emphasis of Liberation Theology on this notion not only entailed that the interest of the marginalized should be viewed as a matter of social ethics, but that it be viewed as a theological question. How we respond to the destitute in society has to do with how we respond to God (cf. Castro, Emilio 1985:32). In a book, *A Theology of Liberation* the Peruvian Liberation theologian, Gustavo Gutiérrez, echoes this position: "*de armen verdrukken is zich vergrijpen aan God zelf, God kennen is gerechtigheid bewerken onder de mensen. Wij ontmoeten God in de ontmoeting met de mensen: wat men voor anderen doet, doet men voor de Heer*" (*Theologie van de Bevrijding* 1974:253). The applicability at this point of one of the central passages in Scripture namely Jesus' parable in Matthew 25:31-46, which shows that the recognition of Jesus in the suffering and destitute, is quite clear. De Gruchy's statement that Article III of The Belhar Confession, which links justice to God, to theology in the narrow sense of the doctrine of God, and which is a positive Reformed response to this challenge, is therefore fully supported (1998:81).

A word about who the destitute, poor and wronged are is appropriate before we conclude this section. Bosch's understanding of the poor in the Bible sheds light on this question. Bosch

observes that when Luke identifies those who suffer in various ways, he always places the poor at either the head (4:18; 6:20; 14:13; 14:21) or the end (7:22) of the list. The poor, therefore, seems to be an all-embracing category for those who are, in various ways, the victims of society, and for those who lack every active or even passive participation in society. This marginality comprises all spheres of life and it makes people feel helpless. The poor, therefore, refers, in the first instance, to the materially poor, but also to other forms of misery. In fact, all who experience misery are, in some very real sense, the poor (Bosch 1991:99; 436-437). Gutiérrez, states that the destitute, poor and wronged, i.e. all people who experience misery,<sup>66</sup> do have first, but not exclusive, right to our solidarity. He pleads that we simultaneously confess the universality of God's love and His special identification with the suffering. If we fail to do this, we do grave injustice to the Christian message (*Theologie van Bevrijding*, 1974:25-26).

### **3.7 A Summary of Findings**

A summary of findings regarding the tradition(s) of both the Old and the New Testaments on the poor and poverty now follows.

Attempting a fusion of what the Bible says about the poor and poverty is almost imprudent. This is because all the biblical traditions developed over a long period. Although the Bible is a product of so many different types of experiences, some common affirmations about the poor and poverty in the Bible can be established. Nonetheless, the diversity in the Scripture is not of such a kind that drawing some conclusions on what the Bible says about the poor and poverty is impossible.

It is notable that the Bible is undisputed in declaring that material, economic poverty is an outrage. The Bible's voices are unanimous in declaring that poverty should not exist, since it is

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<sup>66</sup> Gutiérrez warns that the understanding that poverty does not only have a material connotation, but also a spiritual one, should not be abused to make exceptions for the rule which fosters a relaxed attitude and a protection of the *status quo* of injustice. Exceptions would include poor people who strive anxiously to wealth and rich people who are not attached to their wealth. The abuse is a play on words and on people (1974:248-249). Bosch (1991:99) also pleads that the secondary use of poverty to refer to all forms of misery should not be abused by neglecting the primary meaning of poverty as concrete and visible material poverty.

not in agreement with the divine will. Even though it appears that there is no common explanation on the origin(s) of poverty, the majority view is that poverty results from decisions that people make. This is to say that poverty does not just happen. It occurs because people make it happen. Some of those decisions could be blamed on the poor themselves but the predominant assertion found in the Bible is that the avarice or the greed of the wealthy lead them to unjustly deprive some people of their essential needs.

The Bible recognizes the evil of economic oppression but it affirms that God is the protector of those who are unjustly deprived of access to the gift of the earth and the fruits of their labour. The challenge that the Bible poses to its readers is that of imitating the character of God and of enabling the poor to overcome the oppression that they experience in their lives. The Bible also portrays the experiences of the poor as a metaphor for the need of salvation. The poor do depend on God because they cannot fend for themselves. They are often powerless to change their situation. The poor cannot depend on the wealthy because the wealthy are responsible for the creation and maintenance of their poverty. The poor have, but only one choice, that is, to depend upon God.

Even as the Bible uses the metaphor of the poor to represent human poverty before God, it does not deny the evil of material poverty. The Bible does not overlook the injustice that creates oppression nor does it suggest that poverty and oppression be ignored in favour of spiritual poverty. It is also notable that the Bible does not idealize the poor as having special access to God. Rather, it calls all people to repentance – rich and poor. The poor are not conferred an aura of holiness and there is no condemnation for the need to overcome the forces that create and sustain injustice and oppression.

Since material and economic poverty are portrayed as a distortion of the divine will, believers cannot put up with its continued existence. This would be nothing less than consenting to the continued deprivation and exploitation of the oppressed. It also follows that, since the Bible uses the language of the poor to refer to the human condition before God, such a metaphor should be seen as a call for genuine expression in the lives of those who hold the Bible dear (believers). This means that “spiritual poverty” becomes authentic by incarnating itself in material poverty.

“Spiritual poverty” calls for a modification of the way believers own and use economic goods. It would involve more than just simple acts of compassion toward the poor. It requires a transformation of the believers’ lifestyle.

It is possible, therefore, to make some observations based on the lessons learnt from the Bible regarding the poor and poverty, one of which is to note that voluntary poverty can become redemptive if it leads to genuine solidarity with the economically poor, and the commitment to overcome their oppression and misery. For Christian believers, such solidarity with the poor is an imitation of Christ, because it involves taking on the effects of human sin in order to liberate people from that sin and its terrible effects.

The Bible can help to shape an authentic response to poverty today. This is true because it is clear from the Bible that any disregard and devaluation of material poverty and associated concentration on “spiritual poverty” are contrary to Biblical teaching. In addition, it is important to note that any radical pronouncements and criticism of injustice and oppression that are not backed up by action do not exhibit the kind of conversion that the Gospels call for. It is also important to note that the biblical teachings do not allow believers to leave social justice to political entities. The community of faith is called to provide a model of a society that is founded on solidarity rather than on conflict between social classes. Indeed, the biblical position seems to propose that the community of faith take action on behalf of the poor. When the community of faith fails to take such an action, it loses its reason to exist. On the other hand, the very existence of the poor is an indication that the community of faith has not lived up to its responsibilities.

It is possible that texts such as Deuteronomy 15:11 (“There will never cease to be some in need on the earth”; see also Matt 26:11; Mk 14:7; John 12:8) are read to imply that poverty was a part of the natural order of things. However, these texts should be read against the backdrop of the wider biblical teaching. When this is done, it becomes evident that concern for the poor, not poverty, should be the normal pattern of a community’s life. In the Bible, the Torah teaches that justice should be granted to the poor and the prophets criticize the people of Israel for ignoring their responsibilities to the poor and for making poverty to be a permanent part of Israelite life.

Hoppe (2004:174) writes:

The Scriptures do not demand that believers adopt any one economic system whose principles are applicable to every age. What the Bible does expect of believers is that they respond with imagination, creativity, and generosity to the evils of every economic system. The Torah presents the ideals. The prophets reflect how ancient Israel failed to live out those ideals. Apocalyptic gives a vision of a future that assures believers that whatever they do to bring about the triumph of justice will not be in vain; the triumph of the poor is certain. The Gospels tell of Jesus, who called the poor “blessed” and spent his ministry reaching out to those on the margins of Jewish community.

It is crucial to recognize that poverty is a creation of those who refuse to live according to the ideals of the Torah and the Gospels.

At this point, we can conclude that the formulation that God is, in a special way, the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged, is indeed a basic Christian conviction, which forms part of the heart of the Christian message. The analysis of the biblical perspectives on poverty will be helpful in the discussions on the place and priority of the poor in both Black and Public Theological discourses below. It will become apparent that, in their attempt to respond to poverty, Black Theology and Public Theologies each employ strategies and methods that may be helpful to the other and even more so to the church in her calling to respond more appropriately to the challenge of poverty.



# **CHAPTER FOUR**

## **THE PLACE AND PRIORITY OF THE POOR IN BLACK THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSES**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses Black Theology. The intention is to outline what Black Theology is in order to establish the place and priority given to the poor within black theological discourses. To accomplish this task, the view of some scholars on and their description of Black Theology will be considered. The development of Black Theology especially in the USA and South Africa will be examined. The exciting intercontinental development of Black Theology that involves theologies in Britain will also be discussed in brief along with a reflection on Black Theology's methodology.

In the first part of the chapter, the origins and development of, as well as the approaches to and context of Black Theology will be discussed while in the second part of the chapter, the role of the poor in Black Theology will be investigated.

The structure of the rest of the chapter, therefore, includes the following themes:

What is Black Theology?; development of Black Theology, which focuses on slavery as a historical context of Black Theology, Reading and Experiencing the Bible, the Civil Rights and the Black Power Movements of the 1970s to the 70s, and Black Theology in South Africa; Sources, Approaches, Strengths and Weaknesses of Black Theology; Contemporary Trends in Black Theology; the Place and Priority of the Poor in Black Theological Discourses; and some conclusions on Black Theology.

## 4.2 What Is Black Theology?

Below, several definitions by various scholars are captured, with the intention to understand better this rather wide-ranging form of doing theology.

In his book, *Introducing Black Theology*, Dwight N. Hopkins, an associate professor of theology at the University of Chicago's Divinity School, writes that black people in America have stayed alive and flourished with a spirit of hope and determination:

Even with 100 million of their African ancestors stolen from the continent, 246 years of slavery, 100 years of legal segregation, and decades of de facto oppression, something has kept them on a path towards freedom. A way of holding on to this something has been passed down from generation to generation (Hopkins, 1999:1).

According to Hopkins, for many years, no one could help nor explain why blacks in the USA suffered perhaps more and longer than any other group of people on earth. The blacks had to wrestle with the reality that there was no other reason for their suffering other than their skin colour. They had to ask, "Why Lord?" They had faith in a power that would sustain them through struggles and aid them in their movement as full human beings (Hopkins, 1999:1-2).

In his book, *Introducing Black Theology: Three Crucial Questions for the Evangelical Church*, Bruce L. Fields captures a definition, which may contribute much towards an understanding of Black Theology. It is a definition of Black Theology that came from a statement by the National Committee of Black Churchmen in 1969.<sup>67</sup> Fields (2001:13) writes:

Black Theology is a theology of black liberation. It seeks to plumb the black condition in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the black community can see that the gospel is commensurate with the achievements of black humanity. Black Theology is a theology of "blackness." It is the affirmation of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both white and black people. It affirms the humanity of white people in that it says No to the encroachment of white oppression.

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<sup>67</sup> Cone, James H., and Gayraud S. Wilmore (eds.) 1979. *Black Theology: A Documentary History, Volume One 1966-1979*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, p101. See this citation and its accompanying commentary in Harris, James H. 1991. *Pastoral Theology: A Black Church Perspective*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 59-60.

In the light of Fields' definition of Black Theology above, it is without question that the goal of liberation governs the theological formulation of Black Theology.<sup>68</sup> Black Theology seeks to make sense of the socio-historical experiences of African-Americans, and by extension, black South Africans, and lately in Britain, in the light of their confession that God has given revelation in Jesus Christ. This revelatory act makes possible the conviction that the struggle for justice is consistent with the gospel. James Cone, in his book, *Black Theology of Liberation*, is of the view that:

Christian theology is a theology of liberation... This means that its sole reason for existence is to put into ordered speech the meaning of God's activity in the world, so that the community of the oppressed will recognize that their inner thrust for liberation is not only *consistent* with the gospel but *is* the gospel of Jesus Christ (Cone, 1970:17).

Black people in the USA and South Africa suffered many years of oppression. It was oppression on the basis of their skin color. In the USA, the cause was slavery while, in South Africa, it was apartheid. Black people in these two countries suffered decades of inhumane treatment.

According to Hopkins (1999:4), Black Theology asks the question, what does it mean to be black and Christian for a people situated in the midst of American racism and called by God to be full human beings? He remarks:

Black theology believes that the God of freedom has created the African Americans to be free – to reach their full humanity without obstacles blocking the goal of becoming human beings who can freely do God's will. And through Jesus Christ's liberation message and presence, God has provided a way for the church to move toward that freedom. Similarly, God today continues to offer a divine Spirit to enable and sustain black folk on their journey toward a liberated humanity (Hopkins, 1999:4).

Black Theology works with the black churches and serves as a critical conscience of the church's vocation to liberate the poor in their journey with God to fulfill humanity. The function of Black

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<sup>68</sup> James Cone defines liberation as the struggle for "political, social, and economic justice." See Cone, James. 1970. *A Black Theology of Liberation*. Philadelphia: Lippincott, p 11. Roberts sees liberation as the theme of Black Theology. He writes that, "Christ is the liberator and the Christian faith promises "deliverance to the captives." It promises to let the oppressed go free." (Roberts, J D. 1994. *Liberation and Reconciliation*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, p.11). Cone and Roberts address concerns of liberation against the backdrop of the reality of racism and its manifestations in social, political, and religious realms.

Theology, then, became that of making sure that when one believes in and witnesses to faith, there is an ongoing questioning about whether or not such belief and witness is in line with the God of liberation of the oppressed (Hopkins, 1999:4).

Hopkins (1999:4), therefore, understands Black Theology as "... an effort of African American people to claim their blackness and their freedom as people of God." Such freedom, according to Hopkins, comes when black people, as they are guided by the African American church, "...live out their freedom because God helps them in their daily struggle against personal pain and collective oppression."

In Black Theology, "blackness" is not just a reference to skin colour, it is a symbol rich in meaning and force (Fields, 2001:13). Fields notes that, "The reality of rejection, dehumanization, fear, and oppression is reflected in this word. As a symbol of oppression, the concept of blackness allows for fruitful theological reflection (Fields, 2001:13). The view of Fields above affirms Cone (1970:121, 213). Cone believes that God is black in that "God has made the oppressed condition his own condition" and that Jesus, in the same manner, is black because he identifies with a community that is oppressed because of its blackness.

Blackness, in Black Theology, is not only a symbol of oppression and the solidarity of the oppressed community with God. Blackness also symbolizes the movement to ascribe worth to black life<sup>69</sup>. Affirmation of "blackness" in Black Theology does not call for hatred of whiteness, but rather for an emphasis on the affirmation of what Africans had been taught to reject and despise about themselves.<sup>70</sup>

With such a view of reality, the oppressed black people could no longer yield to white oppression because, by doing so, they would deny their own humanity and that of the white people as well. Regarding what Black Theology is, Fields (2001:15) further remarks that, "Black

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<sup>69</sup> Gayraud Wilmore, "Introduction: Part IV – Black Theology and Black Church," in *Black Theology*, vol. 1, p 243.

<sup>70</sup> This is the view of Gayraud S. Wilmore in *Black Theology*, vol.1, p 299, "The Episcopal Address to the 40<sup>th</sup> Quadrennial General Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (Excerpt)."

Theology involves the process of formulating theology from the perspective of an oppressed people. It seeks to interpret the gospel of Jesus Christ against the backdrop of historical and contemporary racism.”

The message of Black Theology, therefore, is that the struggle for liberation is consistent with the gospel, and that every theological statement must be consistent with the goals of liberation and should perpetuate such goals. To be black and Christian at the same time calls upon one to fight back against the forces that would obstruct being black in the world and against the impediments preventing black people from achieving their full individual and group humanity, which God has created them to reach.

To be black and Christian means having faith in a movement for individual and systemic liberation; a “liberation that is the final work that God and oppressed people will carry out to bring about full humanity” (Hopkins, 1999:5). To that effect, therefore:

Black theology recognizes that God, through Jesus Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit, works with the poor as they learn to love themselves enough to practice their total freedom and create their full humanity on earth as it is in heaven (Hopkins, 1999:5).

Hopkins’ understanding of being black and Christian draws on the understanding that the God of freedom, through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ the liberator, has made available the journey of faith and hopes for one to be free. God’s Spirit of liberation empowers the oppressed African Americans to struggle for full realization of structural and personal free humanity. The oppressed should be free of racism and become a fully created people of God (Hopkins, 1999:5-6).

In *Tribal Talk: Black Theology, Hermeneutics, and African/American Ways of “Telling the Story”*, Will Coleman identifies Black Theology with Womanist and Feminist Theology, Latin American Liberation Theology, and the other so-called Third World theologies. The common ground is that they are all theologies that attempt to discern and proclaim God’s presence in liberating those who suffer under various forms of sin and oppression (Coleman, 2000:171). Coleman understands Black Theology as a theology of witness and liberation. He is quick to add

that every theology including what he calls the traditional Eurocentric ones, has its own particular point of departure and focus. The focus of Black Theology "...is upon the analysis, interpretation, and proclamation of how God liberates African Americans (and other oppressed peoples) from oppression" (Coleman, 2000:171).

Coleman understands Black Theology as a theology of liberation, which has its roots in the African American community. It is a survival theology as well as one of liberation. It is a theology that takes seriously the social context from which its praxis arises. It draws from the wealth from within the African American community as the most important material out of which theological affirmations are made. It is a spontaneous activity that seeks to examine and interpret God's doings for the liberation of African American people within a racist setting (Coleman, 2000:180). In addition, it is a theology of the oppressed. From the North America context, Black Theology is a theology concerned with the survival of the African American people under overwhelming oppressive circumstances. He writes that because Black Theology is centred on survival, it habitually employs "passionate, gut-level language" in elucidating its content, rather than "dispassionate, cognitive language".

Similar to Coleman's understanding of Black Theology, is that of Simon Maimela.<sup>71</sup> In *Initiation to Theology: The Rich Variety of Theology and Hermeneutics*, a book he helped to co-edit with Adrio König, Maimela (1998:111) notes that Black Theology "...deals with problems of racial domination and oppression in North America and South Africa...".

Maimela recognizes Black Theology, Latin American theology of liberation, and feminist theology as those theologies that arise:

... from the experience of one or another form of human oppression, thus focusing attention on the concrete and particular broken relationships in society. These relationships manifest themselves in various forms of alienation and these theologies try to find ways of resolving the conflicts in the light of the gospel, so that people can at least break out of oppression and bondage and come to liberation and freedom (Maimela, 1998:111).

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<sup>71</sup> Simon Maimela is a South African scholar and theologian. He famous for his extensive study of Black Theology.

Nevertheless, Black Theology is quite distinct from Latin American theology of liberation and feminist theology. Maimela (1989:111) observes that the Latin America theology of liberation wrestles with class dominion and oppression while Feminist Theology, "...calls the attention of the church to the perennial problem of male domination and exploitation of women in all societies." However, Black Theology is a theology of liberation, which calls for social, political, and economic empowerment. It demands the right of self-determination for black people while providing a theological legitimacy for such a process.

### **4.3 Development of Black Theology**

Attention is given here to the development of Black Theology by considering slavery/racial segregation in the USA, which is the actual historical context of Black Theology. Attention is also given to the ways African Americans read and experience the Bible, and the 1950s to 1970s era of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement in the USA. Brief reference will be made to the developments of Black Theology in Britain. The discussion will also outline the development of Black Theology in South Africa through a study of the Black Consciousness Movement and that led to the birth of Black Theology.

Maimela (1989:111) asserts that Black Theology has its origins in the unique experiences of 'the people of color' especially of African descent in North America and South Africa. He claims that the people's blackness was justification enough "...to subject them into a life of pain, humiliation, degradation, exploitation and oppression." For him, therefore, Black Theology is "...a particular theological response and is correlative to a unique situation of racial domination<sup>72</sup> and oppression".

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<sup>72</sup> Maimela (1989:112) understands racial domination as "...that conscious belief in the inherent superiority of all people of European ancestry, a superiority which entitles Whites to a position of power, dominance and privilege, and which justifies their systemic subordination and exploitation of people of color, which are regarded as inferior and consequently doomed to servitude".

Domination of one race by the other is quite evident in North America and in South Africa. Maimela (1989:112) writes that the Northern American situation revolved around the history of slavery, which brutalized, degraded, and brought about shattering effects to black personhood. Millions of Africans were "...driven like animals, treated as beasts of toil, shipped across the seas and stripped of their language and culture." Consequently, racism determined the most basic institutions of American society, ensuring that black people remained on the fringes of society, "...deprived, dependent, humiliated, depersonalized and without justice, freedom or a share in the political, economic and cultural spheres."

The same was true of the situation in South Africa. Even though black people were not directly victims of slavery, they experienced racial oppression because of colonialism by European settlers. This form of colonialism employed cultural, scientific, economic and military power to subjugate the people of colour, robbing them of all dignity. They dominated them by the systematic destruction of their personhood through physical and spiritual torture, intimidation, dreadful conditions and denial of basic human rights (Maimela, 1989:112).

Coleman (2000:171) notes that, "Black theology developed primarily out of the social and religious history of African American people in North America." Black Theology does not have its roots in the academia and to understand its present task, a consideration of the context out of which it arose is necessary. Coleman, then, gives a brief development of Black Theology, which he divides into four phases. The first phase emerged as a conscious discipline in the mid-1960s. During this period, radical African American ministers began to reflect on the significance of the civil rights and black power movements within the African American communities in the USA. The second phase was roughly from 1970 to 1975. During that period, the African American theologians took their case to the Euro-American colleges, universities, and seminaries. The third phase began after that, and it focused on global issues in relation to African American communities in the USA. Coleman does not provide the precise date of this phase. At present, Black Theology is concerned with what he calls the utilization of interdisciplinary strategies and indigenous cultural sources, in its theological discourse (Coleman, 2000:172).



Hopkins identifies “the basic building blocks” that were used to construct a Black Theology in response to the question, “What does it mean to be black and Christian?” The building blocks are:

- i. The historical context of slavery;
- ii. Unique way of reading and experiencing the Bible; and
- iii. Developments during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

In the period 1619-1865, African slaves created a new faith called black religion for the oppressed and the poor. These oppressed poor people experienced the theme of exodus, the message of the prophets and the life of Jesus as a way of freedom. From the 1950s to the 1970s, an effort emerged to relate the gospel to the experiences of the African American freedom struggle and the particular challenges of Black Power. Conclusions about Jesus Christ were systematically related to the movement for the liberation of the oppressed especially the African American poor (Hopkins, 1999:15-16).

#### **4.3.1 Slavery as a historical context of Black Theology**

What follows in 4.3.1 to 4.3.4 is a discussion of the development of Black Theology, with special focus on slavery as a historical context of Black Theology. This is followed by a discussion of the way the Bible was read and experienced in the context of the development of Black Theology. The contribution of the Civil Rights Movement between the 1950s and 1970s will be examined, as well as the development of Black Theology in South Africa.

On Black Theology and the context of slavery, it has been noted that Black Theology has its roots in the experiences of black Americans who were subjected to slavery and other forms of racial discrimination. Thus, memories of African beliefs, common sense wisdom, and reinterpretation of white Christianity, in the context of slavery will be discussed. During the period of black slavery, 1619 to 1865, the poor black people began to construct their own faith in what Hopkins calls “the hell of over two hundred years of slavery.” Although this faith was the private property of the slave masters and although blacks had been torn from their home in Africa and ripped away from their families, blacks in the USA did enjoy “the beauty of a faith

which maintained their humanity and their hope in a new heaven and a new earth for their children” (Hopkins, 1999:16).

Hopkins states that black people in the USA during this period constructed a new religion that drew from three sources. The one source was “memories of African religious beliefs”, the other was “commonsense wisdom from everyday life”, and the third source was “a reinterpretation of the white supremacy Christianity introduced to them by their Christian slave masters.” The results of that endeavor brought about the formation of the “Invisible Institution”, which was “a name given to the secret times and space where blacks worshipped God by themselves” before surfacing as the public black church at the end of the civil war in 1865 (Hopkins, 1999:16-17).

### ***Memories of African beliefs***

The reality of slavery and slave trade was such that when the White Christian slave traders and missionaries brought Africans from their motherland to the USA, created an interruption of the slaves’ link to what Hopkins calls “the family of spirits and religious worldview of the African continent.” Much as this was the case, the Africans retained some practices<sup>73</sup> of African indigenous religions. The African worldview that Hopkins refers to is that the high God ruled all creation with justice and compassion for the weak. Intermediaries carried out some specific duties on behalf of the high God; however, they got their power from that Supreme Being.<sup>74</sup> The ancestors and the living dead required sacred recognition and veneration and served as intermediaries between the troubles and fortunes of the living and the supernatural world. Religious leaders and elders within the land of the living steered the community with sacrosanct

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<sup>73</sup> Such practices include the following: Talking to dead ancestors, putting the belongings of the dead person on his or her grave, believing that religion was not private but part of every day public and private life, the act of shouting during worship, respect for elders, and the key role of the extended family.

<sup>74</sup> For further readings on the development of this thought, see Mbiti, S. John. 1970. *African Religions and Philosophy*. N.Y.: Anchor Books, (p. 37); Opoku, Kofi Asare. 1978. *West African Traditional Religion*. Accra, Ghana: FEP International Private Ltd (p. 9-10); Curtin, Philip D. (ed). 1968. *Africa Remembered: Narratives of West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press (p. 274).

wisdom based on traditional authority. This worldview also took account of a vision of the unborn as preparing to depart from the spiritual to the material world (Hopkins, 1999:17).

To these Africans, the secular and the sacred were one. No space was non-religious and all life was holy. Such beliefs were a great source of encouragement to them since God ruled over all creation and:

...[N]o individual or race could claim hegemony and monopoly in any sphere of reality. It encouraged them because whenever any person or group sought to challenge God's hegemony by hoarding and lording privileges over another, duty called for ongoing resistance in the name of the Supreme Being Hopkins, 1999:17-18).

The African way of life understood individualism as a sin and attached importance to individuality. One could pursue one's goals as long as such served the collective well-being. Africans lived out a life style of "I am because we are" and lived in extended family settings which accepted not only the biological family connections but also the "beggar, the broken and the bereaved." The Africans also brought with them to the USA a point of view that valued, what Hopkins calls, "both-and" instead of "either-or" perspective on life. To them, all of life's dimensions "involved a complementary and non-antagonistic relationship with that which was outside of oneself" This means that to the African, persons or communities different from one's own were not involuntary threats or enemies; however, antagonism and hierarchical stratification occurred when evil spirits or wicked people interrupted the created balance of the community (Hopkins, 1999:18).

### ***Commonsense Wisdom***

Coupled with memories of African beliefs was an appropriation of their own commonsense wisdom from every day experience. According to Hopkins (1999:19-20), such wisdom consisted of sayings which were filled with folk theological wisdom and included the following:

- "God may not come when you call him, but he is right on time". The African Americans understood this to mean that God appears "on time" to ease one's troubles and lift one's burdens.
- "God sits high but looks low." This representation of God provided for a portrayal of God as one whose providence covered all reality. He is not positioned so high that he cannot

deal with human predicaments. As they read the Bible, they understood Jesus as the divine Being who became poor in order to bring about suffering humanity's liberation.

- “God don't like ugly.” These people understood God as one who would not let trouble to last forever for the voiceless of society. They knew that evil could reign in the immediate realm, yet in the end, God would prevail on earth for the sufferers of pain and abuse. Such an understanding of God enabled the slaves to hold on in hope of a future, which would be theirs.
- “God helps those who help themselves.” The slaves understood themselves as people who should defend themselves and struggle for full humanity in their journey to achieving their fullest creative possibilities. Appropriation of this understanding of God to their immediate context meant that one had to fight against the slave system and never to wait idly on God while the evil forces crushed one's spirit, body and mind because that would be a slow suicide.

The daily challenges led to the realization that because God was on time, God looked low, God detested ugliness, and God helps those who help themselves, all oppressed peoples were co-laborers with God in order to produce life's fullest fruit.

### ***Re-interpretation of White Christianity***

To the slave masters, the slaves were to obey their masters. This was their preaching. On their part, the African Americans took the preaching of the White people and transformed it. Biblical stories that spoke about liberation were linked to events in their lives to open the door to freedom. They accepted biblical stories of liberation and treasured them as “the criteria of Christian witness and evangelism”, and liberation action was lifted up as criteria for sensible biblical interpretation. Hopkins writes that:

From their perspective of freed found freedom in the memories of about their African religious beliefs, in the commonsense wisdom of every day experience, and in the liberation theme at the heart of a reinterpreted Christianity, enslaved black workers projected themselves into an entirely new community made up of God, Jesus, their families, and themselves (Hopkins, 1999:21).

The African Americans understood God to be the main expression of justice, contrary to how the Europeans understood justice, which was, “saving the African ‘heathen’ from the barbarism of their own native environment” (Hopkins, 1999:21).

The slaves understood their sense of freedom from reading and applying the Hebrew Scripture. They saw themselves in the lives of the Hebrew people during their time in Egypt. Pharaoh represented the white slave masters. The story of forced labor and a subordinate social status was theirs. The fact that God eventually delivered or liberated the Hebrew people meant that he would do the same to the then four million African Americans, because this was the same God, the “I AM WHO I AM” God. They understood God as him who granted to all humanity equal freedom in original creation; but “man”, (the slave trader) stole the black people from Africa, bringing about a betrayal of God’s sacred intent from the beginning of time. The same God of the Hebrew Scripture who brought about new realities to the oppressed Hebrews would fulfill the promise of liberation for the black workers in North American slavery (Hopkins, 1999:22).

The slaves developed, what Hopkins (1999:22), calls “a ritualistic affirmation about God’s constituency.” This means that they understood God as one who “felt a special *love* for the oppressed, *heard* their groans, and *delivered* them out of the house of bondage.” This *love-hearing-deliverance* became an expression of the heart of the new liberation theology that slaves contributed to Christianity in North America:

...love, included a divine partiality of the poor; hearing became Yahweh’s ears to the moans of the voiceless of the earth; and deliverance saw the divinity with the outstretched arms fighting off slavery and hoisting the victims on eagle’s wings into a land rich with “milk and honey” (Hopkins, 1999:22-23).

#### **4.3.2 Reading and experiencing the Bible**

The second period or building block, as proposed by Hopkins (1999:23), is the development of a Black Theology of liberation through the rereading of the Bible from the viewpoint of the majority of society, who are the poor and the working people. The African Americans read the Bible in a manner that challenged the prevailing dominant ideas about theology. The dominant theology offer unprejudiced thinking or talk about God. Black Theology on its part saw and experienced the spirit of freedom clearly on the side of the African American poor. As they read Scripture, they saw God as one who sided with the oppressed people.

It appears, from Hopkins’ representation here, that Black Theology stated openly that its proponents, even during this period, understood their theology to have an open leaning toward

the majority of the world, who are the poor and the marginalized. The then dominant theology claimed to be universal, yet represented the views of the few who subjugated the many.

One reading of the Hebrew Scriptures is Exodus 3:6-11. The African Americans who read this portion understood Yahweh as the deliverer of the Hebrew people. He, Yahweh, *heard*, *saw* and *delivered* the oppressed Hebrew slaves from bondage to liberation. When God liberated the Hebrews, the resultant emancipation was not one that only dealt with the invisible spirits of the slaves, but also one that brought about the freeing of actual workers who were real slaves to the then ruling class, whose intention was the amassing of profit based on the forced, strained and unjust labor of working, oppressed people. The message that came out clearly from Scripture was that poverty was a result of injustice. On the contrary, God is portrayed as one who has always sided with the poor and has consciously decided *to listen* to, *to see*, and *to change* the course of human history by working with the poor on earth, hence freeing the broken humanity from sin. God, in his being and work, is a liberator who has great love for victims of oppression. Liberation of humanity is his divine objective (Hopkins, 1999:24).

The African Americans understood the focal point of the Christian story as the revelation of God as the liberator for the poor in Jesus of Nazareth (John 3:16). It is in Jesus that all humanity receives full personal and communal liberation. Just as the God of the Hebrews loved, heard, saw and delivered a particular poor and oppressed people, the event of Jesus unlocks a divine promise of freedom for all of human race who would give their way of life to the poor. In Jesus, God once again exhibits His conscious choice to appear in a specific location. He chose the setting of poverty for the birth of the one chosen to offer full humanity for all. He revealed himself in the filth and muck of the manger (Hopkins, 1999:25).

African Americans saw here the link between the Hebrews and the story of Jesus. The common thread is that of compassion for the poor which begins with the Hebrews and continues to the New Testament. It is God siding with the poor for everyone's humanity on earth. In Luke 4:18-19, the purpose and plan of God on earth is revealed in Jesus. In the passage, the focus on the creation of a new heaven and a new earth by God is also revealed. This passage in Luke, which has its roots in the Hebrew Scriptures (Is 61), began the entire ministry of Jesus. The choice of

this passage was to reveal God's purpose for Jesus' ministry. The ministry would bring about justice and righteousness for the poor. The poor in the passage who were to be the targets of God's good news included those without wealth, the physically blind, those behind steel bars or real prisons, and those suffering material oppression (Hopkins, 1999:26).

Jesus, writes Hopkins (1999: 26-27), also gave the criteria for who would enter heaven and who would suffer for their earthly exploitation of the poor in Matthew 25:31ff. Humanity is divided into two – sheep and goats. One's liberation, therefore, comes about according to one's relation to those sectors of society who are materially poor (Matthew 25:34-34, 40). God opts to side with the poor in order to present the universal divine grace to all who have ears to hear and eyes to see the materially poor and oppressed. These people include "... the hungry, the thirsty, the homeless strangers, the torn and naked tattered ones, the sick who lack resources or health insurance for their illnesses, and those in prisons, the majority of whom are overwhelmingly poor" (Hopkins, 1999:27).

Black Theology, as Hopkins notes, asserts that the God of liberation witnessed in the Bible, decisively revealed in the living presence of Jesus Christ, and offered today as an empowering Spirit, is the same God who desires the divine will to be located amidst the troubles and struggle of the black poor. Since God, decisively, chose to side with the poor, a Black Theology of liberation affixes itself in the interest of the black poor. In view of the fact that it is the divine will for the poor to be free, the small, rich ruling class of today have the opportunity to accept God's grace for them to choose for the poor. By returning God's resources to all of humanity, the minority group of those who monopolize no longer will exploit the poor. Through the poor, the rich and all who monopolize receive their salvation. With the African American poor, Black Theology makes available an opportunity for all to make a conscious resolution to arrive at their full humanity and take pleasure in the new social relations on earth and in heaven. The biblical revelation and the revelation of God among the black people complement one another since they amount to the similar holy event of liberation (Hopkins, 1999:28).

### **4.3.3 Civil Rights and the Black Power Movement - the 1950s to the 1970s**

The events of the 1950s through the 1970s form the context in which Black Theology developed. This period witnessed the birth of the Civil Rights movement, and the Black Power movement. Out of these movements, came black religion.

As noted so far, Black Theology combined slave theology with a new reading of the Bible, and an appropriation of black folks' affirmation of black pride and resistance against white racism. Black Theology, according to Hopkins (1999:29), arose from three main endeavors:

- A critique of Joseph R. Washington's *Black Religion*;
- The Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s; and
- The Black Power movement of the 1960s and early 1970s.

“Black Theology”, as a phrase or expression, came out of the call for an affirmation of black religion during this period of considerable societal makeovers in the USA and in the Third World. A more elaborate description of these three endeavors would bring about a clearer understanding of the developments in the period in question.

#### ***The Black Religion***

In 1964, a man by the name Joseph R. Washington Jr., a religious scholar from the African American community, published a book titled *Black Religion*. In this book, he presented several arguments, some of which are highlighted below:

- To Washington (1964:22), religion meant a belief in the various dimensions of the human experience but not the same as faith. To him, faith demanded a fundamental change in the individual because its direction was one that was shaped and tested by a community of believers who are instructed by tradition and history. Faith must always be a response to God while religion may be a response to whatever an individual desires. Faith stands in judgment on all religions and is the critic of every religion. Its concerns are those of the ultimate. Faith is not concerned solely with one aspect of a person's life but with the whole of life. It is in faith that a person makes every decision and is willing to be loyal to God every moment. On the contrary, in religion, a person may place one's value on some goal or god, which is confused with God.



Washington, expounding this understanding of faith, writes that faith is that, which begins with the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and not with the man from Nazareth or with the Sermon on the Mount. A Christian is one who has faith in Jesus Christ as Lord (Washington, 1964:23). Washington's comprehension of faith and religion suggested that religion could be a response to a political party or a justice movement, for example, while faith is a specific belief in God through Jesus Christ (Hopkins, 1999:29).

To Washington, faith could only be found in a tradition especially the historic Protestant Christian tradition from Europe. Washington understood the true church to be one that has specific faith, as opposed to religion, in the God of the Hebrew and the Christian Scriptures. Belief in the religion of Jesus does not stand as authentic example of the true church. Theology, therefore, could be developed only with faith, tradition and a church institution. Such theology arose from a church grounded in a firm faith handed down through European tradition. To Washington, white Christians were true Christians because only they had *faith* in Christ, they were connected to a white European *tradition*, and they belonged to the true *church*. Therefore, white people were the only ones who had a Christian *theology* (Hopkins, 1999:30).

Washington's (1964:38-39) second argument is that:

- Black people in the USA were religious and had developed religious institutions. He positively affirmed the historic struggles for justice, freedom and equality of these religious institutions. He proposed that these were lessons from which the white churches could learn. Nonetheless, Washington was quick to assert that a religion of the justice of Jesus did not qualify as faith. To Washington, faith could only be in God manifested in Jesus Christ and passed down from European Christian tradition, housed in the then European and white American churches, and anchored in theology, which was a discipline of an intellectual nature pursued by European and white American Christianity.

To Washington, the African Americans had failed to make a real contribution to Protestantism, the Christian faith, or the Christian church. They had failed to suggest any ecclesial amendments in the white organizations on which they were modeled. His reason was that such failure by the African Americans was not an inherent inability but it was, primarily, because the African

American institutions were not established to propound theology or liturgy. Black Theology, therefore, distorted the historic Christian faith (Washington, 1964:38-39).

Washington (1964:255), nonetheless, understood the harmful impact of Christian white supremacy and the evils of segregation, which was carried out by white Americans. He reasoned that since only the white churches had a faith and not just a religion and were the heirs of European tradition, the sin of racism had forcefully kept black people out of the Christian faith, tradition, church and, consequently, theology. This was precisely why the central theological questions of faith, especially the teachings of the church on social issues, had not entered the religious realm of the African American (then called the Negro).

Washington's thinking was that if theology arose only out of white churches, which were the true defenders of the faith as opposed to religion, it then followed that black religious organizations were, at best, institutions for justice and, at worst, mere organizations of childlike clowning. For him, the solution was for black religious organizations to go out and join white American churches in order to have access to theology. Once they had access to (white) faith, their positive contribution to white churches would be the emphasis and experience of works of justice (Hopkins, 1999:31).

Many white religious scholars and clergymen praised *Black Religion* because it was an intellectual statement about the authenticity of white American churches and a bold critique of the nature of the African American church. The book repositioned the white church as a centre of the Christian faith and witness in the USA. Its attacks on black religion meant that African American believers had to abandon their independent status and assimilate into white churches. African Americans condemned the book even though they acknowledged Washington's underscoring of the element of justice for the black believer. They condemned the book because of its uncompromising assertion that black religious worshippers did not have faith, they were separated from Christian tradition, and they failed as churches, thus, lacking a theology. Washington strongly recommended that if black people were to be a church and possess a theology, they would have to merge with whites and adopt white theology. Black theologians of the day moved to show the shortsightedness of Washington analysis. Consequently, Black

Theology arose, in part, as a systematic investigation, development, and creation of a Christian theology for black people that tended toward liberation (Hopkins, 1999:32).

### ***The Civil Rights movement***

Several scholars claim that the Civil Rights movement began on December 1, 1955.<sup>75</sup> This was the day when one black female worker named Rosa Parks is reported to have sat down in a Montgomery, Alabama bus and refused to give her seat to a demanding white man. This act of radical defiance against the evils of Southern segregation laws sparked a new generation of black civil rights activism. Hopkins (1999:32) claims that if Washington's academic publication provoked a negative incentive for the emergence of a Black Theology of liberation, the civil rights and black power movements served as positive intellectual energy from the grassroots.

Rosa Park's refusal to give her seat because she was tired from a day's work is believed to have brought about the movement that propelled Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., the African American Church, and the North American Black Struggle for Justice into the national and international arenas. It was after Mrs. Parks' event that King and the African American Churches began to boycott the city buses in protest against segregation. The African American church was aware of the truth that the Christian gospel contradicted the discriminating laws of white supremacy (Hopkins, 1999:33).

The Civil Rights movement is believed to have been a radical and militant chapter in the history of the African American struggle for liberation and the practice of freedom. The movement encouraged the black church to go into direct mass action, which broke the laws. They shut down local governments by disrupting the daily routines and practices of whites in power. These organizations, the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) in the 1940s and early 1950s and the Civil Rights movement through the African American church,

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<sup>75</sup> See Garrow, David J. 1986. *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership*. New York: Vintage Books; Branch, Taylor. 1988. *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

brought in a new form of protest whereby blacks moved from the court chambers dominated by the NAACP into the streets and rough country of the Southern states (Hopkins, 1999:33).

The blacks adopted measures such as sit-ins, kneel-ins, and other acts of civil disobedience to undermine the Jim Crow practices and segregation laws. Through the Civil Rights movement, the blacks demanded full equality for all Americans within the rights of the constitution of the USA. The religion of freedom and the historical religion of black faith from the time of slavery fueled the Civil Rights movement against the terror of the Ku Klux Klan, racist politicians, and the generally hostile white response (Hopkins, 1999:34).

Hopkins reports that:

Black theology arose from black pastors that had participated in King's civil rights movement. These ministers and church administrators were veterans for civil rights resistance in the South and desegregation battles in the North. They were familiar with water hoses and cattle prods. They had religiously told white officials to stick to Christian love and nonviolence. They had also preached at funerals for nonviolent civil rights workers. And they experienced the pain of having their churches dynamited in the early morning hours (Hopkins, 1999:34).

The lesson that the founders of Black Theology of liberation learnt from the Civil Rights movement began to redefine what it meant to be a church. The movement redefined the church as "a militant, radical manifestation of Jesus Christ in the streets on behalf of the poor and marginalized." The calling of the church was that of being witnesses outside of buildings and on behalf of the least in society. The church had no choice but to follow the way of Christ "who came, died and was resurrected for the freedom of the oppressed and, through them, all of humanity" (Hopkins, 1999:34).

### ***The Black Power movement***

Another incentive that gave rise to Black Theology of liberation, according to Hopkins (1999:34), is the Black Power movement. The Black Power movement arose from Greenwood, Mississippi with the call for Black Power during a civil rights march on June 16, 1966. The march was led by Dr. King and Stokely Carmichael, the then chair of the Students' Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The SNCC was the youth wing of the Civil Rights movement.

Apart from the call for Black Power during the civil rights march, the Black Power movement had other roots. Hopkins (1999:35-37) mentions five of them namely the suffering of the black people as a result of poor living conditions, a growing disdain for the hypocrisy of white liberalism within the civil rights movement, and the failure of the federal government to support voter registration. The others are the white segregationist terrorism in the South, and the resurrection of the spirit of Malcolm X who was the contemporary father of Black Nationalism. An elaboration of these roots can shed more light on this discussion.

The first root cause is that the Black Power movement arose from the suffering of the masses of black people. The Montgomery bus boycott and the signing of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 complicated the ever-widening gap between blacks and whites in the American society. The passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1957, 1960, and 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 benefited only a small section of the black community. The middle class blacks harvested insufficient benefits from the battle for civil rights. However, the black poor, who were the majority, remained in poverty and lacked considerable societal gains (Hopkins, 1999:35).

The second root for the Black Power movement was the growing disdain for the hypocrisy of white liberalism. The SNCC, which was the youth wing of the civil rights movement, analyzed the kind of suffering that they had to endure as a result of betrayals at the hands of white liberals. The youth group took the position that membership in the Democratic Coalition held little hope for Southern blacks. They realized that because they lacked power, they were victims sold out by the liberals (Hopkins, 1999:35).

The failure of the Federal government to support voter registration continued the disillusionment process for the SNCC. This is the third root of the Black Power movement. In 1961, however, the Kennedy administration sought to redirect the growing militant energy of the SNCC into voter registration in the South. The president is said to have provided protection on condition that the youth would adhere to the proposed reform. One wing of the SNCC accepted the opportunity. It was not long before the SNCC suffered bloody beatings, that is, as early as 1962, from segregationists. While these beatings took place, the federal agents of Robert Kennedy's Justice Department stood nearby, watched and took notes (Hopkins, 1999:36).

The fourth root that brought about the rise of Black Power was the reaction to white segregationist terrorism in the South. The chances of enlisting to participate in elections proved to be fatal. The SNCC leadership and ordinary black people suffered bombings, sabotage of cars, and murder. The whites used the system for repression. They used “legal” means, e.g. sheriffs jailed “outside agitators” who interrupted the common ties between whites and blacks, banks and insurance companies conveniently cancelled loans and policies, thus frightening helpless and powerless black sharecroppers (Hopkins, 1999:36).

The fifth and final root for Black Power was the resurrection of the Malcolm X spirit. Malcolm X, the father of contemporary Black Nationalism, was assassinated in February 1965. He was believed to have grasped the profound sense of psychological self-hatred and self-denigration internalized by black America.<sup>76</sup> He also explained the true meaning of integration<sup>77</sup> while preaching black solidarity and the right to self-determination<sup>78</sup> (Hopkins, 1999:36-37).

So far, it is evident that Black Theology has its roots and origins in a painful context of oppression, dehumanization and destruction of black personhood. Maimela (1989:112) shows that Black Theology “was born as a theological protest against racial discrimination and human beings’ inhumanity to other human beings”. To Maimela, Black Theology is “a conscious,

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<sup>76</sup> Hopkins (1999:37) reports that Malcolm X, with insightful clarity declared, “The worst crime the white man has committed has been to teach us to hate ourselves.” That is why black people burn their hair to make it straight. And for similar reasons, they bleached their skin and tried to make their noses and lips thinner. In addition to denying their natural and beautiful self-identity by burning their hair and distorting their skin, African Americans did not share equitably in the resources of the nation. White men controlled the major institutional resources of America. To love oneself, then, meant both the right of self-identity (e.g. black is beauty) and the right of self-determination (e.g. the control of the means of producing and distributing the nation’s wealth).

<sup>77</sup> Malcolm X “sought to shatter the myth in the black person’s mind that equated value and all positive norms with whiteness and that also defined blackness as a creation of whites. Before black power, white people stood for cleanliness, beauty, and saintliness. Black people were equal to nastiness, ugliness, and evil” (Hopkins, 1999:37).

<sup>78</sup> Malcolm X demanded a lifting up of the black pride and Pan-Africanism. He also theologially defined the white man as “the devil” (Hopkins, 1999:37).

systematic, theological reflection on black experience, characterized by oppression, humiliation and suffering in white racist societies in North America and South Africa”. Maimela (1989:113) further notes that the oppressed gave birth to Black Theology, “which seeks to interpret these oppressive conditions in the light of the biblical God whose justice demands that the oppressed and downtrodden be set free.” Furthermore, Black Theology, “as a response to White Theology which sanctifies racist social institutions, is thus a passionate call to freedom; it invites all the people of colour to authentic human existence and freedom in God’s name”.

#### **4.3.4 Black Theology in Britain**

The development of Black Theology in Britain is documented, for example, by Michael N. Jagessar and Anthony G. Reddie in a book,<sup>79</sup> *Black Theology in Britain*, which they edited. The book sketches the growth of Black Theology in Britain from the eighteenth century through the contemporary era. By means of re-investigating popular contents and formerly unpublished, revolutionary material, Jagessar and Reddie put forward wide-ranging and challenging analyses of the development of an eclectic and unique voice, that is, Black Theology in Britain. Similarly, in the first chapter of his book,<sup>80</sup> *Black Theology in Transatlantic Dialogue*, Anthony G. Reddie traces the respective developments of Black Theology in Britain and the USA. He details how Black Theology differed in the two regions, what they have in common, and what they can learn from each other.

#### **4.3.5 Black Theology in South Africa**

In addition to the discussion of Black Theology in the USA above, a consideration of Black Theology in South Africa will follow at this point. There are similarities between the two countries that formed a breeding ground for Black Theology. Firstly, attention will be given to the Black Consciousness movement in South Africa, and its role in the development of Black Theology.

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<sup>79</sup> See Jagessar, Michael N. & Anthony Reddie. 2007. *Black Theology: A Reader*. University of California: Equinox.

<sup>80</sup> See Reddie, Anthony G. 2006. *Black Theology in Transatlantic Dialogue*. Palgrave Macmillan.

### ***Black Consciousness in South Africa***

In his 1988 doctoral dissertation of the University of South Africa, titled, *Black Theology – Challenge to Missions*, Johannes Nicolas Jacobus Kritzinger argues that Black Theology in South Africa cannot be understood separately from Black Consciousness. Black Consciousness represents the experiential base out of which Black Theology arose and is also the framework within which it developed (Kritzinger, 1988:23).

Kritzinger writes that the first concrete manifestation of the Black Consciousness movement in South Africa is the formation of a black caucus organized by students attending the University Christian Movement (UCM) national conference at Stutterheim in 1968. This brought about the formation of the South African Students' Organization (SASO) and other Black Consciousness organizations. Subsequently, SASO joined forces with earlier phases of black struggle such as the African National Congress (ANC), Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and other forces to oppose white rule in South Africa. The awareness by the Black Consciousness movement of being heirs to a long tradition of African resistance to white domination was the strongest influence. What set apart the Black Consciousness movement from earlier movements was the fact that theirs was a phase characterized by “identity” and black solidarity as opposed to “anger”, “emulation” and “criticism” which characterized earlier phases of resistance (1988:24-26).

Kritzinger (1988:26) claims that Black Consciousness was one form in a chain of revivals, which occurred in the black world in South Africa. However, the most significant factor that contributed to the newness of the movement was the influence of the Black Power movement in the USA. Kritzinger writes that it was this injection “from the USA which gave the impetus to the emergence of Black Consciousness in South Africa.”

The Black Power Movement arose in the USA in the mid-1960s. It immediately made an impact on the powerless and leaderless people of South Africa. Black students in South Africa eagerly read and propagated the ideas of people like Stokely Carmichael, Eldridge Cleaver, Malcolm X and others. There were mutual personal visits to the USA and South Africa by students of both countries (Kritzinger, 1988:27).



The third factor that influenced the Black Consciousness movement in South Africa, other than the afore-mentioned groups (African Nationalist Struggle and Black Power in the USA and movement of negritude), is political independence in Africa. By the mid-1960s, most African colonized states had gained independence through armed struggle, except Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa. That scenario had a profound effect on the peoples of South Africa (Kritzinger, 1988:3-34).

The thinking behind Black Consciousness is holistic liberation, not only from personal inferiority but also from systems of racist oppression. It was interested in, what Kritzinger (1988:34) calls, the internal and the external liberation. Internal liberation would deal with, among other aspects, self-image, acceptance of blackness, rediscovering black history, and the adoption of a clenched fist as the “trade mark” that represents a determination of the black people to affirm themselves as human beings in the face of white domination, and to mobilize their collective power in order to overcome it. (Kritzinger, 1988:34-45) External liberation, writes Kritzinger, would include self-reliance and solidarity, conscientisation, mobilization, and “separatism” (1988:46-54). The black people would have to do their own thing for themselves. Conscientisation meant “helping the oppressed to ‘name their world of oppression, and develop tools for analysis, and mobilize their resources to change their life-world’” (1988:48). Mobilization was aimed at calling the whole black community to consolidate its group power for an all-out confrontation with the prevailing system (1988:49). External liberation further involved “separatism”. It was a strategy for forming exclusively black organizations for purposes of black solidarity. It was also to avoid any attempts to dilute the determination of black people to free themselves (1988:50-54).

### ***Development of Black Theology in South Africa***

Kritzinger (198:58) divides Black Theology in South Africa into two distinct phases. The first phase began in 1970 with the establishment of what he calls “a Black Theology Project by the University Christian Movement (UCM)”. The second began in 1981 with the establishment of “the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT), which from its inception included a Black Theology ‘task force’”.

In the first phase (1970-1980), Black Theology appeared by name in a paper written by Dr. Basil Moore, the then director of theological concerns of the UCM titled, *Towards a Black Theology*. This unpublished paper was read during the UCM meeting at Thaba 'Nchu in March 1970. The paper applied the Black Theology of the USA to the South African context (Kritzinger, 1988:58-59).

A conference to set up the Black Theology agency was held in February 1973 in Pietermaritzburg. At this meeting, it was acknowledged that an appropriate theology was essential in order to make religion keep abreast with the rebirth of the black people. Such a theology would help the black people's true understanding of God's revelation, which brings liberation from present problems (Motlabi, 1973:12). The functions of the Black Theology agency, among other responsibilities, was to co-ordinate all work done in the field of black theology in South Africa, provide all interested people with background material on Black Theology and maintain high academic standards on such matters as definitions and propagation of Black Theology (Kritzinger, 1988:61).

After that conference, other meetings and studies were held including the Black Renaissance Convention (BRC) of December 1974, the Mazenod Black Theology Conference of 1975, studies by individual black theologians, Black denominational caucuses such as the Black Priests' Solidarity Group (BPSG), the Belydende Kring (BK), and the Black Methodist Convention (BMC). There were ecumenical forums as well and Third world contacts were another stimulus (Kritzinger, 1988:62-74).

The second phase of South African Black Theology began, according to Kritzinger (1989:75), in 1981 and is on even today. Kritzinger chose 1981 because this was the period of the establishment of the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT), as well as the Alliance of Black Reformed Christians in South Africa (ABRECSA). Kritzinger notes that ABRECSA played a very important role in the South African theological arena, in the sense that, it gave prominence to the condemnation of apartheid as a heresy. Although ICT was established in 1981, it was not until 1983 that its 'task force' on Black Theology arranged a conference on Black Theology. The

1983 ICT conference and others that followed revisited and brought Black Theology back to the lime light (Kritzinger, 1988:77-78).

During the second phase, more studies were carried out by individual black theologians. Such studies included the writings of Desmond Tutu, T A Mofokeng, A A Boesak, L R L Ntoane, Gobi Clement Mokoka, I J Mosala, and Walile Mazamisa (Kritzinger, 1988:78-79). An important document that came out of the ICT circles was the Kairos Document, which grew out of the deepening experiences of crisis among black Christians living in troubled townships during the period of the state of emergency (Kritzinger, 1988:79-80). In November 1985, a Black Ecumenical Church Leadership Consultation (BECLC) meeting was held in Durban. The main purpose of the Consultation was to “create a theological framework for the interpreting and radicalizing [the] struggle of the black people” Secondly, the Consultation was to “grapple with the social analysis of the South African conflict situation and... work out forms of action to... organize black people into a self-conscious social force...” Thirdly, it was to examine “the adequacy of the church as an agent of the total liberation which her Lord demands” (Kritzinger, 1988:80-81).

The most recent organizational development in terms of Black Theology was the 1985 establishment of the Black Theology Project (BTP). Kritzinger (1988:82ff) notes that this grew from the Black Theology task force of the ICT and its two conferences organized in 1983 and 1984. The Black Theological Project has helped to publish a bi-annual Journal of Black Theology in South Africa, which “promises to become an important vehicle for fostering the Black Theology approach” (Kritzinger, 1988:83). Some recent works in Black Theology in South Africa will be presented below in section 4.5.

#### **4.4 Sources, and Approaches, Strengths and Weaknesses of Black Theology**

This part of the study focuses on the source of Black Theology, the approaches to Black Theology especially in South Africa, and the strengths and weaknesses of Black Theology.

Coleman (2000:180) writes that Black Theology:

...engages in a hermeneutical methodology that synthesizes the biblical theme of liberation with the contemporary situation of African American people in the United States. The Biblical emphasis on liberation, both in the history of Israel and in the life of the historical Jesus, is the foundation for understanding what the content of black theology should be.

Hopkins (1999:41) notes that in addition to the radical Christian religion created by enslaved African Americans, that is, God's revelation in slavery; a new reading of the Bible, that is, God's revelation in a sacred book; and the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, that is, God's revelation in recent history, the fourth building block in the development of Black Theology as a theology of liberation is method, that is, God's revelation today and in the future. He further writes that:

Method helps the African American church to carry out the contents of black theology. And this content is God's spirit of liberation located among the poor, whose freedom has implications for the full humanity of all. For the Christian, the decisive revelation of this divine content is Jesus Christ (Hopkins, 1999:41).

Hopkins also describes the role of method in theology as follows:

...method in theology responds to the question: How do we arrive at our answers in our talk about and practice with God among the poor today? How do we come to our conclusions about relations among God, humanity, and the world? What are our key beliefs? What norms help us to distinguish between sinful spirits and the divine liberation spirit? What are the consequences of our theology? For today and the future, method helps the black church to work in order to be with God, who is already with the African American poor (Hopkins, 1999:41).

According to Hopkins (1999:41), Black Theology of liberation is a "systematic and constructive movement arising from the reality of God's liberation power existing in all parts of life." Hopkins further observes that Black Theology does not separate the sacred from the secular. The reason given here is that, God's love for the least in society has no boundaries. God's liberation spirit is present in all aspects of black existence especially that of the poor. Hopkins (1999:42) observes that in Black Theology, the various sources answer the question of the location of the meeting between divine revelation and black humanity. For him, six sources of Black Theology answer, among other questions, the question of where the African American poor meets God's presence and action of liberation, and where and how God's spirit of liberation reveals itself.

#### 4.4.1 Sources of Black Theology

Some of the sources of Black Theology will be identified in this discussion. Of note is Coleman's (2000:180) statement that Black Theology, "drawing from resources within the experiences of African American people (personal, social, economic, and so forth) tends to depart from the traditional concerns of theology especially in the more metaphysical and abstract modes". The sources mentioned by Coleman (2000:180) include the African American experience, history, and culture, on the one hand, and divine revelation, Scripture, and the church tradition, on the other hand. He notes that Black Theology does not choose one over the other:

...black theology cannot be either exclusively kerygmatic (as with Karl Barth) or apologetic (as with Paul Tillich), because, in addition to addressing the heretical nature of much of Euro-American Christianity, it should speak both within the African American church and within its larger community. More important, it should be relevant to the context of African American people within an oppressive environment (Coleman, 2000:181).

Similarly, there is a detailed development of six sources of Black Theology in Hopkins (1999:42-46) namely the Bible<sup>81</sup>, the African American Church<sup>82</sup>, the faith tradition of liberation<sup>83</sup>, the African American Women's Experience<sup>84</sup>, culture<sup>85</sup>, and radical politics<sup>86</sup>.

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<sup>81</sup> To Hopkins (1999:42-43), the African American struggle for freedom and their encounter of oppressive conditions are similar to those which the Hebrew people faced as recorded in the Hebrew and the Christian Scriptures. The Hebrew Scriptures show Yahweh hearing and seeing the difficulties faced by the Hebrew slaves, who were then the least in the society. When the poor of America read the Hebrew slaves' story and their relationship to a liberator God, they realized that they were not alone in their contemporary challenges in America. When the poor African Americans read the exodus event that feature the oppressed Hebrews the events resonated with theirs. It was a life of suffering at the hand of cruel taskmasters; they were accused falsely, pursued by force of prejudice, went through periods of anxiety, fear, and doubt about the future, and quarreled with their leaders. When the African American poor read the Hebrew Scriptures with their context in mind, they discovered a new world, which was different from the then dominant Christianity and theology of mainstream America. To them, the exodus story never ended with harsh difficulties; however, the hope of deliverance consumed the pain and brought about strength to "keep on keeping on." The poor, who are black, bring their contextual unease to the Christian Scriptures. Jesus meets them as their liberator who himself went through hurt to the point of death yet rose out of the clutches of evil. This Jesus becomes the good news of possibilities and power for the poor. Hopkins further states that:

Thus the first source of black theology is the unity between, on the one hand, the pain and promise of oppression and liberation found in the bible and, on the other hand, a similar existence experienced by the African American poor people today" (Hopkins, 1999:43).

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<sup>82</sup> The second source of Black Theology is the African American church. Hopkins writes that the black church is made up of the historical black churches, which include the Baptist, African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, and the Methodist Episcopal. Included in this list were the newer black churches such as the Pentecostal, Holiness, and nondenominational churches. The black congregations in white denominations were also part of the black church. He asserts that the black church existed on every occasion black Christians came as one in their own space and time to worship and live out God's call for freedom for the least in society. The African American Church is made up of the poor and the working people, 70% of which are women. On this matter, Hopkins (1999:44) writes that:

Its class and gender composition provides a fertile basis for the development, construction, and implementation of a black theology of liberation because African American women are usually at the bottom of American society and the black church is usually located in the heart of the black community.

Other aspects that factored into formation of a fertile ground for Black Theology included the back church's vibrant worship experiences, which helped the members to redirect their spiritual and emotional strength into forms of self-respect. Self-respect was a necessary component to long-term struggle. Hopkins also takes note of the language and rhythm of preaching, praying, singing, shouting, dancing and testifying as factors that empowered the cultural aspects of African American life. It also confirmed that Black English, used when the preacher is preaching and the congregation talks back, were authentic. Buildings, publishing houses, transportation vehicles, auditoriums, dining facilities, and credit unions including other economic resources and forms of wealth, offered an independent financial base of alternative independent witnessing in a society continually making black life and labour inconsequential and expandable (Hopkins, 1999:44).

<sup>83</sup> Hopkins (1999:44) notes that the African American church has had a long history of preaching and practice of justice right from the times of the indigenous African religions of those first Africans who were forced into the USA till date; liberating Christianity is situated in some African American churches on the local level. Hopkins further observes that a faith tradition of struggle has existed outside formal church structures especially during the different periods of justice work by black civic, cultural, students', women's, and political organizations.

<sup>84</sup> This is the fourth source of Black Theology. According to Hopkins (1999:44), women constitute about 70% of black churches and over half of the African American community. Since this is so, Black Theology is obliged to deal with and reflect upon the intellectual, emotional, and body concerns and contributions of black women.

<sup>85</sup> By culture, Hopkins (1999:45) refers to art, literature, music, folktales, Black English, and rhythm. Hopkins mentions one liberation motive in non-explicit Christian texts such as "... the heroic and courageous stories about

Cone (1997:16), in his book, *God of the Oppressed*, argues that black theologians cannot formulate theology in a realm unrelated to human existence. It follows, then, that Black Theology must emerge from the historical and religious experiences of the African-American peoples. **The black experience**, according to Cone, **is the first source of Black Theology**. In his other book, *The Spirituals and the Blues*, Cone (1972) brings to the fore some of the aspects which make up the black experience namely stories, tales, and the sayings of African Americans which have developed in the form of songs, poems, narratives, and music as the people endured

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Anansi the spider – a small, weak creature able to outsmart those with power – were brought by slaves from the west coast of Africa to American slave colonies and were passed orally from one generation to another” (Hopkins, 1999:45). Jazz was a tool that served periodically as a creative and unique form of protest, refusing to fit within prescribed styles of European and American controlled music. African Americans also used sports to celebrate their uniqueness in a world controlled by others of a different class and colour. The extended family, as another art form, provided ways of survival and maintenance as well as a site for grooming and affirming the minds of the young who were the possible leaders of the future (Hopkins, 1999:45).

<sup>86</sup> Politics was understood as the ability to determine the direction that the African American community was to pursue. It was their right to self-determination. Politics, then, took into account the vital importance of owning and controlling capital and resources. The intent was to make sure that the black people would own and control wealth (Hopkins, 1999:45-46).

Coleman (2000:181-182) regards these sources of Black Theology as very important. The experiences of the African American people - humiliation and suffering - was an experience of life under ethnic suffering that sought to find meaning and power in its own affirmation of God’s presence in the liberation events of the African American community. Their history as a community demonstrated the ongoing struggle of the African American peoples to find expressions of an imminent God who is actively involved in that struggle. The African American culture found creative ways of expression as the African Americans reflected on history, endured pain and experienced joy. The revelation, as understood from an Afro American theological perspective, refers to contemporary encounter with God, not only the events of in the past. The present is seen as the arena for God’s ongoing involvement in the quest for a liberating future. Black Theology places Scriptures at the centre of its theological discourse without becoming literalistic. Its central claim is that the biblical message focuses on human liberation. Black Theology also focuses on both intrinsic nature and the actual history of Christianity in order to examine the former’s own faithfulness and to identify itself with many of the so-called “heretical” movements of radical Christianity. It is believed that the mainstream or Euro-centric theological tradition had identified or affiliated with the powerful rather than the powerless.

existence in a racial society. In the same vein, Fields (2001:21) affirms that the African-American history is an abundant source for Black Theology. He notes that, “Religious faith played a major role in providing a motivation and a plan...”

The **second source of Black Theology**, as suggested by Cone (1970:63-64), is **revelation**. Revelation takes place in concrete historical events occurring in human history, and it is incomprehensible within the realm of Black Theology apart from a consideration of God at work in the black experience. Furthermore, Cone (1970:65-66) notes that God makes an unqualified identification with the liberation of black people in the manifestation of all genuine liberative events. These events are the only means available for an authentic encounter with God<sup>87</sup>.

The **third source of Black Theology is Scripture**. Cone (1970:66-67) argues that the Bible is not the revelation of God - only Jesus is. He sees the Bible as an essential witness to God’s revelation, which is foundational for Christian thinking about God. The Bible serves as an evaluative standard for contemporary interpretations of God’s revelation, and the biblical witness is that, unquestionably, God is a God of liberation. Cone is of the view that the Bible is not an infallible witness, that God is not the author, and that the Bible writers are not secretaries. He argues that any attempts to prove things like verbal inspiration can obscure the real meaning of the text namely liberation<sup>88</sup>.

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<sup>87</sup> Cone’s understanding of revelation here is supported by Avery Dulles’s category of revelation as “dialectical presence.” For Cone, one encounters God (or Jesus) in the midst of the struggle for liberation. For an assessment of this model of revelation, see Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1994), pp. 93-97.

<sup>88</sup> In a more recent book, *Troubling Biblical Waters*, the New Testament scholar Cain Hope Felder voices a similar concern about the nature of Scripture. Felder (1990:14) advocates the adoption of a new critical stance towards tradition, towards prevailing exegetical methodology, and towards conclusions drawn from questionable hermeneutical analysis. He argues more issues require consideration in black biblical interpretation, and it is in this sphere that his own perspective on the nature of the Bible emerges. He affirms that the Bible is the “most important ancient locus for the word of God.” He maintains that this affirmation does not mean, however, that the Bible is categorically, in and of itself, the very word of God.



The **fourth source of Black Theology is Jesus Christ** to whom the Bible witnesses. Cone (1997:30) describes Jesus as the “content of the hopes and dreams of black people.” Fields (2001:22) also writes that Christ was revered by the black slaves:

...because they saw through his liberating presence that he had chosen them. Because he was the Truth he empowered them both to see through the dehumanizing lies of the surrounding white culture and to believe in their own worth. Though black slaves may have been sold like livestock, Jesus was present with them. He was the great burden-bearer and gave them hope...

Furthermore, Cone (1997:33-34) notes that the black experience is a *source* of truth, but it is not the Truth itself. He writes that Jesus Christ is the Truth and is the evaluator of all human claims. Nonetheless, there is no truth in Jesus independent of the concrete experience of oppression on the part of dehumanized people, in general, and people of color in particular. Cone claims that there is solidarity between the church and the Lord that it confesses and because of such an identity, the church can dim the light of its witness if it becomes entangled in heresy. To Cone, heresy is “any activity or teaching that contradicts the liberating truth of Jesus Christ.” It is, therefore, a shameful inconsistency for the church to hamper the mission of the Lord, the Liberator.

The **fifth source of Black Theology is the tradition of the church**. Tradition is the compilation of theological reflections arising from the history of the church, from its beginning to the present day (Fields, 2001:23). Cone (1970:68) argues that it is virtually impossible for any serious student of Christianity to ignore tradition because the New Testament itself is a product of tradition. Black Theology consults church tradition, but from a critical, evaluative position. In his book, *Black Theology in Dialogue*, James Deotis Roberts asserts that there must be a “moratorium” on the Western domination of theological reflection. He retorts that theologians from Africa and Asia must be allowed to do their own theology. This, according to Roberts, applies to black theologians. Though informed by tradition, a critical, evaluative position facilitates the incorporation of that which advances liberation and the rejection of that which hinders the full humanization of the oppressed (Roberts, 1987:15-16).

In the light of the above sources of Black Theology, it is evident that Black Theology draws on a number of sources to spawn a body of *orthopraxis*, confession formulated in the midst of

liberative activity. The *black experience*, a term encompassing many elements of the historical black experience, is foundational and determinative for Black Theology. A major part of black experience has been and continues to be the black church. *Revelation*, though still distinct from Scripture, is important because, at its core, is a witness of God's liberating activity in black history. *Scripture* has long enjoyed a central role in the lives of black people but both the *Bible and tradition* are important sources for black theological reflection. Each is important, but they must be examined for potential contributions to the black theological task with an unashamedly critical eye.

#### **4.4.2 Approaches to and the act of interpretation in Black Theology in USA**

A cursory look at literature devoted to Black Theology indicates that the hermeneutics of Black Theology is developing. Work on Scripture and uncovering of its meaning and significance for Black Theology continues, and reveals a richness of thought unique to individual thinkers in this discipline. An attempt is made in this section to present the dominant theme and the organizing principle of Black Theological hermeneutics. This is then followed by a survey of influential representatives of this methodological perspective. A summary is provided of some of the common characteristics from representative topics.

In his book, *Prophesy Deliverance*, Cornel West identifies a number of factors, which facilitated the emergence of the assumption of white supremacy in the West. Thus, a number of "texts" of the historical, sociological, and economic sort require exegesis (West, 1982:48-49)<sup>89</sup>.

In his book, *We Have Been Believers: An African-American Systematic Theology*, James H. Evans Jr., holds that an authentic interpretation must advance the primary theme of liberation (Evans 1992:23). He argues that liberation captures the real, visceral character of the human struggle against the principle of evil in the world, and sees liberation as ultimately reflective of God's will and work in creation. Evans claims that liberation is multidimensional because it

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<sup>89</sup> Cain Hope Felder sees West's argument of the Western appropriation of the Scriptures as providing legitimacy for skepticism on the part of black biblical scholars (Felder, 1980:8).

includes the physical, spiritual, and cultural aspects of all human existence. Furthermore, physical liberation refers to an innate desire to have the freedom of movement, associations, and self-determination. Spiritual empowerment facilitates a new life characterized by a new hope and a new self-confidence. Cultural liberation entails a freedom from “negative self-image, symbols, and stereotypes”.

Evans suggests a pervasive interpretation that the exodus and the death of Jesus are the foundations of Christian liberative hope in Black Theology (Evans, 1992:15-18). His approach advances a view of divine plan of liberation by initiating and perpetuating three tasks. The *first* is to remind the interpreters that the religious perspective of the world held by white Christians is radically different from that of black Christians. He calls this an epistemological<sup>90</sup> break (Evans, 1992:23). The goal of a liberative hermeneutic is to help the African-American Christian to view the world as God views it, that is, as comprised of, among other things, those in need of liberation.

The *second* task of liberative hermeneutic, advanced by Evans, is to deconstruct (take apart) the misinterpretations of African-Americans undergirding American Christianity. Evans considers the role of hermeneutics under the overarching category of black religion as he notes that, “Black religion is a protest against those portrayals of African-Americans as less than human or outside the providential care of God” (Evans, 1992:23-24).

A *third* task is the promotion of a true and essential self-knowledge. For this reason, hermeneutics must facilitate the affirmation of African-American selfhood. Fields (2001:22) notes that affirmation comes not only through biblical interpretation but also through an enhanced comprehension of how the situation of oppression emerged in the USA, and how it is sustained in the present socio-cultural setting. Such a multi-dimensional comprehension of liberation presents the consummated theme of the hermeneutic of Black Theology. Other Black

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<sup>90</sup> Epistemology is the study of the origin, nature, and limits of knowledge. It considers the question, “How do we know what we know?” Evans asserts that black and white Christians see elements of the world differently. They come to know some things through diverse pathways of thought conditioned by their experiences. This diversity of perspective must be recognized and be respected (Evans, 1992:23).

theologians such as James Cone, JD Roberts, Stephen Reid, and Cain Hope Felder exhibit similar hermeneutical emphasis, albeit with some methodological distinctiveness.

Cone (1986:5) argues that Scripture is foundational for the development of Black Theology. The meaning of Scripture begins with Israel's belief that God was involved in their history. God's relationship with Israel provides the backdrop for the divine salvation revealed as the liberation of slaves from oppressive social, political, and economic edifices. To Cone (1986:5-6), Christology is the point of departure. Together with the Old Testament tradition of exodus, Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection become a further confirmation of God's solidarity with the poor and his work of liberation on their behalf. Christ grants freedom to the oppressed. Hermeneutics, then, becomes that which explicates Christ, as the climatic revelation of God's solidarity with the oppressed. Cone (1997:102) notes that the Bible tells the story of God's deliverance through Christ Jesus and, that through the reading of the Scripture, the people hear other stories about Jesus, which enable them to move beyond the privateness of their own story. They are taken from the present to the past and then thrust back into their contemporary history with divine power to transform the socio-political context.

On his part, J D Roberts holds that the Bible is essential in the development of a Black theological hermeneutic. Roberts (1983:8-9) observes that in a number of ways the African portrayal of God resembles that of God in the Old Testament. He advocates an exegesis from "below" seen in solidarity with the oppressed, which yields insights overlooked by those who read the Bible from the perch of privilege. He argues that there must be an expansion of the hermeneutical circle, which begins and ends with the Bible reinterpreted (Roberts, 1983:27). A liberative hermeneutic, which is essential for Black Theology, as well as for any oppressed people, must move towards three goals. First, it must be universal in vision. The teachings and norms developed must include voices and perspectives of "all cultures, and all religions. Secondly, it must have human rights as its focus. He asserts that human rights are not only for those under the "Christian covenant", but also for all humanity. Third, the holistic nature of thought and reality must be fully considered. Roberts sees the awareness of the spiritual dimension as the genius of black religion. He notes that the "secular and sacred, the rational and

the mystical, the individual and social interact and are held in dynamic tension in one continuum of experience” (Roberts, 1983:28-29).

Even though Cain Hope Felder is a New Testament scholar, his analyses of specific biblical texts show a similar concern with liberation. Felder (1990:106) formulates the following as a basic understanding of freedom in the New Testament:

It is more accurate to take Paul’s use of the word *freedom* in a comprehensive or holistic manner, for a “free spirit” inescapably guides the body towards freedom. Thus for Paul, no less than for Jesus himself, the good news was a full rejection of discriminating against persons or deferring to the wealthy or powerful by virtue of their social position or out-ward appearance (Rom. 2:11).

Felder (1990:114) understands passages like Galatians 3:28 and 5:1 as calls to maintenance of the believers’ relationship and status with Christ, a maintenance, which may involve various forms of resistance. His exegetical findings lead him to conclude that the freedom, both to preserve personhood against enslaving forces and to show and experience love in community, are divine mandates.

On his part, the Old Testament and Biblical Theology scholar, Stephen B. Reid, opines that black church tradition informs the interpretation of Scripture. Black church tradition and biblical interpretation are not prioritized one over the other. In fact, “Neither identity nor interpretation takes priority; they act as partners. The black biblical scholar, theologian, and preacher hold black culture and tradition in the one hand and the Bible in the other” (Reid, 1990:16). According to Reid (1990:19), a black hermeneutic must first engage the text in a serious way, and it must show how the biblical texts are adaptable to the fulfillment of human potential and the establishment of community in the midst of a racially and socio-culturally hostile environment.

Reid (1990:140-141) maintains that the exegetical method for a black biblical tradition has three dynamically related movements. It begins with a critical reading of the biblical text, which provides the black church with an awareness of the “political, social, and economic realities of antiquity.” The second movement involves the recovery of black biblical interpretation. Parallels between the situation of God’s people in the Bible and black people’s situation in the USA are

explored. The exploration leads the black biblical interpreter into application, the third movement, which is a priority that dominates black church tradition.

From the above analysis, it is evident that Cone has a pronounced Christological focus in his hermeneutic. Roberts sees the centrality of Jesus Christ in the Christian faith, in general, and hermeneutics in particular, but also insists on a broader base of input for a black liberation hermeneutic necessary to facilitate liberation for all, regardless of socio-cultural distinctive. Felder sees biblical interpretation as validated through its contribution to human freedom. Reid, on the other hand, attributes much in hermeneutical methodology to the totality of the black experience and he offers readings from the biblical text to address the situation of black oppression.

In the light of the above discussions, it is observable that although distinct contributions exist, common characteristics of black liberation hermeneutics are also discernible. The *first* common characteristic is the experience of racial oppression as it relates to the specific discipline of biblical interpretation. This leads to a hermeneutical suspicion. The experience of oppression affects the selection of suitable teaching passages, biblical models, and even the limits of the biblical canon. The *second* characteristic is that holistic liberation is the goal of hermeneutics. Liberation encompasses not only the experience of black but oppressed people everywhere. Oppression can take many forms, from class to gender, affecting the people in many lands and in many ethnic groups. All aspects of existence must be removed from that which inhibits the expression of the full humanity and potentiality of the marginalized in society. The *third* characteristic is that, in the analysis of oppression, socio-cultural factors occupy a position of prominence. The study of Scripture is a determinative source for black liberative theology, but experiential matters affect its interpretation (Fields, 2001:33-34).

Rebecca S. Chopp and Mark Lewis Taylor are of the view that theology in the USA has undergone a shift from using a melting pot model, in which theology, as officially understood, sought a dominant or common human experience:

...to a model that values the college of different faces, voices, styles, questions, and constructs. Black theologies, Asian-American theologies, feminist theologies, womanist theologies,

theologies from gay men and lesbian women, and theologies offered from the perspectives of the disabled are all presented on the scene today (Chopp & Taylor, 1994:4).

Black Theology can inform and it can be informed by those from diverse theological perspectives, even by Public Theology. For Black Theology, however, the dehumanization, pain, hopes, and aspirations of the black people are of critical importance. To this end, Fields (2001:34-36) proposes a fourfold task for the Black theologian; he must be an exegete of Scripture and life, a prophet, a teacher, and a philosopher.

Field's view of a Black theologian as an exegete of Scripture and life agrees with that of Cone (1997:8) who argues that exegesis involves the study of Scripture as a primary source for theological reflection, but it is also God's word to those whose loves are suppressed by dehumanizing forces through varied forms of oppression. The Black theologian interprets Scripture in the light of the survival needs of the oppressed.

For the reason that the Black theologian is an exegete of Scripture and life, he/she is also a prophet. Fields (2001:35) argues that the prophet's message must be one, which brings the gospel into confrontation with the injustice of modern society. The pervasiveness of injustice is itself an effect of past dehumanization and oppression in the history the USA. God's power and the fact that he will bring judgment, confirm that there is a reason for the hope that justice will indeed reign.

The Black theologian is a teacher. Fields (2001:35) writes that the Christian faith must be taught in a manner that clarifies the relationship between faith and human existence. The teacher is the communicator, and it is in the context of communication that the teacher is also a preacher. Cone (1997:8) argues that the theologian demonstrates awareness of the passionate character of theological language, which is the language of celebration and joy that the freedom promised is already present in the community's struggle for liberation.

The Black theologian is a philosopher, one adept at identifying other viable interpretations of life. Fields (2001:35) argues that the truth of the gospel must be demonstrated continually against a backdrop of real human existence, which, for many, involves oppression. The presentation of

the gospel must provide answers in ways that address the form and content of the question of the oppressed. It is the philosophical side of the theological task that facilitates intellectual honesty and consistency in the thought and discourse of the theologian. Philosophy enhances openness to other views and protects against inordinate dogmatism.

In view of the discussions above, it is evident that the task of a Black theologian is to explain clearly to the people of God how the gospel of Jesus Christ corresponds to the struggle of liberation. The theologian functions as an exegete, a prophet, a teacher and a preacher, and a philosopher within the situation of active involvement. The Black theologian is not just a speaker or writer, but one who is actively involved in the lives of oppressed people.

#### **4.4.3 Approaches to Black Theology in South Africa**

There are several approaches to doing Black Theology. What follows is a discussion of some of the notable approaches to black theology especially in South Africa. This discussion is subdivided under the following headings: Kerygmatic theology, theology and black experience, theology and struggle, occasional theology, autonomous theology.

Kritzinger (1988:84ff) writes on what he refers to as a “basic approach” to Black Theology in South Africa. What characterizes black theology in South Africa include the Kerygmatic character of Black Theology, Black Experience, the Struggle, Occasional Theology, and Autonomous Theology.

##### ***Kerygmatic Theology***

According to Kritzinger (1988:84-85), the first characteristic of Black theologians is that “that they are Christian believers, most of them church ministers”. Their concern, therefore, was the relevance and credibility of the gospel among black people in South Africa. Black Theology was therefore propagated not just by academic scholars, but by people that were deeply involved with the life of the black church. Kritzinger notes that, “The basis motivation for Black Theology does not come from a political ideology, but from genuine Christian concern to say and do something which will be really good news to suffering black people” (1988:84).



The one big question that is in the hearts of many Black Theologians is, “How can faith in Jesus Christ empower black people who are involved in the struggle for their liberation?” (Kritzinger, 1988:84-85). It is a question at the heart of Black Theology, which also shows the profoundly Christian character of the enterprise. Kritzinger states that, “The deepest motivation of Black Theologians comes from their faith on the Good News that through Jesus Christ God has intervened in history on behalf of the poor and downtrodden” (1988:85).

### ***Theology and Black experience***

A further essential distinguishing feature of Black Theology is the reality that it emerged from the black experience. Black Theology in South Africa was and is a reflection of faith upon the historical challenges of blackness. Kritzinger (1988:85) claims that blackness “implies the existential experience of being oppressed.” It, therefore, follows that, “A black Theology of liberation emerges from the actual experience of oppression.” Black Theology:

...tries to capture the cry of oppressed black people... as it re-thinks the central claims of the Christian faith in the light of this black experience... It can be called a ‘critical reflection upon the experience of oppression and exploitation from the standpoint of Christianity’ (Kritzinger, 1988:85).

Since Black Theology has its starting point in black experience, Black Theology becomes a situational theology “which follows an inductive approach rather than the deductive one of classical Christian theology” (Kritzinger, 1988:85). Black Theology proceeds from human experience in search of its worth in the Christian sources. However, Black experience is not confined to situations of oppressions. It also involves “the whole area of African culture and religion challenged and transformed as it is through three centuries of contact with Western culture” (Kritzinger, 1988:86).

Culture becomes an important component of Black theological reflection. Black theologians would seek to avoid the dichotomy between Black Theology and African Theology but would bring both the political and the cultural dimensions together. Nonetheless, the starting point of Black Theology does not lie in the experience of suffering and contemporary African culture only. It also lies in the black struggle for justice and humanity.

### *Theology and struggle*

Allan Boesak understands Black Theology as “the critical reflection of black Christians on their involvement in the black liberation struggle” (Boesak, 1978:76). Similarly, Goba (1986:68) sees the agenda of Black Theology as that which is determined by “the emancipatory interests of the black community.” With such background in mind, Kritzinger (1988:87) affirms that:

...[I]t is clear that Black Theology is engaged theology, operating with an epistemology which regards the struggle of the poor and oppressed as the ‘locus theologicus’ (Mofokeng 1983: 49). In this respect, Black Theologians agree with the description of the theological task by Gutierrez (1974:11): ‘Theology is reflection, a critical attitude. Theology follows; it is the second step’. The first step is personal involvement in the black struggle for full humanity.

The above statement by Kritzinger builds on the thoughts of Goba, who claims that, “Black theology occurs within the context of the black struggle and inescapably will reflect the ideological interests of the black community. If it doesn’t it ceases to be black theology” (Goba, 1986:66). This view makes black theology political since it deals openly and directly with the realities that were previously ignored by the theology of the western world. Such realities would include “the realities of rich and poor, of white and black, of oppressor and oppressed, of oppression and liberation from oppression” (Boesak, 1977b:3; Kritzinger, 1988:87-88).

In South Africa, especially before the advent of democracy in 1994, Black Theologians “did” their theology in situations of severe tension. At some point, the apartheid government had banned all the liberation organizations such as the ANC, the PAC, the Black Consciousness organizations (of the 1970s), the UDF and the AZAPO. Black theologians also did not escape the experience of being banned and harassed. In the eyes of the apartheid government, Black theologians, represented the “religious arm” of the “total onslaught” against the state, and therefore, needed to be combated. In fact, the very first Black Theology seminar, held in April 1971 was disrupted by the police, “and the book containing the papers read there, *Essays in Black Theology*, was banned soon after publication.” Numerous Black theologians have detained, since then, accused of treason. Some were even “restricted” for varying periods of time (Kritzinger, 1988:88).

Mofokeng (1983:1) writes that the long shadow of the law hanged over all of Black Theology in South Africa, and this influenced the character of its publication. Mofokeng notes that Black Theology was not done with academic detachment since it operated on what he calls “ideological battle ground”, in which the black people struggled for justice and liberation. Kritzinger (1988:88) observes that Black theologians shared in the experience of tension and uncertainty, which characterized the black liberation struggle. Black theologians did also develop a resilience and astuteness, which enabled them to survive against the odds of the time.

### ***Occasional Theology***

In his book, *I write what I like*, Biko (1971:94) describes Black Theology as a theology, which “grapples with existential problems and does not claim to be a theology of absolutes.” For Kritzinger (1988:89), Black Theology “does not present a systematically worked out ‘whole’, but could be described as an ‘occasional’ theology.” Kritzinger (1988:89) describes Occasional Theology as “a theology ‘dictated by the circumstances and immediate needs rather than the needs for system building’”. Black Theologies had to grapple with severe censorship laws of the apartheid government. In respect of that period, Segundo (1976:26) and Goba (1988: iv) observe that theology was not a safe academic discipline, but rather, a dangerous enterprise which was “an extremely difficult risky business”.

The realities and the needs of the black struggle have determined the theological priorities and theological methodology of Black theologians. The search, therefore, for God, has not been limited to the Bible and tradition. It has extended to the present and historical circumstances. Black theologians have, therefore, opted for a theology of struggle, which would always have an ‘occasional’ character, as they try to fathom the underlying causes of black suffering in order to respond to it in the light of Christian faith (Kritzinger, 1988:90).

### ***Autonomous Theology***

Black Theology has an autonomous character. Kritzinger (1988:90) explains that, “black theologians are not concerned about obtaining the approval of white theologians for what they

are doing. The emergence of the creative black subject in the Black Consciousness movement lies at the root of this assertiveness.”

Bartman (1973c:19), in an article in the *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* titled, “The significance of the development of Black Consciousness for the church”, states that, “To white theologians who are going to use their criteria to assess Black Theology, my response is go on, but your white standards are irrelevant. The black man is not seeking your approval”. However, Kritzinger (1988:90) notes that some theologians have labeled Black Theology ‘reactionary’ and have interpreted it as dependent on the white theology, which it rejects. The argument is that Black Theology cannot do without the white man and his whiteness and that the demise of white rule and white theology in South Africa would make Black Theology redundant.

In this regard, Maimela (1984:49) writes:

... I do not deny that the rejection of white theology is an important aspect of Black Theology, but since I do not regard it as a mere reaction, I prefer the term ‘autonomous’ at this point. It includes the element of rejection, but it underlines the positive self-affirmation which is inherent in it. Black Theology represents a positive choice for a new way of doing theology which will remain relevant long after white racism has ceased to be a problem in South Africa.

It is notable that Black theologians perceive themselves as answerable to the black population in its struggle for fairness, and not to the academic organization of white theologians (Kritzinger, 1988:90).

#### **4.4.4 Black Theology’s strong points and weak spots**

Several scholars have written on the strengths and/or weaknesses of Black Theology.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Such scholars include - Coleman (2000 :182-185); Cone (1984:79-97); Wilmore (1983b:234ff); Roberts (1983:27, 179); Roberts (:1987:19); Jones (1973)

### ***Strengths of Black Theology***

Some of the strengths of the early form of Black Theology that remain valid today are highlighted here. In his book, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church* James Cone shows that Black Theology was innovative in linking the Christian faith and the African American freedom in North America. Black Theology raised the central question “What has the gospel of Jesus to do with the oppressed African American people’s struggle for Justice in American Society?” Black Theology for that reason identified liberation as the heart of the Gospel of Jesus (Cone, 1984:79-81).

The second strength of Black Theology is that it uncovered and attacked racism and other forms of prejudice in the Euro-American church. Black Theology unmasked the Euro-American church’s theology as un-Christian heresy (Cone, 1984:81). Thirdly, Black Theology caused radical African American ministers to have a second look at and to develop a deeper appreciation of their own African and African American heritage. Black Theology provided a challenge to conservative African American churches with their “pie-in-the-sky” religion, and it led some African American theologians to move away from an unreasonable dependence on European theology (Cone, 1984:83).

A fourth strength of Black Theology its contribution in bringing about a conducive climate of African American ecumenism by noting that the struggle for freedom and equality by African American people in the USA was determined, not by denominational or religious persuasion, but by ethnicity. Commitment to the liberation of black people was the basis of ecumenism (Coleman, 2000:182-183).

In some measure, the above contributions of Black Theology were felt in the South African political, social, and religious landscape. On the other hand, there were some flaws/weaknesses in Black Theology.

### ***Weaknesses of Black Theology***

Like any other form of theology, Black Theology has its blind spots and several of its weaknesses have been noted by scholars. In his book, *For My People: Black Theology and the*

*Black Church*, James Cone identifies four weaknesses of Black Theology. The first weakness is that Black Theology gave the impression, at least in life, that its only reason for existence was a negative reaction to white racism rather than a result of the positive elements of black culture and theological reflection. Consequently, Black Theology may have over-reacted to racism in the Euro-American churches and the broader society. It allowed the attack of racism to become its dominant characteristic while ignoring other forms of oppression (Cone, 1984:86-98). Secondly, Black Theology depended too much on “moral suasion and not enough on social analysis in response to white racism. Therefore, its analysis of oppression was too superficial, offering no clues to the linkage between racism and other forms of oppression” (Cone, 1984:88).

Black Theology may have made an inadequate use of social sciences to analyze the situation confronting the formulation of a viable Black Theology. It did not adequately explore the relationships “between racism, capitalism and imperialism, on the one hand, and theology and the church on the other” (Cone, 1984:88). With this weakness in mind, Fields (2001:72) notes that such exploration, for example, would have revealed the futility of Martin Luther King Jr.’s initial appeal to the conscience of the nation regarding the historical and contemporary dehumanization of black Americans. Social reflection of a more informed nature would have shown more fully the depth of the relationship between personal and institutional racism.

Third, Black Theology provided no analysis of economic oppression as the latter contributes to the impoverishment of African Americans and other poor people. This lack of analysis is, in part, because of a mutual marginality of both the African American community and Marxists within North American society but also because African American Christians did not trust atheists and because Marxism did not prevent Euro-Americans from being racists. However, economic analysis is not an option; it is a necessity. Marxism, in Cone’s view, would be a helpful tool in the process of liberation because it would confront black preachers and theologians with the dynamics of class struggles in a national community (Cone, 1984:92, 85; Coleman, 2000:183). This resultant awareness would, in turn, inhibit the possibility that black leaders would preach liberation while fleecing the flock, something that is possible because of the influence of capitalism in American culture (Fields, 2001:72). This inadequate social and economic analysis will be referred to in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

A fourth weakness of Black Theology is the fact that it was plagued by inadequate gender analysis; it did not address the issue of sexism early on in its development. Initially, it was not sensitive to this issue within the broader culture, the African American community, or the African American church. Presently, it correctly perceives that racism cannot be eliminated without a corresponding elimination of sexism and classism because they are all interconnected (Cone, 1984: 96-97; Coleman, 2000:183). Fields (2001:72) notes that there are significant connections between the effects of racism and the manifestations of sexism in black society and in the black church.

Gayraud Wilmore, in his book, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People*, has called for the undoing of the heavy reliance Black Theology had upon Eurocentric categories and values. He urges Black Theology to draw from sources indigenous to African American experience and culture, both Christian and non-Christian (Wilmore, 1983b: 234ff; Coleman, 2000:183). On his part, J. Deotis Roberts, in his books, *Black Theology Today: Liberation and Contextualization* (1983) and *Black Theology in Dialogue* (1987), argues that Black Theology should develop its own metaphysics as distinct from a traditional, Eurocentric one. Black Theology should address questions of ultimate reality beyond historical understandings of oppression and liberation from a uniquely African American perspective (Roberts, 1983:27; 1987:19).

Another scholar who has criticized dependence on Eurocentric methodologies and theological categories by Black Theology and black American theologians is Charles H. Long. In his book, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion*, Long (1986:102) claims that theological discourse is itself an imperialistic enterprise because it is encoded in Eurocentric expressions. African American religion should, therefore, draw directly from its own signs, symbols, and images.

#### **4.5 Contemporary Trends in Black Theology**

Coleman (2000:187) observes that Black Theology has been the centre of much contest and exchange of ideas during the course of its growth. On the other hand, it has endured, as have other liberation theologies, and has become a feasible alternative theology to Eurocentric

theology. Black Theology is now ready to progress in some new directions. Coleman notes at least three areas of concentration for the present and future Black Theology and the African American religious thought. The available options include the globalization of Black Theology;<sup>92</sup> Womanist Theology;<sup>93</sup> and the utilization of interdisciplinary approaches<sup>94</sup> for incorporation of

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<sup>92</sup> Black theology has now become an international theology, no longer confined to the continental United States. Instead, through contact with Third World theologians, and with acceptance by some European and Euro-American ones, black theologians have developed a broader audience. Furthermore, the affinities with other liberation and indigenous theologies have formed a basis for discussions about collaborative research, writing, and praxis. During the 1970s and 1980s, several conferences were held that culminated in the publication of several volumes of literature including *Theology in the Americas and the Challenge of Basic Christian Communities*, edited by Sergio Torres and John Eagleson; and *Asia's Search for Full Humanity*, edited by Virginia Fabella. Some others are *Theology in the Americas: Detroit II*, edited by Cornel West et al; *Irruption of the Third World and Doing Theology in a Divided World* edited by Sergio Torres and Virginia Fabella; and *African Theology en Route*, edited by Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres. Collectively, such texts have become the basis for creating a corpus of literature that challenges, subverts, and revises the traditional, Eurocentric theological canon. They also underscore the pluralistic context out of which any contemporary theology has to be spoken. However, even as we make progress in deepening our understanding of global oppression and strive to attain additional linguistic resources in the struggle against it, our attention is also called, in a very poignant way, to the response of those who personally experience multidimensional oppression namely women of African descent (see also <http://theologytoday.ptsem.edu/apr1993/v50-1-article7.htm>).

<sup>93</sup> Womanist theology continues to blossom both within and alongside Black Theology, the African American church and community, and the broader society. As the specific discourse of African American women, it is distinct from both Black and feminist theologies. On the one hand, unlike Black Theology, which is chauvinistic in its nascent form, womanist theology was never limited to a critique of North American racism. On the other hand, unlike the initial articulations of feminist theology, which held a myopic view of racism and classism, it is not restricted to a critique of sexism or patriarchy. Instead, African American women are articulating insights from their unique experiences of sexism, racism, and classism within North American society. Moreover, they are developing a paradigm that is not confined to either traditional theological language or categories (see also <http://theologytoday.ptsem.edu/apr1993/v50-1-article7.htm>).

<sup>94</sup> The Black Theology Forum is currently engaging in dialogue with several African American literary critics. The immediate purpose of this theological and literary conversation is to explore the story of African American religion via folk culture, art, and narratives (both historical and fictional). Beyond this more immediate concern, though,



indigenous sources into a contemporary, constructive Black Theology. Black Theology has become an international theology. It is not anymore confined to the theological discourse in the USA. Through its contact with Third World theologians, Black Theology has become better known to a broader audience. Its affinities with other liberation and indigenous theologies have provided a basis for ongoing discussions on collaborative research, writing and praxis in the future<sup>95</sup> (Coleman, 2000:187).

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there is the desire to come to terms with the deep structures of African American discourse (broadly understood as multitextual). As a case study, the story of African American religion provides an opportunity for members of the Black Theology Forum and several literary critics to come together and further to develop "pluralistic ways of speaking" through interdisciplinary strategies. Second, through ongoing critical dialogue and debate, members of the Black Theology Forum have come to realize the importance of mastering multiple ways of speaking theologically. They have come to see why interdisciplinary strategies are crucial for the constructive task of a contemporary Black Theology. They have developed a wide range of interests including (1) systematic theology, from the Enlightenment to the present; (2) theological hermeneutics, especially with respect to contemporary interpretation theories and strategies; (3) specific theological themes such as God, Christology, anthropology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, and eschatology; (4) Black Theology, considered as a cultural phenomenon; (5) the utilization of indigenous sources for a contemporary, constructive Black Theology; (6) the political and religio-cultural analysis of African American folk tradition; and (7) African American religious thought, considered cross-culturally (see also <http://theologytoday.ptsem.edu/apr1993/v50-1-article7.htm>). Thus, the Black Theology Forum is constantly seeking multidimensional ways of speaking theologically through the appropriation of interdisciplinary strategies of interpretation and communication. The utilization of these diverse techniques provides new opportunities for thinking constructively as well as critically about the role of the contemporary African American theologian in a world that is far more complex than it ever has been before. Nonetheless, we are also all too aware of the fact various forms of oppression (racism, sexism, classism, imperialism) persist. Therefore, Black Theology remains relevant both as a critical and prophetic voice that can draw from past experience while speaking of hope for the future in the present situation (see also <http://theologytoday.ptsem.edu/apr1993/v50-1-article7.htm>).

<sup>95</sup>“...[D]uring the 1970s and 1980s several conferences were held among representative theologians, culminating in the publication of several volumes of literature: *Theology in the Americas* (1976), *African Theology en Route* (Appiah-Kubi and Torres 1979), *Asia's Search for Full Humanity* (Asian Theological Conference 1980), *The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities* (International Ecumenical Congress of Theology 1981), *Theology in the Americas: Detroit II* (West, Guidote, and Coakley 1982), *Irruption of the Third World* (Ecumenical Association 1983), and *Doing Theology in a Divided World* (Ecumenical Association 1985). Collectively, these texts have become the basis for creating a corpus of literature that challenges, subverts, and revises the traditional Eurocentric theological canon. In addition to these representative publications, there is an organization called the Ecumenical

Fields (2001:74) claims that, in order for Black Theology to maintain its viability, four areas of Black Theology must be continually evaluated namely its relationship to Christian tradition,<sup>96</sup> the question of hermeneutics,<sup>97</sup> its relationship to the larger theological community,<sup>98</sup> and the danger of losing its Christian identity.<sup>99</sup>

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Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) that meets frequently to engage in dialogue around issues of common concern” (Coleman, 2000:188).

<sup>96</sup> The church, black or white, is the church because of adherence to certain truths correctly held as transcendent, normative, and authoritative. Such a belief system inherently encompasses beliefs about the nature of God, Scripture, Jesus Christ, humanity, and the Holy Spirit. The black church (especially in the USA) historically has scrutinized the meaning of the gospel in ways other than physical, economic, political, and cultural liberation. These reflections on belief and life, because of their transcendent nature, speak to concerns such as, What does freedom or liberation mean and how will it be achieved? Are we left with interpretations of reality that are only the product of our experiences? If experience is ultimate, what is the nature of any moral imperative that seeks to describe and move toward conditions as they should exist? Black Theology’s moral imperative has been and always will be authoritative in the African American community and outside the community only in proportion to its faithfulness to Scripture as mediated in and through the black church (Fields, 2001:78).

<sup>97</sup> The primary question confronting any black hermeneutic is whether the members of the interpretive community are engaging in socio-critical or socio-pragmatic approach (see Anthony C. Thiselton’s 1992 book, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, p. 41). Without consistent identification and implementation of transcendent perspective in black biblical hermeneutics, there is no “command” to change the dominant social, political, economic, and theological structures. The resultant theological formulation can only speak to the black interpretive community. That may be sufficient for some. The cost, however, is too dear for those who want to prove convincing to other communities and work effectively for change. This prophetic role could be a perpetual legacy for Black Theology (Fields, 2001:81).

<sup>98</sup> An analysis of the question of Black Theology’s relationship with the broader theological community demands a consideration of many factors. Two questions would be important: In what sense are Black Theologians free from the restraints of the dominant theological community? If they do reject the voice of the dominant white theological presence in the name of synthesizing a relevant Black Theology, then how can Black theologians affect change in the theology and socio-cultural attitudes of the dominant culture? Those who identify with the Black theological community must continue in the research, synthesis, and application of biblical and theological principles. The Black theological community must be willing to accept criticism from those considered outside the liberation

The affinity of Black Theology in the USA with other liberation theologies elsewhere is growing. An example is South Africa, where the Black theologians have developed a style of doing theology that is very similar to that of their counterparts in the USA.<sup>100</sup>

In South Africa, according to Tinyiko Maluleke, Black Theology has a tentative agenda:

...from the second half of the 1980s several items have been thrust upon the Black Theology agenda - both from within and from without. The first 'item' to be put forward mainly from outside Black Theology, in various ways, on a few occasions has been the pronouncement that Black Theology was either dead, redundant or overtaken by 'events'. There have been two basic reasons advanced for these kinds of pronouncements, namely the perceived 'popular shift' from Black Consciousness as a political strategy to Non-Racialism and the demise of Apartheid. A possible third reason for pronouncing Black Theology dead is the sheer difficulty of race-talk in a political situation where race is no longer supposed to matter (<http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/ricsa/me99/docs/maluleke.htm>).

In view of the above, Maluleke explains that the agenda for the next phase of Black Theology in South Africa must be harvested first and foremost from within Black Theology itself:

From the early 1980s Black Theology has acknowledged the *multiplicity of ideological positions* and political strategies in the construction of Black Theology. However, in making this acknowledgment, Black Theology cannot 'go back' to a time when commitment was not yet recognized as the first act in theology. Therefore, the multiplicity of ideological and political frameworks will not be allowed either to become a 'cover-up' and thereby obscure the commitment of any given brand of Black Theology (<http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/ricsa/me99/docs/maluleke.htm>).

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community, even those who through latent, and sometimes obvious, racism, patriarchy, and homophobia, may be involved in perpetuating dehumanization and structural oppression (Fields, 2001:82-84).

<sup>99</sup> Fields (2001:86) asserts that doctrinal distinctiveness must be maintained as they authorize the use of descriptive term, *Christian*, and secondly, they enhance the hope of motivating others who share elements of Christian dogma to consider more fully what it means "to act justly and to love mercy and walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). Thirdly, they assist the church in ministry to the black community, as well as the church in general.

<sup>100</sup> See Moore, Basil (ed). 1974. *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa*. Atlanta: John Knox Press; Boesak, Allan. 1984. *Black and Reformed*. Leonard Sweetman (ed). Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books. Hopkins; Dwight N. 1989. *Black Theology USA and South Africa: Politics, Culture, and Liberation*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.

While *race* has always been an important category in Black Theology both in the USA and in South Africa, *gender* has also irrupted onto the Black Theology agenda in the past ten to fifteen years especially in South Africa (<http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/ricsa/me99/docs/maluleke.htm>). Despite the fact that gender is becoming more and more fashionable in South Africa - its racial component should not be forgotten; nor does the demise of apartheid spell an end to racism and racist exploitation. In fact, it might mean that racism has become more sophisticated.

Maluleke argues that without abandoning the notion and language of liberation, Black Theology can no longer make pronouncements on liberation in meta-narrative and kerygmatic terms. Its (biblical) hermeneutics in the past ten years in South Africa, have shown how unsatisfactory and how elusive such an approach could be. The foregoing point notwithstanding, Black Theology has sought to place a high premium on *solidarity with the poor* and not with the state or its organs no matter how democratic and compassionate such a state might be. To Maluleke, such a theological position must not be mistaken for a sheer anti-state stance. Black Theology is first and foremost not about the powerful but about the powerless and the silenced (<http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/ricsa/me99/docs/maluleke.htm>).

Another *item* that has come up often in discussions of Black Theology during the past decade or so, in South Africa, is the question of African Independent Churches (AICs). For Black Theology, Maluleke notes, this matter is not unrelated to solidarity with the poor. Several Black Theology conferences have identified AICs as a significant interlocutor for Black Theology. Although some tentative steps have been taken in studying this phenomenon, the task ahead remains daunting. On the other hand, like the AICs, South African Black Theology reflections have identified African Traditional Religions (ATRs) as an area that needs attention. This should link well with the currently fashionable ‘multi-faith’ dialogue in South Africa. Unfortunately, as Maluleke notes, the dialogue (predictably), largely, excludes African Traditional Religions. A serious interest in ATRs is one of the most constructive ways of not only bringing Black Theology into the “religious dialogue” debate but also of affording Black Theology another chance of demonstrating solidarity with the poor, for ATRs is the religion of the poor in South Africa (<http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/ricsa/me99/docs/maluleke.htm>).

In Britain, Anthony G. Reddie's book, *Black Theology in Transatlantic Dialogue*,<sup>101</sup> charts a new course for Black Theology, which interrogates varieties of Black experience in different contexts through creative and analytical means and, then, brings them into critical interaction. Reddie creates a dynamic conversation between Black Theologies in the US and in the UK, comparing and highlighting divergences in the respective movements. The book maps out the contours for a meaningful dialogue between African American and Black British theologies of liberation. Reddie's constructive approach of 'A Jazz Hermeneutic for Black Theology' is a creative and challenging suggestion for the future work of Black Theologians. In his other book,<sup>102</sup> Reddie investigates the oral sources of Black experience, in order to use these traditions to affirm Black elders living in Britain, and to educate their young counterparts. Other publications attend to the contemporary trends in Britain.<sup>103</sup>

In South Africa, on the other hand, Black Theologies address various exciting themes in contemporary contexts. Russel Botman<sup>104</sup> pleads for a Black Theology of transformation. In various publications, Tinyiko Maluleke<sup>105</sup> also relates Black Theology to African Theology. He holds that various cultural matters need to be dealt with in theological discourse. Rothney Stok

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<sup>101</sup> See Reddie, Anthony G. 2006. *Black Theology in Transatlantic Dialogue*. Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>102</sup> See Reddie, Anthony G. 2001. *Faith, Stories, and the Experiences of Black Elders: Singing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land*. Jessica Kingsley.

<sup>103</sup> See Beckford, Robert. 1998. *Jesus is Dread: Black Theology and Black Culture in Britain*. Darton: Longman; Beckford, Robert. 2000. *Dread and Pentecostal: A Political Theology for the Black Church in Britain*. SPCK.

<sup>104</sup> See Botman's doctoral dissertation: *Discipleship as Transformation? Towards a Theology of Transformation* (1993).

<sup>105</sup> See: Maluleke, T S. 2003. The Valdezia Mission Station, Then and Now: A Missiological Appraisal. *Missionalia*, Volume 31, No. 1 (pp. 156-176); Maluleke, T S. 1997. In Search of "The True Character of African Christian Identity. A Review of the Theology of Kwame Badiako. *Missionalia* Volume 25, No. 2 (pp. 210-219). Maluleke, T S. 1995. Urban Black Townships: A Challenge to Christian Mission. *Missionalia* Volume 23, No. 2 (pp. 162-183).

Tshaka,<sup>106</sup> like James Cone, employs the thoughts of Karl Barth in the development of Black Theology while Nico Koopman<sup>107</sup> develops Black Theology within the framework of Public Theology. A potentially new development in Black Theology is the growing collaboration amongst Black theologians from the USA, Britain and South Africa. Theologies from these three countries recently participated in an international conference on Black Theology in Chicago (<http://www.garrett.edu/index.php/news/75-april09/492-james-h-cone-to-deliver-convocation-lecture>).

#### **4.6 The Place and Priority of the Poor in Black Theological Discourses**

Based on the foregoing analysis of the development, features, strengths and weaknesses of Black Theology, it is concluded that the poor enjoy priority in Black theological discourses. The poor enjoy and have epistemological significance, i.e. the poor determine the methodology of Black Theology. Black Theology reads the Bible, and the social context is through the lenses of the poor. In addition, Black Theology creates new knowledge, which is liberating and operates from the perspective of the poor.

There seem to be two major emphases that stand out in Black Theology. The one is the view that there is a conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed, and the other is the strong belief in the divine preferential option for the poor and the oppressed.

##### ***The oppressor and the oppressed***

Maimela (1989:116) observes that since Black Theology has its roots in and it is born out of the historical experiences of suffering and pain resulting from white oppression and domination, black people became aware that they were poor, powerless and dominated. This happened, “not by accident or by divine design”. The people realized that they were made poor and powerless by

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<sup>106</sup> See Rothney Stok Tshaka’s 2005 doctoral dissertation: *Confessional Theology? A Critical Analysis of the Theology of Karl Barth and Its Significance for the Belhar Confession*.

<sup>107</sup> See Koopman’s article, *Some comments on Public Theology today*. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*. Number 117. November 2003 (pp 3-19).

another class of people, “the white dominant group that denies the Blacks the right to shape their lives”. Maimela notes that, such awareness of being made poor and rendered powerless led black people to “a radical change which often involves them in confrontation with white racists who want to maintain the present unequal material relationship”. The world then, becomes a battleground between the white oppressors and the oppressed blacks. The world is understood, from the black peoples’ perspective, as that which is “polarized between two groups, the powerful and dominant Whites who benefit from the oppressive social-political conditions and the exploited and dominated Blacks who are victims of racism”.

In this regard then, Black Theology “insists that the reality of our conflictory world should become a subject, a datum for theological reflection” (Maimela, 1989:117). Maimela further states that, “This constitutes a major departure from traditional theology practiced from the point of view of the privileged, well-fed and rich Whites ...which ... close(s) the eyes of many Christians to the reality of conflict between Whites and Blacks” (Maimela, 1989:117).

Racism<sup>108</sup> is one of the causes of injustice. The sin of racism brings about oppression and the desire to dominate others. Such situation brings about conflict and polarization between (white) oppressors and oppressed blacks. Black Theology therefore:

...calls for radical transformation of individual and social structures, because the gospel message proclaims that, in Christ, the alienation between God and humans, and between human beings themselves have been overcome... Black theology contends that it is as people candidly face the racial factors that breed alienation and conflict that they will be open to the transformative power of the gospel, which will lead Whites and Blacks to acquire qualitative new ways of becoming human in their relationships to one another (Maimela, 1989:117).

Black Theology does this to confront the sin of racism.

### ***The divine preferential option for the poor and oppressed***<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Maimela (1989:117) understands racism to mean “the sinful refusal to love, to have fellowship and to be available for the well-being of one’s neighbour, who happens to have a different skin colour.”

<sup>109</sup> This heading comes from Maimela (1989:118).

Having noted that racism operates in the world, creating conflict between the (white) oppressor and the oppressed black people, any theology that is aware of such conflict cannot afford to remain socially and politically neutral. The challenges and struggles that bring about the conflicts between the two sides are of life and death. The church and its theology would, therefore, have to take sides. Such a choice would be informed by the conviction that “the demands of the gospel are incompatible with unjust, alienating, and polarizing social arrangements in racist societies” (Maimela, 1989:118).

Maimela further notes that, Black Theology, as an incarnational theology:

...places a high premium on the fact that in becoming human in Jesus, God, the King of kings was not born in the sumptuous palaces of kings. Rather, the Almighty and transcendent God chose to empty the Godhead of divine power and glory in order to take on the nature of a slave. God came down from his throne and chose to be born of poor parents, to live and die as a poor and oppressed human being so as to give the oppressed Blacks new life and hope (Maimela, 1989:118).

Subsequently, it follows that God, in Jesus, has chosen to identify Himself with all human sufferings. Jesus also identified Himself with the despised and rejected of the society during His earthly ministry. Such is a demonstration of the fact that God is a thoroughly biased God who takes the side of the oppressed, the weak, the exploited, the hungry, the homeless, and the scum of society (Maimela, 1989:118).

Maimela also notes that Black Theologians are convinced that the theme or motif of God’s preferential option for the poor and the oppressed runs through the entire Bible. In the book of Exodus, God takes the side of the oppressed Israelites against the oppressive Pharaoh and his regime. Another example is that of Jesus who was born to a poor people and who identified with the poor, marginalized and the rejected of the society. Jesus’ friends were not the Priests, Sadducees, Pharisees and Scribes, but the sinners, the prostitutes, the traitors, the scum of society.

Maimela argues that in opting to side with the oppressed and downtrodden, God affirmed that He is not ready to condone social institutions in which the poor and the powerless are oppressed and humiliated on the basis of color, religion or class. Black Theologians, therefore, argue that just as God liberated the Israelites not only from spiritual sin and guilt but also from oppressive socio-



political and economic deprivation, God does liberate the oppressed blacks both from their personal sins and guilt and from historical structures of evil, exploitation and oppression that are embodied in racist social structures (Maimela, 1989:119).

In Black Theology, the fact that God has taken sides with the poor is very important, because it implies that God is not prepared to put up with social situations in which black people are oppressed and humiliated. In an earlier work, *The Unquestionable Right to be Free: Essays in Black Theology*, edited by Itumeleng J. Mosala and Buti Tlagale, Maimela writes that, in the light of the preferential option for the poor, the church is called upon to abandon its false neutrality, move out of its position of power, and shake off the protection given it by the beneficiaries of the *status quo*. In doing this, the church would be taking its position for and with the poor who struggle to control their destiny, thus, committing itself unequivocally to human liberation (Maimela, 1986:106).

In the light of the above, Black Theology sees the church as God's prophet, who reads the signs of the time, openly denouncing ameliorative measures, which prolong and give injustice and oppression respectability, and calling for and advocating a radical transformation of the existing structures. By doing these things, the church becomes that institution which joins forces with God to work for the liberation, dignity, and, justice for all people, and rejects the misuse of the gospel to legitimize class and racial oppression as well as sexual domination. When the church acts in this manner, then, it becomes a vehicle of reconciliation and peace among the alienated, polarized, and conflicted humankind in the world (Maimela, 1986:106-107).

#### **4.7 Some Conclusions on Black Theology**

This chapter has engaged in conversation, primarily, with the writings of Dwight Hopkins and Johannes Kritzinger. The decision to consult their writings more than those of other scholars is based on the detailed nature of their writings on Black Theology. Dwight Hopkins writes, in detail, on Black Theology in the USA while Johannes Kritzinger considers Black Theology from a South African perspective. The chapter has taken note of the reality that black people in the USA and in South Africa suffered many years of oppression on the basis of their skin color.

Oppression came in the form of slavery for the black Americans, and of apartheid for black South Africans.

, Based on the views of several scholars consulted in this chapter, it can be shown that:

- Black Theology investigates the question of what it means to be black and Christian for a people suffering racism. It is an effort to claim one's blackness and freedom as a people of God.
- Black Theology recognizes that the triune God works with the poor, as they learn to love themselves enough to practice their total freedom and create their full humanity on earth as it is in heaven. It attempts to discern and proclaim God's presence in liberating those who suffer under various forms of sin and oppression.
- Black Theology is a survival theology, as well as one of liberation. It is a theology of the oppressed people - a theology that deals with the problem of racial domination and oppression in North America and South Africa.

It is noted in this chapter, that Black Theology is centered on survival. It, therefore, employs passionate, gut-level language in explaining its content.

On the development of Black Theology, it is observed that it has its roots in the unique experiences of the people of color (people of African descent) in both North America and in South Africa. Some of the factors that led to the development of Black Theology include the historical context of slavery, which was a unique way, on the part of black Americans, to read and experience the Bible, and the developments during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s in the USA. As they endured the pains of discrimination, black Americans (as slaves) developed a ritualistic affirmation about God's constituency. They understood God as one who felt a special love for the oppressed, heard their groans, and would deliver them from the house of bondage. They saw a divine partiality for the poor.

Black Theology received a real boost from the Civil Rights and the Black Power movements of the 1950s to the 1970s in the USA. In South Africa, as well, Black Theology received a real boost from the Black Consciousness Movement. The Black Consciousness Movement

represented the experiential base out of which Black Theology arose and the framework within which it developed. In South Africa, Black Theology has two phases (Kritzinger 1988:58). The first phase began in 1970 with the establishment of a Black Theology project by the University Christian Movement (UCM), while the second phase began in 1981 with the establishment of the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT).

In both the USA and South African cases, Black Theology has sought to synthesize the biblical theme of liberation with contemporary situations (slavery and apartheid) of its people. Emphasis is placed on liberation, both in the history of Israel and in the life of Jesus as the foundation of the content of Black Theology (Coleman, 2000:180). The sources of Black Theology include the Bible, the black church, a faith tradition of struggle for liberation, women's experiences<sup>110</sup>, black peoples' cultures, and a radical politics. Black Theology also draws from the black experience, revelation, Scripture, Jesus Christ, and the traditional church.

In Black Theology, there are two emphases; the first is the conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed, and the other is the strong belief in the divine preferential option for the poor and oppressed. Black theological discourses give priority to the poor more than Public Theological discourses, on matters, which concern, for example, the option of the poor, the epistemological preference of the poor, and solidarity with the poor. In Black Theology, God is understood as taking side with the poor in order to present the universal divine grace. God sided with the

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<sup>110</sup> Coleman (2000:178) writes that, "African American women theologians have also had a significant impact upon the origin and development of black theology. Such writers as Jacquelyn Grant, Katie Cannon, and De-lores Williams have provided a major critique both of nascent black theology and of the black church with respect to their sexism. Beyond this, taking their cue from other African American writers such as Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, they are developing a uniquely "womanist" theological discourse. Walker actually coined the word "womanist" in her book *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens: A Womanist Prose* (1984). In brief, it refers to an "outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willfull*" (xi) disposition on the part of black women and women of color vis-à-vis doing what is expected of them as submissive women. It is adamantly countercultural. At the same time, it is avowedly communitarian in its orientation and concerns. The womanist paradigm is distinct from both black (dominated by African American men) and feminist (dominated by Euro-American women) theologies. Rather than rely on traditional theological categories for shaping their reflection, they draw from the unique experiences of women of color, especially African American women, to inform their way of thinking theologically."

hungry, the thirsty, the homeless strangers, the torn and the naked, the sick who lack resources or health insurance for their illness, those in prison, majority of whom, were overwhelmingly poor.

The analysis of poverty from the social science and the biblical perspectives are reflected by the various works on Black Theology. The features, causes, and consequences of poverty, as well as the ways of addressing poverty, suggested in these analyses, are addressed in Black theological discourses. The liberation of the poor is a priority to Black Theology and the next chapter will discuss Public Theologies with a view to establish the place and priority of the poor in Public Theological discourses.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## THE PLACE AND PRIORITY OF THE POOR IN PUBLIC THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSES

### 5.1 Introduction

The present chapter will examine the place and priority of the poor in Public Theological discourses. The background of Public Theology, that is, its origin and development, the *public* in Public Theological discourses, as well as the similarities and differences of Public Theology with other forms of theology, and its definitions, will be sketched. Furthermore, a discussion of the sources of Public Theologies namely Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience will follow. Some principles of Public Theologies such as creation and liberation; vocation and covenant; moral law, sin, and freedom; ecclesiology and trinity; and Christology will be considered. Two approaches namely the direct public involvement approach, and the indirect public involvement approach will be analyzed, while the last part of the chapter will deal, specifically, with the role and place of the poor in Public Theological discourses.

In the light of the variety of approaches to, and the emphases in Public Theology, the plural form, Public Theologies, will be used, mostly, in this study. This outline is important for an orientation into this relatively new and rapidly growing field in theology. The discussion will, eventually, illuminate the discussion on the synergies and the potential of both Black Theology and Public Theologies for addressing poverty.

### 5.2 Public Theologies - Background Information

This section of the research seeks to provide information, primarily, on the background of Public Theologies, similarities and differences that exist between Public Theologies and other forms of theology, and a discussion of the concept of Public Theology. Public Theologies are, then, defined by considering and describing what Public Theologies are and are not, and what public theologians do. The notion of Public Theology is compared with concepts such as civil religion,

public religion, political theology, public church, public philosophy, social ethics, and public ethics. Attention is also given to a discussion of public intellectuals and public theologians. In this way, a better understanding of Public Theologies is achieved.

### **5.2.1 Origin and development of Public Theologies**

This section outlines the origins and development of Public Theologies. Particular attention is given to the helpful writings of Harold Breitenberg, Max Stackhouse, and Martin Marty.<sup>111</sup>

In an article in the *Journal for Christian Ethics*, “To Tell the truth: Will the real Public Theology please stand up?”, Harold Breitenberg, Jr (2003:56) writes on the origins and the development of the term Public Theology. He notes that the variety of ways in which those interested in Public Theology understand and approach it is a consequence of the different contexts in which the term arose and developed. He claims that Public Theology, “originated from discussions about civil religion and its role in the United States that begun in 1967 with sociologist Robert Bellah’s seminal work on American civil religion”.

Breitenberg (2003:56) attributes the coining of the term Public Theology to the church historian Martin Marty:

...Martin Marty coined the term “public theologian” and “public theology” in order to distinguish his interpretation of persons and features within the Christian tradition in the United States from understandings of civil religion held by Bellah and others.

Breitenberg’s position supports that of Max Stackhouse. Stackhouse (1996:105), in an article in *Theology Today*, titled, “Public Theology and ethical Judgment”, notes that Public Theology, as a term, appeared for the first time in the title of a 1974 analysis by Martin Marty of the thought of Reinhold Niebuhr who lived from 1892 to 1971.

In his article, “Reinhold Niebuhr: Public Theology and the American Experience” in *The Journal of Religion*, Marty refers to what he calls the main strand of American religious thought that

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<sup>111</sup> Martin Marty has played an important role in interpreting American religion to the public world.

drew on the works of various figures that interpreted the nation's religious experience, practice and behavior in the light of some sort of transcendent reference. This includes the way Jewish thought was incorporated into American religious thought. It also refers to the many theologians in the black community who informed their contemporaries in the 1960s of the long lineage of reflection on the values of their people's experience in the new world (Marty, 1974:332).

In the same article, Marty refers to the work of Reinhold Niebuhr as Public Theology and regards the works of Jonathan Edwards, Horace Bushnell and Rauschenbusch, etc. as Public Theology from the church's side. He also writes that their contemporaries such as Benjamin Franklin, Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, and Thomas Jefferson used deistic or theological material in order to make sense of the American experience. These people looked for what appeared to them to be a broader and deeper repository of religious motifs, which is the nation itself. To Marty, all these people were Public theologians (Marty, 1974:332-334).

At the heart of Marty's article is the message that:

...theology, while related to intensely personal commitments and to a particular community of worship, is, at its most profound level, neither merely private nor a matter of distinctive communal identity. Rather, it is an argument regarding the way things are and ought to be, one decisive for public discourse and necessary to the guidance of individual souls, societies, and, indeed, the community of nations (Stackhouse, 1996:165).

Soon after Marty used the term Public Theology, Robert Neelly Bellah, an American sociologist, accepted the term as a "friendly amendment to his civil religion thesis and incorporated it into his works (Breitenberg 2003:57)".

According to Breitenberg (2003:57), David Hollenbach, a theological ethicist, then began to call for the formulation of a Public Theology that would attempt to illuminate urgent moral questions of his time through explicit use of what he called "the great symbols and doctrines of the Christian faith".<sup>112</sup> Breitenberg (2003:57) further states that David Tracy, then, made his

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<sup>112</sup> David Tracy, born in Yonkers, New York in 1939, underwent seminary training in philosophy and theology at St. Joseph's seminary in Dunwoodie, New York. After teaching briefly at the Catholic University of America in

significant contribution to Public Theology in his discussion of three publics – the wider society, the academy and the church. According to Breitenberg, the “works by Marty, Hollenbach and Tracy often inform the understandings and assumptions others have about Public Theology and frame their discussions of it.”

Breitenberg (2003:57) observes that, largely as a result of conversations generated by debates over civil religion, older terminologies were revived. Such older terminologies included public philosophy and public religion. New ones were also devised such as public church. This was an attempt to demarcate the various fields of study and to clarify the issues at hand. As the concept, public theology generated its own area of discussion, which overlapped with the expanding and fading civil religion debate, “other terms and rubrics were soon brought into the conversation, including political theology, public discourse, public ethics, public intellectual, and social ethics.”

Public Theology, to a greater or lesser extent, shares certain characteristics with each of the above (Breitenberg, 2003:57). Breitenberg notes that sharing depends on how a writer understands the other terms and concepts and the relationships among them, and the academic and ecclesial perspectives from which he or she approaches them. He observes that:

... while each of these is related to public theology, a consensus exists within the literature devoted to public theology, written by those who are not explicitly opposed to it, that none of the other terms or the fields they describe is completely synonymous with public theology.

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Washington, D.C., he moved to the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, where he continues to teach ([http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/WeirdWildWeb/courses/mwt/dictionary/mwt\\_themes\\_868\\_tracy.htm](http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/WeirdWildWeb/courses/mwt/dictionary/mwt_themes_868_tracy.htm)).

Tracy’s first book is *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan* (1970). His more original and lasting contributions came in his next two books, *Blessed Rage for Order* (1975) and *The Analogical Imagination* (1981). In *Blessed Rage for Order*, Tracy sees the central task of theology as a critical correlation between the values and claims of postmodern human experience and the texts of the Christian tradition, and which develops a pantheistic understanding of theology in the metaphysical categories of process theology. In *The Analogical Imagination*, Tracy presents a hermeneutical understanding of theology, centered on the notion of the classic, which emphasizes interpretation and the necessarily public character of systematic theology.



### 5.2.2 The *public* in Public Theology

A clearer comprehension and insight into what *public* in Public Theology means is crucial to an understanding of Public Theologies, and the way they compare with other forms of theology. Here an attempt will be made to shed light on the notion of the term, *public*, in Public Theologies.

In his book, *Publics and Counterpublics*, Michael Warner notes that *public* and *private* are not always simple enough that one could code them on a map with different colors. This is because the two terms describe social contexts, kinds of feelings, and genres of language and they have many different meanings, which often go unnoticed. The American courts, for example, have developed other ways of defining public and private to refer to relationships rather than places (Warner, 2005:27). Warner (2005:28) further observes that:

Public and private sometimes compete, sometimes complement each other, and sometimes are merely parts of a larger series of classifications that include, say, local, domestic, personal, political, economic, or intimate. Almost every major cultural change – from Christianity to printing to psychoanalysis – has left a new sedimentary layer in the meaning of the public and the private... In modern contexts, the terms have been used in many different and overlapping senses, combining legacies from classical thought and law with modern forms of social organization.

The implication here is that none of the two terms, public and private, has a sense, which is exactly parallel to, or opposite of, the other. This is so because the contexts overlap, and some things are private, in one sense, and public, in another. These two terms will have to be understood in more than one context and with attention to their history.

In his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Jurgen Habermas writes that the notions, concerning what is public and what is not, deal with categories of Greek origin, transmitted bearing a Roman stamp. He observes that:

In the fully developed Greek city-state the sphere of the *polis*, which was common (*koine*) to the free citizen, was strictly separated from the sphere of the *oikos*; in the sphere of the *oikos*, each individual is in his own realm (*idea*). The public life, *bios politikos*, went on in the market place (*argora*), but of course this did not mean that it occurred necessarily only in this specific locale (Habermas, 1991:3).

Habermas (1991: xi) reports that in the eighteenth century, a new civil society emerged in Europe. It was driven by a need for open commercial arena where news and matters of common concern could be exchanged and discussed freely. However, the development also came with growing rates of literacy, accessibility to literature, and a new kind of critical journalism:

In its clash with the arcane and bureaucratic practices of the absolutist state, the emergent bourgeoisie gradually replaced a public sphere in which the ruler's power was merely represented *before* the people with a sphere in which state authority was publicly monitored through informed and critical discourse *by* the people.

Habermas (1991:36) points out three preconditions for the emergence of the new public sphere in Europe namely the discursive arenas such as Britain's coffee houses, France's saloons, and Germany's *Tischgesellschaften*. The three may have differed in size and composition of their publics, the style of their proceedings, the climate of their debates, and their topical orientation, but they all organized discussions among people that tended to be ongoing, once they had a number of institutional criteria in common.

To Habermas (1991:30-31), the public sphere mediates between the "private sphere and sphere of Public Authority" while "the private sphere comprised civil society in the narrow sense, i.e., the realm of commodity exchange and of social labor." Whereas the "sphere of Public Authority" dealt with the state, or realm of police, and the ruling class, the public sphere crossed over both these realms and, "Through the vehicle of public opinion it put the state in touch with the needs of the society".

In his book *The Analogical Imagination* David Tracy argues that all theology is public discourse, but different publics are addressed by the theologian (Tracy, 1981:3). This implies that, "The specific audience requires the theologian to tailor a theology that acknowledges the various social realities with their distinct traditions, values and assumptions" (Bezuidenhout, 2007:8).

In his 2007 article, "Notions of the Public and Doing Theology" in *International Journal of Public Theology*, Smit identifies three main ways in which the concept, *public*, is used in contemporary societies. In this article, Smit (2007:4-5) considers Tracy's understanding of *public* as quite vague, because it functions with the presupposition that all theological discourse

is public, in the sense that it addresses specific audiences or publics namely, society, academy, and church. As far as this understanding of public is concerned, theologians do their theology with specific publics in mind and, in the process, internalize the claims, questions, themes, challenges, needs, rhetoric, nature of argumentation, understanding of truth, views of meaning and relevance, norms of communication, plausibility structures, criteria of adequacy and models of rationality from particular publics. Koopman (2009:13) notes that within the framework of this notion of *public*, Public Theology is a value free description of the audience that theologians have in mind in their theological labor.

Such an understanding becomes an acknowledgement of a specific audience for theology in a specific instance. However, if all theology is Public Theology and any sphere within which theology speaks could be called *public*, then the need for Public Theologies, which is defined as such, and are differentiated from those, which then would not be Public Theologies, becomes vague.

Other interpretations of the word *public* in Public Theology also exist. Smit (2008) shows that Tracy's approach is to be found on the one end of the spectrum of descriptive understandings of *public*. On the other side of the spectrum, is the interpretation which limits the *public* of Public Theology to Tracy's third public, that of society, the public life in the world. Smit (2008) also investigates a more normative understanding of *public*, in which, *public* is a specific sphere of life separate from politics and the economy, a place where opinions can be formed. This can range from either civil religion practiced independently of churches and religious organizations, on the one hand, to the formation of advocacy groups that would help to enhance democracy, on the other.

Related to the three different understandings proposed by Smit, are three corresponding understandings of Public Theologies. The *first public* which Smit (2007:1-2) identifies is the sphere of spaces and practices where an informed public opinion about the normative vision for society is formed and sustained. This sphere is characterized by critical discussions between equal partners, and by being free of constraint, threat and self-interest, and open to difference and otherness. Koopman (2009:12) is agrees with Smit (2007:5) that some approaches to Public

Theology are based on this understanding of *public* as the sphere where a normative vision underlying contemporary democratic life in democratic societies is developed. This Public Theology takes on the form of public religion as Civil Religion, advocacy and a struggle for specific goals, as well as round-table forums, which facilitate dialogue and address tensions and conflicts in service of the common good and participates in policymaking and implementation.

The *second public* identified by Smit (2007:3-5) is the *public* which has to do with life, in general, life in the world, the whole of creation, history, culture, social life, reality and humanity. Koopman (2009:13) observes that Public Theology, which functions in the context of this broader, vaguer understanding of public, focuses on three questions regarding the place, social form and role of the church in this broad public. This approach to Public Theology deals with questions regarding the role of the church in society; in issues of state, power and politics; in issues of law, justice and civic life; in issues of economic life; in issues of war and peace; and in issues that concern the diverse arrangements of life in society and community, and in civil society.

All the above-mentioned descriptions use the descriptive *public*. This leads to a wider array of interpretations of Public Theologies. Koopman (2009:13) claims that Smit's description:

...of the plurality, diversity and ambiguity in the notion of public, does not leave us with the feeling of being overwhelmed, of relativism, of blurring complicatedness. Neither does his analysis pacify us. On the contrary, it fosters an acknowledgement of appreciation of the variety of Public Theology initiatives in different contexts. And it fosters self-understanding of our own approaches to public and public theology. Moreover, it invites continued discussion in the development of the important notion of public theology.

To Koopman (2009:12-14), the concept, *public*, is used in an inclusive way to refer to the whole of life. Consequently, the theologian is challenged to have God's love for the whole world, for all reality, and in focus when doing theology in various theological disciplines and sub-disciplines. He notes that, at the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology at the University of Stellenbosch, four public spheres in democratic societies are recognized namely political, economic, civic society, and public opinion formation. The *political sphere* focuses on the state, government, political power, and the control and regulation of public life. The *economic sphere*

concerns aspects such as the so-called autonomous market economy, globalization, ecology, science and technology.

The *civil society sphere* focuses on themes relating to the relationship between theology and, among others, the institutions, organizations, associations, and movements of civil society, which, independently from the state and economy, strive to enhance the quality of life, satisfy the needs and foster the interests of people, change the nature of society, and build the common good, that is, a life of quality for all. Such groups would also include schools, legal bodies, cultural and sports clubs, and churches. Lastly, the *public opinion formulation sphere* focuses on themes such as the nature of society, the common foundational values for society, common challenges for society, and common priorities for society.

It appears that the descriptive *public* points to the fact that, at this point in history, not all theology is necessarily public, that is, in spite of the inherent public character of theology. From the understanding that faith does not only have individual personal relevance, but that the gospel has something to say about society, the word, *public*, then points to those theologies, which take the welfare of the city rather than the welfare of the church as their agenda (Forrester, 2004:6). Specifically, and, in some cases, primarily,, this involves the participation in spheres of public discourse, those places where opinion is formed, as well as the way in which Christians theologize within those spheres (see Storrar 2008). From the way in which Centers of Public Theology see their own task, it is evident that the task also includes contributing to the formation of a sound economic and political sphere, among others.

As earlier indicated, the title of this study is *The Poor and the Public: An Exploration of Synergies between Black Theology and Public Theologies*. The title is prompted by the need to suggest and indicate that irrespective of the way the concept “*public*” is described, the cause of the poor must be addressed. In the end, all the spheres of *public* namely political, economic, civil society, public opinion, and life, in general, have to engage with the plight of the poor and vulnerable.

### 5.2.3 Public Theologies in relation to other forms of theology

In this section of the study, Public Theologies will be compared and contrasted with other forms of theology such as civil religion, public religion, political theology, public church, public philosophy, and social/public ethics. The notions of public intellectuals and public theologians will also be compared and contrasted.

#### *Civil Religion and Public Theologies*

Dirk Smit points out that the term, Civil Religion, is vague and ambiguous and can be used in many different ways. He traces the origins of the notion back to Robert Bellah's 1967 essay, "Civil religion in America" (Smit, 2007:101).<sup>113</sup> An online resource ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil\\_religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_religion)) notes that the meaning of the term Civil Religion varies depending on whether one is a sociologist of religion or a professional political

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<sup>113</sup> In the sixth chapter of his book, *Essays in Public Theology*, Dirk Smit notes that when Bellah wrote the 1967 Essay "Civil religion in America," Civil Religion could have meant, "the religious dimension... institutionalized in a collection of beliefs, symbols and rituals – of a nation or of any collectivity, and particular group within a society." Obviously, Bellah was concerned about American Civil Religion, and hence, therefore, this raises the question of whether such an understanding would hold for other nations or other groups of persons and/or institutions. The other challenge is what is meant by "religion" and the relationship with other denominations and faith communities (Smit 2007:101-104). In South Africa, during the period of fermentation and growth of apartheid ideology, Smit writes that, "the notion of civil religion has been employed by respected scholars to understand and describe the particular blend of religion and culture amongst dominant and powerful groups within Afrikanerdom... To the extent that the term was used as heuristic tool, it clearly did not carry most of the original association in Bellah's first description and usage, but was used in a new and very specific way, to describe particular Afrikaner form of civil religion" (Smit, 2007:108). Events, which took place during the years of defeat in the fight against apartheid and for transformation in South Africa, have been described as a short period of civil religious revival. Smit (2006:121) points out that, although the term is no longer used, the discourse of Civil Religion did discuss, among other aspects, shared value system; nature and function of common good, public opinion; nature and effects of secularization; the public role of religion, etc. He laments the disappearance of the term and suggests that, new methods and terminologies must be found to analyze, understand and describe these complex but crucial themes.

commentator. However, Civil Religion is intended as a form of social cement, helping to unify the state by providing it with sacred authority.<sup>114</sup>

Breitenberg (2003:57) notes that Civil Religion has been typified in many ways and is the center of attention of a wide-ranging body of works. He relates that although Martin Marty sought to distinguish Public Theology from Civil Religion, he has defined Public Theology in ways that are similar to descriptions of Civil Religion. Bellah (1975:3)<sup>115</sup> describes Civil Religion as “that religious dimension, found... in the life of every people, through which it interprets its historical experience in the light of transcendent reality (in Breitenberg, 2003:58).”

In his 1967 essay, “Civil Religion in America”, Bellah claims that Civil Religion, in its priestly sense, is “an institutionalized collection of sacred beliefs about the American nation”. He describes the prophetic role of Civil Religion as challenging “national self-worship” and calling for “the subordination of the nation to ethical principles that transcend it in terms of which it should be judged”. Bellah identifies the American Revolution, the Civil War, and the Civil Rights Movement as three decisive historical events that impacted the content and imagery of Civil Religion in the United States (Bellah, 1967:1-21).

Marty (1981:16)<sup>116</sup> describes Public Theology as “an effort to interpret life of a people in the light of a transcendent reference”. It is due to such similarity in description that the two terms are

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<sup>114</sup> The simple dogmas of the civil religion include life to come, the reward of virtue and the punishment of vice, and the exclusion of religious intolerance. According to the wikipedia online resource ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil\\_religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_religion)), the phrase "civil religion" was first discussed extensively by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in *The Social Contract*. Rousseau defined "civil religion" as a group of religious beliefs he believed to be universal, and which he believed governments had a right to uphold and maintain - belief in a deity, belief in an afterlife in which virtue is rewarded and vice punished; and belief in religious tolerance. Beyond that, Rousseau affirmed that individuals' religious opinions should be beyond the reach of governments.

<sup>115</sup> Bellah, Robert N. 1975. *The Broken Covenant: An American Civil Religion in Time of Trial*. New York: The Seabury Press.

<sup>116</sup> Marty, Martin E. 1981. *The Public Church: Mainline-Evangelical-Catholic*. New York: Crossroad.

sometimes confused and the concepts or realities to which they point collapsed into unitary notion. An examination of the literature devoted to the two terms would show the following:

- Civil Religion and a Public Theology are both concerned with the relationship between political authority, government and society, on the one hand, and God, the gods, or that which is perceived by a people to be sacred or holy, on the other hand. Breitenberg (2003:58) notes that Civil Religion emphasizes the public life and social responsibilities, and the national life of a people; while a Public Theology is concerned with the relationship of individual believers to the civil government.
- Civil Religion begins with the nation and its people and discerns the conception of God held by them. A Public Theology moves from religious faith and practices to considerations of their importance for the broader society.

A Public Theology is, often but not every time, understood as approaching these and other issues from the viewpoint of particular religious communities and traditions, as well as the individual religious believers who comprise them. A Public Theology deals with the public import and explanation of theological concepts, in relation to the larger society, in ways the Civil Religion does not. This is, in part, because Civil Religion is distinct from particular faith traditions upon which a Public Theology is based and out of which it develops.

Civil Religion and a Public Theology often diverge in their language and the intended goals of their respective discourses. A Public Theology differs markedly from discourses labeled as Civic Religion in both substantive features and formal appeals. When the rhetoric of a Public Theology is contrasted with that of the Civic Religion, one is able to isolate rhetorical distinctions (Breitenberg, 2003:79).<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Bellah, as well as Marty, seems view Civil Religion as a cultural phenomenon especially in the USA. Marty holds that Americans approved of religion, in general, without being particularly concerned about the content of that faith. He distinguishes between what he calls “priestly” and “prophetic” roles within the practice of American Civil Religion, which he prefers to call the Public Theology.



### ***Public Religion and Public Theologies***

William H. Swatos, Jr.,<sup>118</sup> the editor of *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society*, is of the view that Public Religion refers “both to a form of civic faith within a republic and to public expressions of religious faith in cultures where religion is more familiarly categorized as a private affair”. He states that Public Religion:

...refers to expressions of religious belief and behavior generated by private individuals or in the subcommunities, communities, and associations in the voluntary sector but having direct bearings on public order. As such, the term serves to refer to one side of the familiar private-public dichotomy (<http://hrr.hartsem.edu/ency/PublicR.htm>).

Breitenberg (2003:58) notes that the one characteristic that Public Religion shares with Public Theology is the uncertainty about the meaning of the terms. He notes that although some scholars describe Public Religion in language that is often related with Public Theology, the reality or concept to which Public Religion refers is generally understood to be more closely linked with Civil Religion:

... Public religion, along with civil religion but in contrast to public theology, is closely associated with the civil government and is so to such an extent that governmental leaders are often the most visible and important bearers of a nation’s public or civil religion.

According to Breitenberg, Public Religion is sometimes understood to be functionally comparable to a state religion or religion supported by the civil authorities. It has had both its religious and its secular supporters, it has also been inexact and evasive with respect to deity, and has tried to present a commonly shared, unitary, consensus faith. A Public Theology involves theological reflection and has connections to particular faith traditions. It is often critical of governmental policies or the State in ways that some forms of Public or Civil Religion are not. The goals of a Public Theology and their form and content are not the same as that of Public and Civil Religion (Breitenberg, 2003:58).

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<sup>118</sup> William H. Swatos, Jr. is the executive director of the Association for the Sociology of Religion and the Religious Research Association (Florida, USA).

### *Political Theology and Public Theologies*

Breitenberg (2003:59) shows that both Political Theology and Public Theology are concerned with the church and politics. They are also concerned with "...what is perceived to be an increasing irrelevance of theology with respect to the larger culture". This is to say that a Public Theology seeks to overcome the cultural marginalization, which is characteristic of contemporary theology.

In his book, *On Human Dignity* Moltmann (1984:98) observes that Political Theology has a trans-confessional character, and it is ecumenical insofar as both Catholic and Protestant churches are faced with the same problem of the growing irrelevance of their doctrines for modern life. They find in none of the different theological church traditions the solutions to the problems of the modern age. However, differences exist between the two theologies. Breitenberg (2003:59) asserts that Public Theology:

...is not exclusively or primarily concerned with politics and political institutions and the relationship of Christian believers and churches to them, with the rights of persons and groups within a body politic, or with theology's marginal place within the contemporary public discourse.

In other words, Public Theology is concerned with the identification of these principles and the warrants for them for assessing these religious claims. It is equally concerned with the equipping of the population with sufficient knowledge of these principles and warrants so that the difference between serious and trivial, valid and phony truth claims about religion and morality in these various statements can be seen by the general population (Stackhouse, 1985:107).

However, the methods of argument by Public Theology and the intended audience are different from those of Political Theology. Breitenberg (2003:82) notes that the theologies of what he calls "the new Christian evangelical right" and "the Latin American liberation theologies" use methods of argumentation, which for the most part are not public. He writes that, generally, they remain confessional theologies, which appeal to theological authorities to defend their positions. To Breitenberg, a Public Theology is not merely a synonym for a Political Theology, despite the important similarities between them. A Public Theology not only must address itself to the wider social and political issues, but it must also appropriate a form of argumentation that is genuinely

public – accessible to anyone, irrespective of one’s religious, political, social, or ideological persuasion.

There are those in the academia who advocate for a Public Theology, which is closely aligned with and focused on the political arena, while others propose a more expanded notion of the areas of life to which Public Theology should attend. Two examples suffice. Representatives of the two points of view are John Bolt and Max Stackhouse Bolt (2001:224)<sup>119</sup> stresses the importance of the political arena for Public Theology and claims that:

The purpose of a public theology is to provide a theological framework within which Christian citizens can conscientiously fashion their political vocation and interpret, evaluate, and transform the civic communities of which they are members.

On his part, Max Stackhouse<sup>120</sup> describes Political Theology as Public Theology’s closest relative but maintains that there is a fundamental distinction between the two. He holds the view that Public Theologians should address multiple “publics” - religious, academic, political and economic. He writes:

Public theology does not begin the approach to the crises of common meaning in modern life through political means. It is instead an attempt to say that political problems are not the primary ones, and that we make an error if we allow the word public to be used in a way that makes all decisions about the common life matters of state (Stackhouse, 1988:113).

A decade later, in 1999, Stackhouse”, in the introduction of an article he helped to edit, titled “Texts and Studies in the Social Gospel”, reports that:

Public theologians, especially in the face of current developments, have identified these decisive areas of civil society as distinct overlapping publics that have now expanded well beyond the confines of any particular nation-state or cultural unit. The global society now in the making demands that we ask precisely the questions of this tradition, now in a new way, with vastly expanding horizons. Christians must speak to issues of the common life, and do so in public. And the first area where they will be properly expected to speak is in regard to the plurality of

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<sup>119</sup> Bolt, John. 2001. *A Free Church, A Holy Nation: Abraham Kuyper’s American Public Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.

<sup>120</sup> Stackhouse, Max. 1988. The Pastor as Public Theologian, in Earl E. Shelp and Ronald H. Sunderland (eds). *The Pastor as Theologian*. New York: The Pilgrims Press.

religions... The second area is the academic public... The third area, is the political public... To these we add the economic public (Stackhouse, 1999: xxvii-xxviii).

### ***Public Church and Public Theologies***

According to Marty (1981:16-17), the term Public Church fits in a larger context of uses of the word, public. Such a church is a partial Christian embodiment within Public Religion. The Public Church, then, is a specifically Christian polity and witness. Similarly, Breitenberg (2003:59) shows that both Public Church and Public Theology are concerned with ways in which Christian faith is related to public affairs and the common good. The term Public Church, nonetheless, pertains to particular churches, traditions, denominations, or clusters of these. It pertains to communities of believers not, primarily, to their theologies and ethics that address institutions, issues, events and practices of public concern within the broader culture.

In an article, “Making a Public Difference after the Eclipse,” Dieter T. Hessel examines what he calls “the continuing place vs. displacement of mainstream Protestantism in the United States”. He observes that the mainstream churches have now been sidelined. Therefore, if the ecumenical mainstream protestant church were to play a constructive public role, then, it has to give special attention to, regain, and enliven contextual theological focus, formulate and teach a coherent social ethic, and develop a vigorous witness utilizing ecclesial resources and mobilizing members to carry out such mission (Hessel, 2002:1-20). This is an example of what one may call a Public Church.

Breitenberg (2003:59) observes that even though the Public Church carries out a Public Theology, the two are not the same, for “... while Public Churches often articulate Public Theologies, Public Theologies are not always produced by Public Churches”. He notes that discussions “... about what constitutes Public Theology or what is an exemplary Public Theologian have been conducted largely within the academic community, not within the church”.

### ***Public Intellectuals and Public Theologians***

Breitenberg (2003:60) observes that Public Intellectuals and Public Theologians recurrently contribute to related concerns. Although some scholars understand Public Theologians to be a

compartment of Public Intellectuals, others perceive Public Intellectuals and Public Theologians as having different goals, which may be at odds with each other. He notes that the two are not synonymous. According to Breitenberg (2003:60) Public Intellectuals:<sup>121</sup>

- Intend to have an impact in the larger society and their work is carried out by intellectuals.
- Have no necessary connection with theology or religion and may even be opposed to expressions of both in the public realm as unwarranted and dangerous intrusions.
- May be theological in their discourse but, at present, for the most part, they are not.

On the other hand, Breitenberg (2003:60) notes that Public Theology:

- May be conducted by and addressed to intellectuals and other elites. However, its creators and intended audience are by no means limited to these intellectuals.
- In its many forms, are produced by members of the laity and the clergy who may not be classified as intellectuals in the academic sense.
- Is intentionally and explicitly theological or, at least, claims to be.

### ***Public Philosophy and Public Theologies***

The two concepts do share some similarities; however, while instances of Public Philosophy may incorporate some aspects of theology, Public Philosophy is not, necessarily, theological (Breitenberg, 2003:60). According to Breitenberg, Public Philosophy tends to focus, primarily and more narrowly, on political aspects of society, on ways in which civil institutions, values, and patterns incorporate political theories and patterns.

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<sup>121</sup> Public Intellectuals are assumed to be communicators and participants in public debates, accessible in mass media. Such a person communicates information and perspectives on a variety of societal issues, not just a specialist area. Their social role means that they respond and react to society's issues and problems. They can provide a voice for others who may not have the skills, time or opportunity. They should be prepared to listen to a multitude of differing opinions and beliefs, and to construct their own conclusions taking these into account. Intellectuals also involve themselves with issues not specifically related to their area of expertise. The role of a public intellectual may be to connect scholarly research with public policy ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public\\_intellectual](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_intellectual)).

- A Public Theology relies on and stresses the public significance of particular religious texts, beliefs, communities, practices, traditions, and influences in ways that Public Philosophy does not.

This view by Breitenberg supports that of Hollenbach and Richard P. McBrien.<sup>122</sup> In his article in *Theological Studies* entitled “Theology and Philosophy in Public: A Symposium on John Courtney Murray’s Unfinished Agenda” Hollenbach (1979:714-715) asserts that, “Public theology is the effort to discover and communicate the socially significant meanings of Christian symbols and traditions. Public philosophy is the effort to discover and communicate the significant meanings of common social and political experience in our pluralistic culture”.

- A Public Theology may interact with Public Philosophy but, unlike the latter, a Public Theology is based, in part, on the understanding of deity and the relationship of that deity to human society (Breitenberg, 2003:60).

Stackhouse also considers that a Public Theology is not synonymous with Public Philosophy. For him, Public Theology:

...is theological in the sense that it takes as its fundamental point of departure the metaphysical and epistemological questions about whether we can speak meaningfully and cross-confessionally about the *logos* of *theos* – especially in ways that can make sense to those who are not already convinced of our confessional stances in faith and ethics, and who do not share our socio-historical backgrounds (Stackhouse, 1987:14).

### ***Social Ethics, Public Ethics and Public Theologies***

According to Breitenberg (2003:61), Social Ethics and Public Ethics refer to governmental, public and social programs and policies that bear upon matters of public and social interaction, order and morality, as well as the obligations of persons or groups to the larger society. Such

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<sup>122</sup> Richard P. McBrien, born in 1936, is the Crowley-O'Brien Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame. McBrien (1987:238) argues that public philosophy should be distinguished from public theology. He claims that, “The former does not depend on insights or wisdom that can be derived only from some religious tradition. The latter is dependent on specific religious symbols and doctrines.” (McBrien, Richard P. 1987. *Caesar’s Coin: Religion and Politics in America*, no. 34. London: Macmillian Publishing Company).

programs and policies are often phrased in terms of specific duties, values or principles such as justice, equality, fairness and peace.

Joseph L. Allen, in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics* describes Social Ethics as:

...normative ethical reflection that focuses upon social structures, processes, and communities, especially those that are large and complex, such as government, economic life, or international politics. It can also refer descriptively to socially shared pattern of moral judgment and behavior (Allen, 1986:592).

Breitenberg observes that Social and Public Ethics often take religious forms; however, the two including Public Theology deal with issues that are understood to be social and public in nature. Much as that is the case, Public Theology takes its point of departure from the context of particular faith traditions and communities in ways that are not identical with all forms of Public and Social Ethics. While some aspects of Public and Social Ethics may be religious, not all are. Public Theology starts with theology and moves to ethics. It interprets the actions of persons, and their social, political and economic, familial, and other institutions in the light of theology. Public Theology is descriptive, evaluative and normative with respect to the broader culture and society, as well as their institutions, in ways that Social and Public Ethics often are not (2003:61).

#### **5.2.4 Reflections on similarities and differences between Public Theologies and the aforementioned expressions of theology**

Similarities and differences that are discussed above are further reflected on.

The forms of theology discussed above do share certain similarities with Public Theologies. On the other hand, they differ from one another. While proponents of Public Theologies tend to emphasize distinctions between Public Theologies and these related forms/terms, others discuss Public Theologies in a manner that accentuates parallels and may simply equate one or more of them, either explicitly or implicitly, with Public Theologies.

Breitenberg (2003:62) writes:

If public theology is nothing more than another form of civil or public religion, whose primary or sole purpose is to give religious legitimacy, support, and sanction to the civil government, dominant culture, or prevailing economic system – or if public theology is simply another name for political theology – then theological critiques that are valid for civil or public religion and political theology would also hold true, without qualification, for public theology. However, if public theology, civil or public religion, and political theology, as well as public philosophy and social or public ethics, properly refer to different things, as I think they do, then both supporters and critics of public theology ought to attend more closely to distinctions among these terms.

A Christian Public Theology is most closely related to Christian Public or Social Ethics than it is to the other terms, but differs from Public or Social Ethics in its sources of insight, intended goals, audience, and methods of argumentation:

...some forms of public theology diverge from public and social ethics in their interpretations of and guidance from institutions, circumstances, events, and practices of the larger society and the normative and evaluative roles they pursue with respect to beliefs, claims, and practices (Breitenberg, 2003:62).

### 5.2.5 Suggested definition(s) of Public Theologies

At this point, the discussion turns to definitions of Public Theologies and to the functions of Public Theologians.

#### *Description of Public Theologies*<sup>123</sup>

Stackhouse<sup>124</sup> (1996:167) notes that, although it remains in dispute, the term “Public Theology”, is becoming progressively more popular, particularly, among those concerned about the ethical

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<sup>123</sup> Robert Benne, in his book, *The Paradoxical Vision: A Public Theology for the Twenty-first Century*, writes that Public Theology can refer to a very specific intellectual task, or it can mean something broader (Benne 1995:3). Public Theology as a very specific intellectual task is captured by David Tracy’s understanding of Public Theology as an effort to identify the common criteria of truth that theology might share with other disciplines, common criteria that then would give credibility to theology’s truth claims in the search for public truth (Tracy, David 1981. *The Analogical Imagination*. New York: Crossroad; Tracy, David 1981. “Defending the public character of Theology”. *Christian Century*, 98:350-56; Tracy, David 1987. *Plurality and Ambiguity*. San Francisco: Harper and Row). On the other hand, the broader understanding of Public Theology is captured by Thiemann (1991:21). He claims that, “Public theology is faith seeking to understand the relation between Christian convictions and the broader social and cultural context in which the Christian community lives” (Thiemann, Ronald F. 1991. *Constructing a Public Theology: The Church in a Pluralistic Culture*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press).



fabric of present-day life. Moltmann asserts that Public Theology deals with the public relevance of that theology, which has a concern at its core of its Christian identity for the coming of the Kingdom of God in the public world of human identity. In his words, “It gets involved in the public affairs of the society. It thinks of what is of general concern in the light of the hope in Christ for the kingdom of God...” (Moltmann, 1999:1).

For Forrester (2000:127-128), a Public Theology:

...offers convictions, challenges and insights derived from the tradition of which it is a steward, rather than seeking to articulate a consensus or reiterate what everyone is saying anyway. Public theology is thus confessional and evangelical. It has a gospel to share, good news to proclaim. Public theology attends to the Bible and the tradition of faith at the same time as it attempts to discern the signs of the times and understand what is going on in the light of the gospel.

A few years later, Forrester (2004:6) writes that a Public Theology:

...is not primarily concerned with individual subjectivity, or with the internal discourses of the church about doctrine and its clarification... [It is] not primarily and directly evangelical theology which addresses the gospel to the world in the hope of repentance and conversion... it is a theology which seeks the welfare of city before protecting the interests of the church, or its proper liberty to preach the Gospel and celebrate the sacraments... public theology often takes ‘the world’s agenda’, or part of it, as its own agenda, and seeks to offer distinctive and constructive insights from the treasury of faith to help in the building of a decent society, the restraint of evil, the curbing of violence, nation building, and reconciliation in the public arena... It seeks to deploy theology in public debate, rather than a vague and optimistic idealism which tends to disintegrate in the face of radical evil.

According to Breitenberg (2003:66), Public Theology is:

...theologically informed public discourse about public issues, addressed to the church, synagogue, mosque, temple, or other religious body, as well as the larger public or publics, argued in ways that can be evaluated and judged by publicly available warrants and criteria.

He notes further that, as far as the Christian tradition is concerned, Public Theology intends to:

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<sup>124</sup> Stackhouse (1987: xi) offers a similar broader definition of Public Theology. He states that Public Theology can be called “public” for two reasons: “First, because that which we as Christians believe is not esoteric, privileged, irrational, or inaccessible. It is something that we believe to be both comprehensible and indispensable for all, something that we can reasonably discuss with Hindus and Buddhists, Jews and Muslims, Humanists and Marxists. Second, such a theology will give guidance to the structures and policies of public life. It is ethical in nature (Stackhouse, Max. 1987. *Public theology and Political Economy*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans).

...provide theologically informed interpretations of and guidance for individuals, faith communities, and the institutions and interactions of civil society, in ways that are understandable, assessable, and possibly convincing to those inside the church and those outside as well (Breitenberg 2003:66).

Breitenberg (2003:65) argues that, regardless of the fact that there are differences in definition and evaluation of Public Theology, there is a harmony with the thinking that Public Theology "...lies in the intersection of theology and ethics." Within the literature devoted to Public Theology, especially those that are not unambiguously opposed to it, there is a wide-ranging agreement that supports the following sketch:

- It is a religiously informed discourse that intends to be understandable and credible to supporters within its own religious tradition while, at the same time, being logical and, possibly, persuasive to those outside.
- It speaks to concerns that bear upon a religious community but also relates to the larger society including those who classify themselves with other faith traditions or with none.
- It relies on insight, language, methods of argument, and warrants that are, in theory, open to all.

A Public Theologian would, therefore, be one who comes from the perspective of a particular faith and:

...analyzes, discusses, or proposes solutions for issues, conditions, and questions that are of concern and import to those within his or her religious tradition, as well as the general public, and does so with ways that can be understood and evaluated by, and possibly be persuasive to, society at large (Breitenberg, 2003:66).

This means that a Public Theologian would seek to communicate, by means that are comprehensible to all and assessable to all, how Christian beliefs and practices bear, both descriptively and prescriptively, on public life and the common good and, in so doing, possibly, influence and move to action both Christians and non-Christians (Breitenberg, 2003:66).

### ***What Public Theology is not***

Breitenberg (2003:66) writes that:

...public theology stands in contrast to those exclusively confessional theologies that do not intentionally and explicitly seek to provide interpretations of and guidance for society's public sectors, institutions, and interactions, as a primary end of the church, as well as theologians who regard sources of insight outside the Christian tradition as either alien or unreliable, and reject the

notion that the public and social import of the Christian faith can be communicated to the larger society through some sort of universal or trans-communal language. Proponents of these positions often distinguish their own work from the theology of others, with whom they disagree on these very points. That is, some opponents of public theology contrast their own work with efforts by those who try to give explicit guidance to society's various public sectors, ostensibly from within the Christian tradition, and inform their theological ethics with sources of insight that are not specifically or distinctively Christian, or attempt to communicate from the Christian community to the wider culture through languages and forms of discourse that can be understood by those outside of, and thus not formed within and by, the Christian tradition.

From Breitenberg's observations above, a Public Theology is not an exclusively confessional theology. Confessional Theologies tend, by and large, not to see the provision of interpretation of, and guidance to the public, the primary end of the church. Secondly, it is notable that, generally, Confessional Theologies tend to regard sources of insight outside of the Christian tradition as either alien or unreliable.

As earlier observed, Public Theologies accept the view that the public and social significance of the Christian faith can be communicated to the larger society through some sort of common or trans-communal language. Public Theologies try to give unambiguous guidance to society's various publics, largely, from within the Christian tradition. They also inform its theological ethics with sources of insight, which are not specific or uniquely Christian. It is also notable that Public Theologies attempt to communicate from the Christian community to the wider culture through languages and other forms of exchange of ideas, which can be understood by those outside of it.

### ***Description of the task of Public Theologians***

According to Breitenberg (2003:67), those who do Public Theology do some or all of the following:<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Cady's (1991:119) view gives Public Theology more of a social-critical thrust. She claims that a Public theologian seeks to "sustain, interpret, critique, and reform a particular religious world-view and its concomitant way of life ... [and] contribute to the upbuilding and the critical transformation of our public life (Cady, Linell E. 1991. "The Task of Public Theology," in Ronald F. Thiemann (ed). *The Legacy of H. Richard Niebhur*. Minneapolis: Fortress).

- They employ resources of insight that are not explicitly or distinctively Christian – although, to various extents, these combine with, specifically, Christian sources of insight.
- They do so in order to give interpretations of and guidance to society’s various sectors, institutions, and interactions, and possibly to evaluate between religious beliefs and practices as they bear on matters of public concern.
- They provide such interpretations and guidance in ways that would be intelligible and potentially persuasive to those inside and outside the institutional churches.

Furthermore:

What distinguishes those engaged in public theology is that they claim to use distinctively Christian sources of insight in dialogue with ones that are in principle available to non-Christians, and that they do so in part to address issues, institutions, and interactions that are of importance to society and its various sectors, through forms of discourse they intend to be, in theory and practice, intelligible and possibly persuasive to most members of society (Breitenberg, 2003:67).

For Stackhouse (1996:168), a Public Theology as employs or engages philosophy and science, ethics and the analysis of social life, “...to find out what kinds of faith enhance life and which lead to contempt for all that is holy, incoherence, injustice, or poverty and want.” Public Theology appears necessary in the present-day world:

...for it reclaims the apologetic emphasis at a time when much of theology is dogmatic, and much of philosophy and science, as well as much of political ethics and socioeconomic theory, has simply presumed that theology represents the polemics of groups claiming revelatory validity of insights that are incomprehensible by others or are nothing but the by-product of other, more real, cultural or social conditions (Stackhouse, 1996:168).

### **5.3 The Main Pillars of Public Theologies**

This section will explore the main pillars or sources of Public Theologies, which are the touchstones of authority for Public Theologies.<sup>126</sup> The main pillars are Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience.

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<sup>126</sup> The thoughts of Max Stackhouse in his *Public Theology and Political Economy* (1987:4-15), is corroborated by McGrath (1994:151-200) in his *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (McGrath, Alister E 1994). McGrath writes that Christian theology, like most disciplines, draws from a number of sources. He might not have had public

Stackhouse (1987:4-15) proposes what he calls the four touchstones or the quadrilateral touchstones of authority to which a Public Theology turns (i.e. Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience). They offer guidelines on whether one's particular orientations are "in the ballpark":

Public theology turns to this quadrilateral... They serve, so to speak, as four boundaries of the playing field of public theological discussion. They are not God, the final authority, but they point to God's limits. They offer guidelines that show us when we are most likely to be speaking about God, and when we are out of bounds and worshipping the artifacts of our own imaginations. They do not prescribe how each person or each community of faith must play the game. Different persons and different communities will play out their religious, philosophical, and social styles differently, within various kinds of coaching in different circumstances (Stackhouse, 1987:5).

With Stackhouse's reflection above in mind, an investigation of these four criteria as they might apply to Public Theologies will follow.

### 5.3.1 Scripture

The first major resource to Public Theologies is Scripture.<sup>127</sup> Stackhouse notes that the Holy Bible is universally accepted as a source and a norm of faith in Christianity, just as the Pali Canon is to the Theravada Buddhists and the Koran to the Muslims. Further, in and behind the large number of present and past, disorganized, undoubtedly pluralistic witnesses that are contained in the Scripture, time and again, "written under all sorts of historical conditions and at the hands of a variety of authors and redactors now lost in legend, the inspiration of that which is truly holy may be found". A Public Theology has to "... discover and articulate... in new ways,

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theology in mind when he wrote the sixth chapter of his book, but the chapter provides an assessment of the potential of Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience for constructive theology. He believes that each of these sources has a distinct contribution to make within the discipline of theology.

<sup>127</sup> McGrath (1994:163) notes that the term "Bible" and "Scripture" along with other adjectives such as "biblical" and "scriptural" are, virtually, interchangeable. These two terms designate a body of texts, which are recognized as authoritative for Christian thinking, although the nature and extent of that authority is a matter of debate. The Bible is not merely the object of formal academic study within Christianity; it is also a subject of meditation and devotion on the part of individual Christians.

scriptural themes that are simultaneously congruent with the development of normative scriptures, pertinent to our context, and open to further refinement or elaboration in the future, just as the Word of Scripture has been”. A Public Theology, therefore, uses Scripture in an apologetic way, making “...the case ever anew that an appeal to Scripture is able both to be congruent with the ancient writings and to provide the foundations for public discourse and action in the face of contemporary realities”<sup>128</sup> (Stackhouse, 1987:5-7).

Having considered Scripture as a resource to a Public Theology, we may now turn to a consideration of the role of tradition.

### 5.3.2 Tradition

The second major resource to Public Theologies is tradition. McGrath (1994:188) understands tradition<sup>129</sup> as an active process of reflection by which theological or spiritual insights are valued,

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<sup>128</sup> McGrath (1994:165) points out that the issue that remains of real theological significance concerns the canon of Scripture. He poses the question: Does the fact that the church drew up the canon imply that the church has authority over Scripture? His second question is: Did the church merely recognize and give formal assent to an authority, which the canonical Scriptures already had? His response is that, in practice, there has been increased recognition that the community of faith and Scripture, the people and the book, coexist with one another, and attempts to draw sharp lines of distinction between them are somewhat arbitrary. He observes that the canon of Scripture may be regarded as emerging organically from a community of faith committed to using and respecting it.

<sup>129</sup> McGrath (1994:188-191) identifies three broad approaches to tradition within Christian theology namely the single-source theory, the dual-source theory, and the total rejection of tradition. In the first approach (single source theory), the early church, in response to controversies from Gnosticism, began to develop a “traditional” method of understanding passages of Scripture. In the second century, Scripture could not be interpreted arbitrarily, but within the context of the historical continuity of the Christian church. “Tradition” here means a traditional way of interpreting Scripture within the community of faith... that theology is based upon Scripture, and “tradition” refers to a traditional way of interpreting scripture. As far as the second approach (a dual-source theory of tradition) is concerned, a different understanding of tradition developed. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, “tradition” was understood to be a separate and distinct source of revelation, in addition, to Scripture. It was argued that Scripture was silent on a number of points, but God had providentially arranged for a second source of revelation to supplement this deficiency - a stream of unwritten tradition, going back to the apostles, and passed down within the church. The third approach (the total rejection of tradition) is a radical one. In the sixteenth century, some

assessed, and transmitted from one generation to another, and not, merely, something that is handed down. Besides, Stackhouse (1987:7-10) argues that when tradition is accepted as a valid criterion in a Public Theology, the case for the contributions of forebears has to be made anew in each generation. However, tradition should be interpreted through the prisms of Scripture, reason and experience to avoid the danger of glorifying some golden age. In tradition, one finds multiple efforts to spell out the criteria for: (i) Distinguishing between justifiable and unjustifiable uses of coercive power in society; (ii) Living with moral integrity in economically and technologically complex civilizations; (iii) The structures of authority for responsible leadership in multiple contexts, and (iv) Developing the basic principles of human rights and of viable economic systems.

Tradition, as the dynamic story of the connection between Scripture and successive encounters with complexities of civilization, is indispensable for our understanding of both the past and the present.

### **5.3.3 Reason**

The third major resource to Public Theologies is human reason. Although the importance of reason for Christian theology has always been recognized, McGrath (1994:182) is of the view that reason assumed special importance at the time of the Enlightenment.<sup>130</sup> However,

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theologians proposed a view that every individual had the right to interpret Scripture as s/he pleased, subject to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It was the Enlightenment that represented a radical rejection of tradition, with claims that reason required no supplement by voices from the past.

<sup>130</sup> The term “Enlightenment”, as McGrath (1994:78) notes, passed into general circulation only in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, and that the term, “Age of Reason”, is often used as a synonym for Enlightenment. He argues that such assumption is misleading because it implies that reason had been ignored and marginalized before, yet the Middle Ages was just as much an “Age of Reason”. The difference lay in the manner reason was used, and the limits, which appeared to be imposed on it. Further, although the Enlightenment was not consistently rational in every aspect, an emphasis upon the ability of human reason to penetrate the mysteries of the world is rightly regarded as a defining characteristic of the Enlightenment.

Stackhouse notes that the claims of faith have to make sense across numerous boundaries – confessional, cultural, sexual, racial, linguistic, ideological. One has to speak of theological claims in a manner, which is coherent, consistent and compelling to the cosmopolitan dimensions of the human mind. He adds that in a society where ignorance of Scripture and tradition is common and, at times when Scripture and traditions must encounter one another, “reason” is an indispensable criterion of public discourse about the most important questions.<sup>131</sup> Public Theology has to be open to free thinking, doubt and critical thought. It has to draw on and include insights from non-theological sciences, giving convincing reasons that are comprehensible, and making psychological, economic, political, social, metaphysical and moral sense (Stackhouse, 1987:10-13).

Having considered Scripture, tradition, and reason as Public Theological resources, a discussion of the contribution of the fourth and final resource to Public Theologies, i.e. experience, will follow.

### 5.3.4 Experience

McGrath (1994:192) understands experience as “that which arises out of traveling through life... or accumulated body of knowledge, arising through firsthand encounter with life”. However, the term has acquired more meaning, and has come to refer to “the inner life of individuals, in which those individuals become aware of their own subjective feelings and emotions”. He notes that

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<sup>131</sup> Since human beings are rational, it is to be expected that reason should have a major role to play in Public Theology. However, there is considerable debate within Christian theology concerning what that role might be (McGrath, 1994:182-3). There are three broad categories of positions. The one position sees *theology as a rational discipline*. This position assumes that the Christian faith is fundamentally rational and can be supported and explored by reason. The second position sees *theology as the re-publication of the insights of reason*. This position sees reason as being capable of establishing what is right without needing any assistance from revelation. The third position sees *theology as redundant, and reason reigns supreme*. This position argues that since Christianity does include a series of major beliefs, which are inconsistent with reason, reason has the right to judge religion, in that it stands above it.



Christianity is not about ideas (as the discussion on Scripture, tradition, and reason may suggest), “...it is about the interpretation and transformation of the inner life of the individual”.

Similarly, Stackhouse describes experience as that which has to do with emotion and feeling and with that kind of knowledge that is directly built up through doing something. Such experience is that of creativity, construction and the overcoming of destruction and decay. Consequently, any viable Public Theology will have to touch the resonances of what people already know by experience<sup>132</sup> (Stackhouse, 1987:13-15).

So far, the chapter has provided a brief exploration of the resources available to Public Theologies, and some of the debates concerning their potential and limitations. Stackhouse sums up his thoughts on the pillars (marks or warrants) mentioned above by showing that Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, in constant interface, remain the channels for the reconstruction of a Public Theology. They require of each generation a fresh articulation of what these imply for the problems of the era (Stackhouse, 1987:17).

In a nutshell, then, Public Theologies see the four resources, viz. Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, as their foundation. Public Theologies use Scripture to make the case, which provides for the foundation of public discourse and action in the face of contemporary reality. Secondly, Public Theologies see tradition as that dynamic story, which brings a connection between Scripture and successive encounters with civilizations, and is indispensable for its understanding of both the past and the present. Thirdly, Public Theologies draw from insights

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<sup>132</sup> Two main approaches to the question of the relation of experience to theology could be discerned within Christian theology (McGrath, 1994:194). The one approach advanced the view that experience provides a foundational resource for Christian theology, while the other advances the view that Christian theology provides an interpretive framework within which human experience may be interpreted. The first view suggests that Christian theology is concerned with human experience – something, which is common to all humanity. It suggests that, basically, all the world religions are human responses to the same religious experience. It, therefore, follows that theology is the Christian attempt to reflect upon this common human experience, in the knowledge that the same experience underlies the other world religions. The second view suggests that Christian theology provides a framework within which the ambiguities of experience may be interpreted. Theology aims to interpret experience, and experience is seen as something, which is to be interpreted, and not that which is itself capable of interpreting.

and sciences, which are non-theological, in order to give reasons, which are convincing and comprehensible, and make psychological, economic, political, and moral sense. Lastly, Public Theologies have to touch the resonance of what people already know by experience.

The next section will be an exploration of the decisive themes in a Public Theology, which exemplify the kinds of motifs that are indispensable to overcoming the theological malaise of modernity (Stackhouse, 1987:17).

## 5.4 The Principles of Public Theologies

In this section, some of the principles of Public Theology as advanced by Stackhouse (1987:17-34, 36-50) are mentioned and briefly analyzed. Stackhouse is of the view that a Christian Public Theology is guided, not only by touchstones of authority or sources (see discussion on 5.3 above), but also by specific themes (principles) that are thought to be indispensable to a Christian witness in the world. Some of the principles include Creation and Liberation;<sup>133</sup> Vocation and

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<sup>133</sup> **Creation:** Even though most communities and religions would believe in a Creator God on whom the world depends, such view has been challenged by modern science since the time of Charles Darwin. Stackhouse (1987:18-19) argues that the rise of Christian fundamentalism has been one of the more remarkable developments of the twentieth century religion. Christian fundamentalism argues for creationism, a view that God created the world and all forms of life at a given moment of time. The primary target of Christian fundamentalism has been the Darwinian views of evolution (biological, cosmological, and social). However, Stackhouse submits that the fundamentalists are unable to articulate their perspective in a coherent way, are wrong about the scientific evidence, and in their insistence that the data must be forced into patterns that accord with their particular interpretation of Scripture. They are also wrong in trying to get laws passed that will allow the propagation of sectarian views in public schools. Yet the fundamentalists have recognized something, which is, theologically, of fundamental importance beyond the issue of how science is taught in public schools.

Stackhouse (1987:21) observes that without a Public Theology:

...that places the results of modern biological, cosmological, and a social science in the most comprehensive context of the mystery of God's creativity, we lack the intellectual, spiritual, and moral resources to deal with the explosion of arrogant exploitations of the earth. In this case, science is likely to become less and less a quest for truth and more a handmaiden of techniques for manipulation, available on demand to the highest bidder and subject only to the constraints of human imagination.

Humanity's competence to fiddle with and alter the world to its desires through technology should be guarded by a wider and deeper kind of understanding, which puts science and technology in a more ultimate context.

Covenant;<sup>134</sup> Moral Law, Sin, and Religious Freedom;<sup>135</sup> Ecclesiology and Trinity;<sup>136</sup> and Christology.<sup>137</sup> Stackhouse has selected these themes because it is assumed that they illustrate

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**Liberation:** On a discussion of liberation as a theme indispensable to any Christian witness, Stackhouse (1987:21-22) notes that just as creationism forms one extreme, liberationism forms the other contemporary extreme. He notes that liberationism's basic question is whether humans can find fulfillment by social change, to which they answer with a "yes" on the basis that oppressed peoples are inspired by the Spirit of God to resist the principalities and powers of domination, and discover new possibilities of autonomy, freedom, community, and human fulfillment. This is based on the view that God is biased in favour of the oppressed, and true pious living involves active social engagement. Liberationists, Stackhouse observes, do know that much of science, philosophy, and religion is an ideological construction designed to protect the interests of the powerful against the weak. They see that every ideology, regime, program, or plan that pretends to provide salvation for human life is false, if it does not change the pretence of the arrogant and open horizons of hope to those who suffer.

Furthermore, Stackhouse (1987:22) observes that liberationists have often made the case for their position much better than the fundamentalists, and that is why it is often treated as an "ideology" rather than theology. They affirm their perspective on historical movement and social change towards "the Kingdom" dogmatically and selectively use Scripture in a proof-texting manner<sup>133</sup>. They frequently draw from Marxist forms of social analysis, which not only distort the accurate understanding of the causes of oppression, but also lean towards the romantic view that enforced dispossession purifies insight by unmasking every illusion. They seldom enquire about what constructive patterns of political and economic life are required to structure complex modern societies, but stress protest and use of violence against present patterns of life and to bring change. Such limitations of contemporary liberationism prevent many would-be allies and supporters of its valid insights from taking it as seriously as its advocates would like. However, any philosophy, social science, or religious orientation, which does not have a passion for social justice, is fundamentally inadequate from the perspective of Public Theology. Stackhouse (1987:24) correctly affirms that such valid insights should be placed in a larger context of theological and social understanding: The greatest allies of liberation movement may not be those who uncritically establish solidarity with them, but those who critically and carefully attempt to marshal the philosophical, sociological, politico-economic, and theological resources to put the movement's valid insights in a more sustainable and less ideological context.

<sup>134</sup> **Vocation:** Vocation rests on the view that God as the creator, who demands social engagement for justice, has a purpose for individuals and groups. The idea that God has placed each person in the world for a purpose and that the person is called to serve the whole of life in the economy of God is a profound and penetrating insight. Vocation implies that the chief end of peoples' lives is to serve God through the actualization of the purposes for which they were created. Whatever they do in any aspect of their lives, especially in their work, they are not on their own. They belong to a reality, which is greater than them (Stackhouse 1987:24). Such a view has direct implications for public life. Those who are in positions of authority cannot lord it over others, because they are fundamentally in the service of purposes beyond their own. The concept of vocation not only relates to personal lives, it has direct meaning for a

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multiplicity of public institutions as well. Each sector of the common life is called by God to define, obey, and enhance the specific values and purposes, which are proper to it (Stackhouse, 1987:25-26).

**Covenant:** Very closely related to vocation, is the fourth theme that is indispensable for a public theology namely covenant. Covenant responds to the question of how humans are to form communities of mutual responsibility as they live out their vocations (Stackhouse, 1987:26). Stackhouse is of the view that people need one another to be whole, while persons in community require a shared framework of common moral obligations, which provide the principles by which to structure such relationships. In the biblical tradition, covenant is understood as a gift of God, which bonds the human will to God's justice and to the neighbor in structures of mutual accountability.

Further, Stackhouse (1987:27) indicates that covenant recognizes the need for different levels of accountability in social relationships. He claims that, "It has structures of authority, but it calls leadership to regard, serve, and care for those in lower positions. Covenant also recognizes the role of voluntary choice and human agreement, but it sees the basic terms within which viable agreements are made as set by a higher law..." Covenant holds that God sets forth terms and limits for humanity, and whatever authority each has and, however, they exercise their wills, they are to be subject to these terms. Covenant is the community-ordering side of vocation (Stackhouse, 1987:27).

<sup>135</sup> **Moral Law:** A Public Theology will hold that there are universally valid moral laws rooted in God. The idea that there is a law of God is a deep and profound insight that has nearly been lost in modern times. This could be because some interpretations of God's law have become so petty, legalistic, and self-righteous. Moral law, however, seeks to answer the question, "Is there right and wrong?" (Stackhouse, 1987:27-28). Moral laws are ethically valid whether or not they are observed in particular societies. These laws are the basis for changing laws and rules when they are unjust. Stackhouse (1987:28) notes that it is morally wrong to murder, rape, steal, torture, oppress, and enslave, whatever the cultural mores, the sociopolitical ideology, or the social needs of a given region, culture, community, or time.

A portion of the Roman Catholic tradition and a large segment of Protestantism including a number of non-Christian religions hold the view that there is a higher moral law, which may be known in some measure by human reason without special revelation. This is called "natural law". The term may be confusing because of the manner present understanding of "nature" has been altered by modern science. However, the point is integral to Public Theology. Public Theology acknowledges insights from philosophy, the natural and social sciences, and jurisprudence by incorporating them, thereby, remaining constantly engaged in a broad interdisciplinary dialogue (Stackhouse, 1987:28). The first question about moral law in Public Theology is not whether one knows what positive statements to make about what ought to be done at every point. The first question is whether one holds that there is a moral order in the universe, which one can discover through dialogue and reflection (Stackhouse 1987:28-29).

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**Sin:** The sixth pertinent theme to a Public Theology is sin. Even when God is sovereign over creation and history, and humans have a vocation to serve, to covenant together in community, and to obey the moral law, it is also the case that humanity encounters distortion, brokenness, corruption, and failure within self and every socio-historical context. One can find social movements and tendencies within the self, which are hell-bent on destruction. When one asks, “why?”, sin is the generic answer (Stackhouse, 1987:29). However, sin would be impossible without the seventh theme, freedom.

**Freedom:** Human freedom is the answer to the question of how sin entered the world if God created it. A Public Theology will acknowledge that freedom, as a gift of God, is a mark of being genuinely human and the occasion for licentiousness and betrayal. If God had ordered the universe in such a way that perfect harmony would be the result, that would entail the denial of choice (Stackhouse, 1987:29).

A Public Theology marks the delicate relationship of freedom and sin by making a sharp distinction between sin and crime. Not all that is sinful should be seen as crime. Public authorities are not competent to evaluate a wide range of sins, and governments should exercise great restraint at this point. The only government deemed fit by a Public Theology will be a limited government. A Public Theology will resist any clerical expert on creation, liberation or moral law, who would attempt to effect total control of culture, social, political or economic life. Alternatively, a Public Theology will always work indirectly by attempting to persuade people to exercise their cultural, social, political, and economic freedom, responsibly, through pluralistic institutions, allowing governments to constrict those public behaviors, which are a clear threat to human rights or the common good (Stackhouse, 1987:30).

<sup>136</sup> **Ecclesiology:** Is it possible for those who realize that they are sinners, and are constantly tempted to use their freedom in destructive ways (even when they know something about the liberating God, who calls all humanity to vocation and covenant under a moral law) to reorganize their lives and forward their views in the public domain? Stackhouse (1987:30-31) reckons that a focus on ecclesiology demands the institutional separation of church and state, and the concurrent claim of the right of religious groups to propagate their views on public affairs among the members of the public. On the matter of the separation of church and state, Stackhouse explains that such separation should not be understood to mean the segregation of theology from public life and from such attempts as guiding political and economic life through persuasion, preaching, and teaching. He indicates that such separation makes it “... possible to form non established groups who will selectively embrace or repudiate the structures, tendencies, programs, values, and actions of public figures and institutions”. Of importance is the confidence in persuasion in a way of witnessing and giving testimony to what is believed to demand reasonable discourse and warranted authority, with the knowledge that those who are not persuaded need not be compelled to join. In this sense, ecclesiology presumes that non-coercive communities of discourse are the core communities of civilization. Persuasion, however, is not all discursive and conceptual because much of it is aesthetic and symbolic. The “formation of an ecclesial

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group would then require the development of liturgical, ritual, and graceful forms of shared experiences” (Stackhouse, 1987:31-32). In many traditions, religion is essentially about symbolic actions rightfully performed. A Public Theology attends to sacramental sensibilities and critically evaluates their capacity to inform the common life (Stackhouse, 1987:32).

**Trinity:** *Trinity* is the ninth key motif in a Public Theology. The doctrine of the Trinity establishes that both the inner life of God, and the ways in which He relates to the world involve plurality and unity. The doctrine of the Trinity conceives of the ultimate reality in terms of a “coherent, integrated diversity” as opposed to every monolithic view of reality and, in contrast to, polytheism. The doctrine of the Trinity also recognizes that, at certain points, a secondary dualism has to be recognized, as seen in the doctrine of the two natures of Christ. The point is that “... a radical appreciation of transcendence and a radical appreciation of the human are both true but are not the same, and neither may be reduced to the other (Stackhouse, 1987:32-33)”.

<sup>137</sup> The *tenth* indispensable theme to a Christian Public Theology is Christology. Stackhouse (1987:37-38, 40-41) believes that the most significant distinct dynamic, which transformed modern theological attitudes towards the political economy, was the evangelical drive in opposition to slavery. The social debates during the period of the battle against slavery “... focused on the questions of property, work, and wealth as matters of Christian stewardship and outward manifestations of obedience to Christ”. A troubling question was posed; “Can Christians hold other people in slavery as property, and can a public policy that allows this be allowed to survive?” From 1840, revival meetings were held in several cities in the USA such as Boston and Iowa. The preaching in these meetings included sermons against slavery and the individualistic doctrines of property, which enslaved human souls. Slavery, under the combined pressure of Christian business influence, the populist evangelical zeal, and the internal pressure from the slave community itself, became legally abolished.

Between 1860 and 1890, the urban population in the West quadrupled, while the rural population only doubled. The industrial city took supreme command, which meant the emergence of factories, technology, trade, commerce, corporations, and labour and service industries. Parallel to these changes was also a change in theory. The very laws of nature seemed to endorse the notion of “survival for the fittest.” However, scattered sermons, periodical essays, and whole journals began to wrestle with these issues. Their basic argument was that the true meaning of Jesus was to be found in his purpose for the church, and the purpose for the church was the improvement of social morality (Stackhouse, 1987:41-42).

Stackhouse (1987:49ff) reports that, from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present, class analysis has been a common feature of Christian writings. One encounters arguments to the effect that God has special concern for the poor and downtrodden. He writes:

key elements for a coherent theological vision for the renewal of public life in complex modern civilizations. These themes are based in Scripture, rooted in tradition, marked by reason, and informed by experience.

More principles can be identified. However, those suggested by Stackhouse are deemed important and comprehensive in this study.

The doctrine of the Trinity is indispensable to the formation of a viable Public Theology<sup>138</sup>. Stackhouse (1987:33) notes that those churches, which are ecumenically oriented, are best suited to nurture and propagate a Public Theology. These churches would have to make the case for what they believe by carrying their message to the people – person-by-person, and group-by-

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If people are poor and suffering, something is wrong either with them or with the social system that oppresses them. Something has to change so that they can become a part of the rather broadly construed middle class. Sometimes this means personal conversion or reform, and sometimes it means sustained and sacrificial charity, and sometimes it means social transformation and reform (1987:49).

Furthermore, the nineteenth and twentieth century thinkers would have agreed with the slogan of liberation theology – “God is in the side of the oppressed” – because these thinkers presupposed that everyone should be enabled to join the middle classes. Stackhouse argues that:

...if people are so rich that they are no longer subject to the vicissitudes of life that daily affect their neighbors, if they are isolated from the needs of common humanity, and if they utilize their wealth to distort the structures of common life for private ends, something is wrong either with them or with the structures of the social system that allows such uncontrolled special privilege (1987: 49-50).

<sup>138</sup> In his inaugural address, Koopman notes that, “Trinitarian faith establishes, confirms and actualises a life of dignity for all in all walks of life... Trinitarian faith facilitates a constructive engagement with suffering... Trinitarian faith enhances the construction of a comprehensive public ethic that entails a vision of the good society of worth and dignity and the fulfilment of that vision through people of public virtue and character who make and live out good choices and policies... Trinitarian faith paves the way for the construction of an anthropology of rationality, vulnerability and interdependence that fosters the actualization of dignity in all walks of life, amongst others, through the building of a human rights culture... and Trinitarian faith through the church in its various forms and with its various partnerships, engages with public life in a prophetic manner, which includes envisioning, criticism, story-telling, technical analysis of public challenges, policy making and also formation of public opinion...” Koopman further observes that in the development of a richer understanding of the significance of a Trinitarian faith for the actualization of dignity in public life, “the doctrines of Christ, of the Spirit and of God are all full of potential” (Koopman, 2009:7).

group. As they do so, they should be aware that they will have to undertake the risk that the message may be modified as it is filtered through the conscience of the people in reasonable dialogue and as it encounters the inevitable demands of complex life of civilization. This is to say that the ecumenical perspectives on a Public Theology must constantly take as its starting point, key orthodox motifs from Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.

Stackhouse (1987:33) explains that:

This will involve the willingness to join and meet all the objections, resistance, and oppositions that one can possibly imagine from a generation that is religiously confused, philosophically undernourished, socially divided, and theologically illiterate. A public theology has to make its case in an open market of ideas among the people, and to develop these patterns of sacramental actions by which the truth and justice of God are symbolized in community.

In his book, *The Spirit in Public Theology: Appropriating the Legacy of Abraham Kuyper*, Vincent E. Bacote<sup>139</sup> advances the view that a fully Trinitarian theology requires that the work of the Holy Spirit be distinguished in all areas, not just in the area of soteriology. He notes that the non-redemptive work of the Holy Spirit in creation is important and requires theological reflection, and that there is direct relationship between cosmic pneumatology and Public Theology (Bacote, 2005:11). Bacote links the Holy Spirit to the public square, showing the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the preserving power of common grace, as it is present in the providential dimensions of politics, science, and the mandate to be stewards of creation. He states that:

We must consider how to practice responsible stewardship of creation in an era of increasing complexity, even as globalization “shrinks” the planet. More fully aware of the Spirit’s work in creation, we must heed the Spirit’s impulse to “go public” in his power and to make fellow Christians aware that they too have been called to permeate every square inch of the world (Bacote, 2005:156).

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<sup>139</sup> Vincent E. Bacote is an assistant professor of theology at Wheaton College. He is also the president of the Christian Theological Research Fellowship and co-editor of *Evangelicals and Scripture*.



Another scholar, Miroslav Volf, adds his voice to the discussion of the role of the Spirit <sup>140</sup> in the public arena. He is of the view that public life should be so structured as to allow the free exercise of religion.

It is evident, however, that the themes discussed above constitute a Public Theological matrix of intellectual, ethical, and spiritual foci for stewardship, and are a group of themes of which Christians have to be stewards (Stackhouse, 1987:33). These nine themes constitute the “word” that the church is called to “...clarify, to celebrate, to refine, to defend, to propagate in public discourse, to incarnate in social and institutional life, and to contextualize amid the complexities of modern economical economies (Stackhouse, 1987:34). These themes do not only clarify and communicate something of the truth and justice of God, but they:

...drive all who begin to wrestle with the meaning of such themes into social analysis and social engagement... they simultaneously are normative and demand contextual encounter with life as it is... they have a component that connects particular social and historical possibilities within the realm of human affairs... They allow us to recognize where, in the plethora of thoughts, experiences, and behaviors, the traces of the transcendent may be found; and they invite us to build, by transformative action, new possibilities on these real if fragile foundations (Stackhouse, 1987:34).

The need for a Public Theology for the development of a vision of stewardship for modern life has been identified. Secondly, what have been set forth in this section of the research are the decisive touchstones of authority by which a Public Theology may be developed. Some of the indispensable themes to a Public Theology are outlined. It is also briefly shown that Christians began to develop a modern theology of economic life in the midst of rapid modernization and industrialization during the last half of the nineteenth century. Lastly, it is argued that Public Theology must be Trinitarian, Christo-centric, and ecclesial.

What now follows is an exploration of the major approaches to Public Theologies.

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<sup>140</sup> In his 2001 book, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*, Volf interprets ‘work’ in terms of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit by rejecting the traditional Protestant understanding of work as vocation, and he takes the concept of *charisma* as the cornerstone for his theological reflection on work. He denies that one is “called” to do a particular kind of work, irrespective of one’s inclination, and asserts, instead, that it is our privilege to do the kind of work for which God’s Spirit has gifted us. All human work done in accordance with the will of God, Volf argues, is cooperation with God in the preservation and transformation of the world.

## 5.5 Approaches to Public Theologies

This section will attempt an outline and appraisal of the major approaches to doing Public Theologies. The South African scholar and theologian, Nico Koopman identifies two American theologians, Max Stackhouse and Stanley Hauerwas as “good representatives of two distinctive approaches” to Public Theologies. Koopman refers to the approach represented by Max Stackhouse as “Public Theology through the church” and that represented by Hauerwas as “Public Theology in the church” (Koopman, 2004:4-15). In other words, some Public Theological discourses deal with the direct and explicit involvement of churches in public matters in all spheres of public life (5.5.1), whereas others deal with the practices of the local congregation that impact on public life (5.5.2).

On his part, the South African scholar and theologian, Ernest M. Conradie, writes, in his article, *“How Should a Public Way of Doing Theology Be Approached?”*, that the appeal for a public manner of doing theology, should be understood, mainly, against the background of the American experience of privatization in a pluralistic culture. That approach is articulated by USA theologians like Reinhold Niebuhr and John Courtney Murray and, in recent times, by Martin Marty, Robert Bellah, Max Stackhouse, Richard John Neuhaus, David Tracy and others (Conradie, 1993:24).

Moreover, that public way of doing theology exhibits several characteristics. According to Conradie, the call for a Public Theology considers that concrete issues disputed in the public spheres are a primary concern to theological agenda as well. Secondly, the call for a public way of doing theology includes a call for the cultivation of an authentic public life, which involves the creation of opportunities where sensitivity for public issues is developed and debated through open dialogue and persuasion. Thirdly, a Public Theology should be intelligible to a greater audience other than theologians and other academics (Conradie, 1993:29-31).

Conradie (1993:32) raises questions regarding the approach to a Public Theology. He inquires:

- How should the issues of public life be approached and what does it actually mean to defend the public status of theological truth claims?

- Which criteria come into play for a public defense of theological truth claims and to whom are these criteria identified?

In an attempt to respond to the above questions, two approaches to doing a Public Theology have been proposed. According to Conradie (1993:23), these two approaches could be identified with reference to what he calls the Chicago and Yale schools of theology, each of which is represented by David Tracy and George Lindbeck, respectively. A discussion of the two proposed approaches to Public Theologies will be attempted below.

### **5.5.1 Public Theologies and the direct public involvement of churches**

As stated above, the one approach to Public Theology is what Koopman refers to as “Public Theology *through* the church”.

In *The Paradoxical Vision: A Public Theology for the Twenty-first Century*, Robert Benne notes that there are two different kinds of direct public approach. These two approaches to doing a Public Theology do diverge on the issue of means. He calls the first kind “Articulating Corporate Conscience”, and, the other, “Exercising Power”:

The first, which we have called “Articulating Corporate Conscience,” works through persuasion, initially with its own members but also with regard to the public sectors of society. The second, far more controversial, is designated “Exercising Power” and uses more coercive means to achieve its ends among its adherents and in society (Benne, 1995:201).

The above statement implies that the first kind of direct approach to doing Public Theology involves direct and intentional influence, while the second kind involves direct and intentional action.

#### ***The direct and intentional influence***

The direct and intentional influence approach entails the articulation of corporate conscience. A typical example is the social statements by the Church through, for example, pastoral letters. Benne (1995:202) illustrates this with the pastoral letters of the American Catholic bishops:

Of particular note have been their letters on the ethics of nuclear deterrence and on the American economy. Both set off a spate of public debate about the arguments they presented. These letters are excellent illustrations of theology becoming public. And in these instances the theology is articulated formally by the church and is addressed directly to society as well as to its own members.

The production of such social statements is a very common way that Churches use to influence the public sphere. On a general note, many major Church conferences have made some social pronouncements, which are meant to address the secular authorities on particular issues.<sup>141</sup>

Koopman writes that the:

...Chicago school... recognizes the fact that the fragmentation of rationality within particular contexts inhibits the possibility of acquiring universal consensus on public issues in a pluralistic context. This school reckons that it is important to explain, justify and defend theological claims in a "public" way and to seek at least a degree of consensus and universality (Koopman, 2003:4).

To Benne (1995:202-203), the intensity of conflict over Church statements especially in the USA has increased since the 1990s, as the focus of statements has shifted from foreign policy issues to those much closer to the religious and moral core of Christian Churches. Due to their proximity to the centre, these social statements have become more important to churchly existence than pronouncements on foreign policy. Benne observes that everyone knows that the churches have no real authority with regard to foreign policy issues. Christians know that other genuine Christians often disagree among themselves on foreign policies. Thus, opponents of such statements tend to ignore what the churches say.

However, statements on, for example, sex, marriage, homosexuality, and abortion, are closely related to how Christians order their personal lives. Since statements on sex, marriage, homosexuality, and abortion concern behaviors within the power of individual decision, they take on far more significance than foreign policy issues. It is possible, therefore, that when people lose out in the debate on such issues, they are much more likely to leave the church than

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<sup>141</sup> Benne (1995:202) observes that a large proportion of pronouncements in the 1980s dealt with economic issues on the domestic scene, and foreign policy issues, on the international. Especially, the latter were repeatedly addressed. Statements on American political and economic policy toward South Africa, and Central and Latin America were particularly numerous, rivalled only by those on American nuclear weapons' strategy.

if they lose out on a foreign policy issue that is several steps of arguments removed from the Christian core.

In his critique of church and society efforts, presented in an article, “To Serve the Lord of All: Law, Gospel and Social Responsibility”, Richard Neuhaus asserts that there is only one occasion when the church ought to speak directly to the world, and that address should be proscriptive, not prescriptive. Such an occasion occurs when a social or a governmental practice directly violates the core religious and moral convictions of the Christian tradition. Then the church must say a loud ‘no’, and be willing to resist that practice. Nevertheless, it must not presume to commend specific public policy options. It has no warrant and little competence for such prescriptive details (Neuhaus, 1990:140-149).

It is not too clear why Neuhaus would limit the church in such a draconian manner. Even though the practice of making social statements may have been misused and abused, the direct address of society by the church should not be discarded. The church, as the corporate body of Christ, is called to address the world directly with both the law and the gospel. Since God has not abandoned society, the church should not withdraw from a measure of responsibility, in and for society. One important way the church exercises that responsibility is by directly addressing society.

It is important to note that the church has a key role to play in the society. It has the capacity to be a guarantor of order by providing an underlying moral guidance system in its people and for society. It is a safeguard of freedom. Since it looks at a transcendent order for its marching orders, it provides an independent vision, which cannot be easily subsumed or tamed by the secular authorities. The church prevents the state from monopolizing power. It has the capacity to generate new social meanings; as it draws on its rich religious and moral sources, it can provide new insights on human needs, rights and responsibilities that are all too often absent in a public sphere, increasingly, stripped of substantive meaning.

Max Stackhouse *et al*, in the introduction to *The Local Church in a Globalizing Era: Reflections for a New Century*, show that the church, the family, and the school are central to any viable and

enduring civil society. The church, the school and the family help to shape personal convictions, form character, nurture love and cultivate understanding. Stackhouse *et al* comment on the reality of globalization and argue that, in order to face the global environment in which people find themselves, they require informed minds, a capacity for principled commitment and a profound faith. It is lamentable that the schools, the family and the church often find themselves besieged by influences and forces they do not quite know how to face (Stackhouse *et al*, 2000:7-8).

Stackhouse writes that Christianity is a missionary religion and, therefore, it should understand the nature and character of that mission especially under the new globalizing conditions (Stackhouse *et al*, 2000:8). Believers have no choice other than to show that theological claims (at least some of them), ethical principles, and social themes found in Scripture are of more significance than ‘contextual import’. Every missionary, preacher and theologian after Paul, Peter and Appollos, respectively, have done this. Thus, believers should identify defensible trans-contextual normative meanings from the careful study of texts. What should then follow such a careful study would be an explanation of the way such trans-contextual meanings might relate to contemporary global economic realities. This requires an understanding of the complex modern social contexts influenced by the way “...biblical motifs have been wedded to philosophical themes, social institutions, and economic interests over the course of two thousand years” (Stackhouse *et al*, 2000:8).

In an earlier study, which Stackhouse wrote in conjunction with McCann, Roels, and Williams,<sup>142</sup> it is observed that:

...the church has nothing to offer the world of economic life but words and example – words about how things ought to be, and how they are, examples of how to live together... So far as we are able, we must represent the truth and justice of God, and the best understanding of social life available, constantly clarifying their indirect connections... but if our words do not stretch towards trans-contextual principles and do not evoke communities that attempt to contextualize

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<sup>142</sup> Stackhouse, Max L., Denis P. McCann, Shirley J. Roels, and Preston N. Williams.1995. *On Moral Business: Classical and Contemporary Resources for Ethics in Economic Life*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

them in a viable social system, they will neither be believed nor have any chance to form, or transform, economic life (Stackhouse *et al*, 1995:110 - 113).

In an article<sup>143</sup> in the same book (Stackhouse, *et al* 1995), Stackhouse notes that theology is essential to the analysis of the human condition and the historical ethos. In his view, “Interests not guided by theology and channeled by covenanted communities of faith march through the world like armies in the night; but they do not build civilizations and cultures that endure” (Stackhouse, 1995:950).

Stackhouse (1995:951) argues that any theology that will address the future has to reach beyond what he calls ‘confessional particularities’. Such a theology should reach beyond exclusive histories and privileged realms of discourse. He is critical of any theology that sees its role as solely the proclamation of personal sin and redemption. He claims that, essentially, theology is not narrative or metaphor, a tradition’s confession of faith, nor is it, primarily, the reflected experience of some particular gender, race or support group. Much as he considers all these as necessary, to him, theology, which is adequate to meet, what he calls, ‘cosmopolitan’ challenges that people face at the present should have another dimension as well. Such theology: ...must develop a social ethic of the emerging world in which democracy, human rights and a mixed economy are acknowledged as universal necessities. It must address a world linked by technology, trade and a host of new interdependencies (Stackhouse, 1995:951).

He reiterates this point noting that:

This agenda for Christian thought requires a “public theology”, a way of speaking about the reality of God and God’s will for the world that is intellectually valid in the market place of ideas and morally effective in the market place of goods and services (Stackhouse, 1995:951).

To Stackhouse, Christians should exercise responsible stewardship of their talents, personal possessions and all that is the Lord’s until His return. Christians have to labour in, what he calls, ‘the vineyard of the world’, “...even when the vineyards reach around the globe in new patterns of corporate capitalism” (Stackhouse, 1995:951).

Stackhouse calls Christians not to retreat under the pretext that the developing global economy has no theological roots. Christians should not give the impression that they have nothing to offer other than condemnation. Christians should not allow Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, secular

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<sup>143</sup> The title of Stackhouse’s article is “*A postcommunist manifesto: Public Theology after the collapse of socialism*”.

humanism and neo-pagan spiritualities to “capture the soul of our time” They should not be allowed to shape the future by default (Stackhouse, 1995:951).

Dieter Hessel<sup>144</sup> in his book, *“The Church’s Public Role”*, writes that the church, especially in the USA, should give special attention to three tasks. The first is what he refers to as regaining and enlivening contextual theological focus in a rapidly changing society, the second is the formulation and teaching of a coherent social ethic, and the third is the development of a vigorous witness to the nation that would better utilize ecclesial resources and mobilize members to carry out this mission (Hessel, 2002:1).

- Regaining contextual theological focus

On the first task, i.e. regaining contextual theological focus, Hessel notes that rapid changes that occur in the world (and in the USA), for example, deserve the church’s concentrated social concern and response. One of the changes is “...the people’s movement worldwide to attend to ecological integrity within the ongoing struggle for social justice”. He shows that the “...environmental crisis challenges prevailing paradigms of theology, lifestyle, and economic progress.” The situation, therefore, requires “a postmodern, eco-just way of being and doing” (Hessel, 2002:10).

To play its role effectively, the church would have to “think through and embody a social vision for this time and place...” The church would have to be “critically conscious of the contemporary situation and... [its] social location in it, and to engage this historical moment from the standpoint of a witnessing community of faith” (Hessel, 2002:10).

Such “thinking” would involve listening to what Hessel calls “a wide range of voices from the powerless to the powerful”. It would also require “theological reflection linked with social

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<sup>144</sup> Dieter T. Hessel is an ethicist and educator who served on the national staff of the Presbyterian Church (USA) between 1965 and 1990 as a coordinator of social education and later as the director of social witness policy. He is currently the director of an ecumenical program on Ecology, Justice and Faith, supported by the MacArthur Foundation (Hessel, 2002: xi-xii).



analysis that would grasp the common meanings of our lives.” To Hessel, the “church’s social witness and ministry” should “show a livelier contextual theological focus on the urgent priorities of the new planetary age” (Hessel, 2002:10-12).

- Formulation of and teaching a coherent social ethic

To Hessel, all the historical (the quadrilateral) sources of authority, i.e. Scripture, tradition, reason and experience, should never be viewed hierarchically because they are aspects of an interactive process. The church has a responsibility, therefore, to “...comprehend the socially dynamic implications of contemporary human experience and new scientific truth interacting with the faith claims or profile of faithfulness articulated in scripture and tradition and illumined by other ancient religious ways” (Hessel, 2002:14).

He develops this thought further:

Within the process of discerning what is morally authoritative, there is a discrete social ethical task. A church body or group involving Christians confronted by an event or policy issue that demands response needs to: analyze the human and social situation, impacts, persons, and powers involved; examine the theological vision expressed in scripture, tradition and contemporary theology that illumines this situation; form middle-range principles that approximate the religious vision and apply to the particular problem; and choose specific policy and programs to support (Hessel, 2002:14).

It is important that churches bring ethical judgments to bear in public arenas. Hessel motivates this by taking note of the fact that the ministry of the church, like that of Jesus, is a worldly activity with justice implications. Hessel calls the church to “play away from home” when rendering that service. This is to say that their “...language must engage the public, including the public policy community, without at the same time reducing their speech to the level of vague civil Esperanto that obliterates distinctive Christian theological-ethical norms” (Hessel, 2002:16).

Hessel urges the church to “... help form new images of the world by linking the biblical stories about God’s action and human conversion with contemporary stories of personal-social pilgrimage”. He paints a picture of one holding the Bible in one hand and in the other, the day’s newspaper coupled with what is known from experience, while giving attention to texts of faithfulness. If theology really wants to make a public difference, it has to do more than retelling

the story. It has to respond to the individualistic society and the personalistic church by teaching and embodying a coherent social ethic "...that grapples with issues of justice across a range of particular policy issues and social practices" (Hessel, 2002:17).

- Development of public witness to the nation

One picks up an urgency Hessel's tone when he writes on the need for the church to develop a vigorous public witness to the nation. He calls for a witness to policy makers at all levels of government, which would have to be designed to "... foster community rebuilding and justice-oriented" policies in the present era. The church needs to continue to debate and adopt social statements (Hessel, 2002:18, 19).

Stackhouse notes that the method to be used in dealing with the global economy, creatively and morally, is not yet determined; however, "... the key issue of Christian ethics will have to shift from sex and politics to economics, technology and culture" (Stackhouse, cited in Hessel, 2002:64).

To Stackhouse, theology "... when it is serious, is a public matter, accessible to any and pertinent to all areas of the common life" (Stackhouse, cited in Hessel, 2002:67). To Stackhouse, the task of the church, for it to have a public role, has to make itself a theological centre. It has to preach and teach; it has to offer and "... interpret the sacraments so as to explore the public as well as the personal theological content of faith, recognizing that the public is now global in scope and endangered by both secularism and fundamentalism" (Stackhouse, cited in Hessel, 2002:80).

Stackhouse states that the topics for theological reflection today would include the questions: "... What ought we to believe? Is there any orthodoxy? How does God want us to live? How do we know? What difference does it make?" To him, these are "... decisive questions that centre especially on the nature of God, on epistemology and on the role of divine authority in pluralistic societies". He suggests that such issues be approached apologetically, addressed by philosophical theology that is fully aware of "... the kinds of social analysis that transcend contextualism if they are to speak to our present cross-cultural situation." He adds that such a theology should "...

no longer rely on arguments from the Bible alone, since other religions have their own scriptures and their own interpretations that, in claim, are stronger than Christian doctrines”. In such a situation, Christians “... will have to show why the Bible should be taken seriously in public discourse” (Stackhouse, cited in Hessel, 2002:81).

Stackhouse is of the opinion that confessional and narrative theologies, which are currently widespread, are inconsequential and not apt to handle the tasks with which theology is faced. To Stackhouse, the tasks include responsibly shaping the “... economic systems of tomorrow in a world that will... involve corporate capitalism operating in a global market for as long as we can see the future”. Such an issue is linked intimately to “... issues of technology, for the capacity to transform nature presents us with new problems that demand deeper sacramental awareness and a theological ethic of stewardship”. Related to this, is the “... issues of international law that can embody the moral and spiritual foundations of our medically, ecologically, and culturally interdependent world”. Stackhouse sees the need to “... develop an awareness of how the “independent sector” can play a role in the formation of civilizations when societies are not governed from the top down but from the centre out”. This can only be done with recourse to theological questions (Stackhouse, cited in Hessel, 2002:82).

Stackhouse wonders whether contemporary Christianity “... can renew its metaphysical-moral vision and play a redemptive role in the transformations that providence had brought”. He wonders whether it would “... guide modern pluralistic democracies with a commitment to human rights and a humane form of mixed-economy capitalism in the path to righteousness”. He asks, “Can it contain the temptation to arrogance in the West, develop a deep compassion for those shuttered by these changes and draw people of all sectors of all societies into faithful, truth seeking, and justice doing communities of commitment and cooperation?” (Stackhouse, cited in Hessel, 2002:82-83).

It is evident, so far, that religion plays an important role in societies. Churches wield considerable influence. The question, therefore, is not whether the church should address the public world directly, but rather, how and how much. To deal with the question of, how and how much, Benne (1995:206-215) has discerned some qualities, which enlighten the search for a

proper manner of *direct and intentional influence*. The guidelines, proposed by Benne, are helpful to any church (theology), which seeks to have any dealings with the public world. The qualities include Credibility, Distinguishing Levels of Authority, and Intelligibility.

*Credibility* is one of the essential characteristics of adequate Public Theology. Credibility increases as the frequency of the church's social statements decrease. The church should practice great restraint in addressing society. Its mission is not to instruct society in how it is to be ordered as its competence to do so effectively is severely limited.<sup>145</sup> The church should speak only when it has something unique to offer from its own theological-ethical heritage.<sup>146</sup> It should be convinced that its vision has a fresh or incisive interpretation to offer or some unique judgment to make.<sup>147</sup> The church must do serious preparation when it takes up a public issue. It must devote adequate staff and time to the preparation of each statement. The credibility of statements is enhanced by the weight of authority, which may be based on the authority of the "*magisterium*", as is the case with the Catholic letters, or it may be the authority of church assemblies, who vote statements up or down after vigorous debate.

Every church statement should *distinguish among levels of authority*. In an attempt to explain what is meant by "*distinguishing among levels of authority*", Benne (1995:209) writes that,

The highest symbols of redemption that the church holds as its very reason for being are at the apex of the pyramid. They persist in recognizable form through the ages. They may be interpreted

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<sup>145</sup> Keeping this limitation in mind should prevent the church from using its sacred symbols to legitimate the ideological propensities of its current leadership.

<sup>146</sup>This entails that the statements are developed by those committed to, and are experts, in that vision. The bearers of the tradition should be in charge of its corporate conscience. They will have to listen to expert opinion from secular authorities in the field, from those involved in the issue, and from those whose interest or person is harmed by social injustice.

<sup>147</sup> In some instances, churches may have spoken not from a coherent religious perspective but from the intellectual fads of the day. Their statements, then, become second-rate social commentary and advice, which is put forth far better by secular authorities or independent laypersons. A further embarrassment is added when such inferior opinions are superficially invested with biblical or churchly authority.

anew for every generation, but they are not radically revised. The ethical principles that flow from those elevated symbols are also very clear and stable.

Examples of ethical principles include justice, freedom, equality, and the Christian love – agape. Agape is a settled moral principle. The other ethical principles are the Ten Commandments, teachings on Christian marriage, and Christian vocation. Each generation, however, will have to restate what these varieties mean in the context of the time, and make room for further reflection. As statements move to formulations that are more specific, they employ the “Middle principle”<sup>148</sup> drawn from philosophical theories. These principles are not binding for all time, but they are provisional definitions of the type of behavior required of Christians at a given period and in given circumstances.

The third guideline for direct influence is *Intelligibility*. This means that the church’s statements should be persuasive to its own members, even as the church intends also to address society directly. In his book, *Love and Power: The Role of Religion and Morality in American Politics*, Michael J. Perry is of the view that when the church addresses the public world, it should not shrink from drawing upon its specifically religious symbols and values. He believes that religious arguments flowing from core religious and moral convictions will be healthily challenged and enriched by robust external deliberations (Perry, 1991:83-127; Benne, 1995:212-213). There are compelling reasons why the specific symbols of a religious tradition should be employed in a public argument. Benne (1995:213 – 214) gives three. He writes that they are, (i) not necessarily unintelligible,<sup>149</sup> (ii) a public argument deprived of its basic religious

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<sup>148</sup> The concept of “middle principle” emanated from Lovin (1984:173). This so-called “middle principle” argument allows much room for debate, since different “middle principles” are held by different philosophical parties (Lovin, Robin W. 1984:173. *Christian Faith and Public Voices*. Philadelphia: Fortress).

<sup>149</sup> The religious community can communicate in ways, which clarify rather than obscure the scriptural and other theological warrants for its understanding and/or interpretation. If the religious claims are to affect the wider public, they will have to be proposed in a fashion, which the public can evaluate, accept or reject on its own terms. The challenge is not to banish religious insight and arguments from public life.

presupposition is, finally and radically, incomplete without such beliefs,<sup>150</sup> and (iii) the society needs such substantive proposals. In a political world dominated by interest group liberalism, where the adjudication of claims is attempted purely on procedural grounds, substantive moral traditions are increasingly necessary for the health of public discourse itself. A public square denuded of substantive moral proposals will likely revert to struggles of private power rather than public persuasion, thus decreasing the chance for peaceful accommodation of competing claims.

As noted above, the direct and intentional influence approach of doing Public Theology will have to accept that any statements by the church should first be directed to their internal constituency. The church must first be able to convince its own communicants of its social teaching before it presumes to persuade the public, and it must devote far more attention to its internal task. It is also important to note that when it is not necessary for the church to speak, then it is not necessary for the church to speak. When the church does speak, it ought to make sure that it is speaking with the authentic voice of its own tradition, not with the cacophonous clamor of politically correct interest groups.

Having examined *the Direct and Intentional Influence*, attention will now be focused on the second, namely, *the Direct and Intentional Action*.

### ***The Direct and Intentional Action***

Benne (1995:215) is concerned that any Direct Intentional Action approach is controversial and risky for both the church and the society.<sup>151</sup> This approach involves the use of power directly by

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<sup>150</sup> Benne (1995:213), citing the words of his Catholic colleague David Hollenbach, observes that if the church is intent on making a contribution to debates about social, political and economic life, it must state, forthrightly and publicly, its own most basic convictions about the nature and destiny of human beings. The church must respond to the most basic questions about the meaning of human life in its social teachings as well as its doctrinal theology. Such questions are religious questions, demanding religious and theological answers.

<sup>151</sup> Robert Benne considers this kind of approach from his Western (USA) context. He writes that Western societies have so many secular concentrations of power that it is unlikely that any religious group could exert enough power

the church to realize its intentions. It entails a high degree of either authority or consensus, which enables the church to exercise the kind of decisiveness that wielding of power demands. The church's intention is to change policy or move the society in specific directions through its exercise of power.

The Direct and Intentional Action is about the church no longer relying on the persuasiveness of argument, for example; it commits its funds, political weight, and people-power to pressure decision makers to move toward a well-defined policy objective. While power<sup>152</sup> and influence are not absolutely distinguishable categories, they do point to clear tendencies. When the church involves itself in direct action, it receives wide media coverage. In a world where people are accustomed to power being wielded by secular agencies, it becomes newsworthy when religious institutions try to wield power. Such behavior surprises secularists who may believe that religion has been thoroughly relegated to the private sphere of life. When the church becomes involved, there is something vaguely scandalous about it (Benne, 1995:215 - 216).

Any exercise of coercive power in the Direct Intentional Action approach may go against the role of the church on earth. God gives the church the authority of the word, not the power of the sword, to exercise in the world. Any coercive action, may threaten to instrumentalize and secularize the sacred symbols of the church in pursuit of very secular, partisan agendas. The church may lose its needed distance from all political action - its claim to point to transcendence collapses, if it draws too close to a political program of action. Consequently, it will face a more difficult time proclaiming a universal gospel to all repentant sinners regardless of the side of the political fence they are on.<sup>153</sup>

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to threaten the freedom and order of society. No religious group in the West has anything like the power it would take for such a threat, contrary to the alarmist claims to that effect, expressed by some secular groups. Compared to governmental, corporate, or military power, church power is puny (Benne, 1995:215).

<sup>152</sup> Power includes all those levels of pressure, ranging from threat to force, that get people to do what one wants them to do, whether or not they really want to do it (Benne, 1995:215).

<sup>153</sup> In an era of diminished authority among religious bodies and of pluralism in political opinions, who is represented when the church acts directly? This is not only a hazard for direct influence approaches, but it is

Benne (1995:218) reckons that the possibilities and limitations of direct action are particularly emphasized in church debates about “advocacy.” An argument can be made for advocacy<sup>154</sup> activities. The church as a corporate body should add its voice to those who speak in the public realm. The church is more likely to support the causes of justice than more powerful and self-interest parties are. Politics today is a main channel for serving one’s neighbor in the modern world. The church must be involved. Benne distinguishes advocacy from lobbying. He writes that lobbyists support their organizations’ self-interest, not the interest of others, particularly not that of the poor and vulnerable. Advocacy has a strong biblical warrant in the activities of the prophets who spoke to the king and people on behalf of the poor.

There are objections to the thinking that the church should play an advocacy role. Some of the objections are listed and explained by John Stumme in his helpful essay, “The ELCA and Public Policy Advocacy: A Preparatory Study” in *ELCA and Public Policy*. He argues that advocacy gets the church involved with power, contrary to its nature and mission. The church often agrees to “lobby” for its self-interest and, therefore, engages in hypocrisy when it claims to be advocating for others. Stumme asserts that advocacy is partisan; it favors liberal thinking and policies. It extends far beyond the church’s actual social statements; it has no warrant for much of what it does. The advocacy arguments of the church reflect the political views of church bureaucrats rather than of the church or its communicants. It divides the church unnecessarily and usurps the citizenship vocation of individual Christians (Stumme, 1990:4-25). Such arguments against advocacy become even more intense when the coercive element is increased.

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infinitely more problematic when coercive power is applied. Protestors arise within churches that exert direct power. Direct action is prone to introducing serious conflict into church life at every level of organization.

<sup>154</sup> Advocacy here may be understood as that activity, which the church as an institution, in an intentional and organized way, seeks to use to influence public policy and civil legislations on the basis of its moral convictions. Advocacy is a “soft” form of direct action. It does not lean heavily toward the coercive side of the persuasion-power continuum. Advocates are charged to testify about issues and/or support legislation on the basis of the social practice statement of the church. Advocacy means standing beside those in need in order to speak on their behalf (Stumme, 1990:77; Benne, 1995:218-219).



Benne (1995:221) wonders whether the noble intentions and presumably good effects of advocacy overturn the presumption against direct action. The furor that surrounds advocacy is a sign of its borderline legitimacy. The church, therefore, will have to think clearly about its involvement in direct action. Benne proposes two principles to guide and limit the church's involvement in any direct action. The first principle is "*Calling attention is more important than trying to call the shots*". The second is "*Focus on extremes but leave the great middle ground alone*".

(i) *Calling attention is more important than trying to call the shots* - According to Benne (1995:221-222), the church is called to be an advocate, but it is far much important for the church to call attention to an injustice or social evil than to prescribe or even support legislative measures to address that injustice. The church should speak proscriptively, not prescriptively. The church should use whatever moral weight it has to point powerfully to the presence of great challenges to our society. Benne holds that given the ambiguous effects of even the best legislation, it is wise for the church to let policy makers shape legislation. The church can provide a further service if it is able to reflect critically on all legislation from its perspective, drawing out the pros and cons as it sees them. Only in rare cases of great clarity should the church actually support particular policy proposals.

(ii) *Focus on extremes but leave the great middle ground alone* - Benne (1995:222-224) writes that the church should be able to bring its prophetic concerns to bear on behalf of those persons who are experiencing great suffering. The church will be most effective at this task if it can speak of the suffering, firsthand, from its ministry to suffering persons. The church may invest its money in the private sector, but efforts should be made to identify corporations that engage in activities the church clearly does not want to support, for example, pornography publishers, and those, which the church clearly wants to support, for example, community renewal in poor neighborhoods. The great middle range of enterprise activity should be left alone, i.e. companies, which are neither despicably sinful nor admirably saintly.

In parts of the world where many organizations other than the church can provide vehicles for direct action by Christians, the church should not squander its limited power on frequent attempts at exercising power. Such may not be the case in other societies where the church may be the sole vehicle for political protest. As noted above, the church's direct public engagement is about Christian theology engaging the public arena using tools available to humanity, and using a language accessible to all, to influence decisions, which impact upon the lives of all humanity irrespective of social status, race, gender, and wellbeing. Direct public engagement is about Christian theology getting out of church environment to public places of debate. This approach to Public Theology seeks to engage with the social, political, and spiritual issues of the day, bringing a coherent Christian perspective to bear upon public policy and cultural discourse. In seeking to present Christ credibly and champion truth, unity and diversity, it represents the views of the wider Christian constituency to governments, the media, and key decision-makers, etc. In formulating a biblical and theologically coherent perspective on many of the complex social, spiritual and moral questions facing contemporary society, Public Theology makes truths publicly accessible. It provides resources for churches and Christian leaders to engage effectively in the moral and political debate, enabling them to challenge aspects of secular thinking and bring a Christian perspective and prophetic witness to the public square. Advocacy, advice and apologetics are central to Christian engagement in the public square.

The above approach to doing theology is complemented by another approach, which focuses on the public significance of congregational practices that impact on public life.

### **5.5.2 Public Theologies and the public significance of congregational practices**

The second approach to Public Theologies will be outlined here. Scholars who represent this approach include George Lindbeck, Hans Frei, Paul Holmer, Stanley Hauerwas and Ronald Thiemann, just to mention a few. However, some of these theologians (e.g. Hauerwas) would not call themselves Public Theologians.

The argument of the approach revolves around the emphasis on the nature and functions of the congregation and its congregational practices. Such functions and practices do pave the way for

exploring the potential of these practices to impact on congregational life and the broader public life. The approach is focused more on the church and what the church should be rather than on what the church could do. According to Conradie (1993:37), the theologians mentioned above have proposed what he calls “an intra-textual” approach to a public way of doing theology. According to this approach:

[The aim of Christian theology] should not primarily be to explain or justify the Christian truth claims in a way accessible to publics external to the Christian community. It should rather concentrate on describing the way in which Christian truth claims function within a particular faith community. Christian beliefs should be understood from within the shared convictions of such community of faith (Conradie, 1993:37).

The idea behind the intra-textual approach is that Christian theology’s aim should be to describe the way the Christian truth claims function within a particular faith community and not to explain or justify Christian faith claims in a way accessible to publics that are external to the Christian community. Christian truth claims are to be understood from within the shared convictions of a community of faith (Conradie, 1993:37).

Following Comstock (1986:129)<sup>155</sup> and Placher (1985:410),<sup>156</sup> Conradie (1993:38-40) notes that this approach holds that Christian beliefs can only be understood in terms of the rules of the Christian community, and that no neutral rules or criteria can be identified to evaluate the validity of Christian truth claims outside the context of the Christian community of faith. This school of thought rejects any endeavors to make Christian beliefs universally reachable by explaining or decoding them in existentialist, Marxist, pragmatist, idealist or any other terms supposed to be more familiar to those in the public arena. It emphasizes faithfulness towards the language used in the Christian communities. As far as the Bible is concerned, it should be allowed to speak to people in particular contexts in terms of its own narrative structures because the biblical text construes the only real world.

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<sup>155</sup> Comstock, G L. 1986. Truth or meaning: Ricoeur versus Frei on biblical narrative. *Journal of Religion* 55:4, 129.

<sup>156</sup> Placher, W C. 1985. Revisionist and Post-Liberal Theologies and the public character of theology. *The Thomist* 49, 410.

Stanley Hauerwas<sup>157</sup> states that:

Attempts to defend the cause of the church before - or by using - secular standards and processes cannot help but betray the presumption that the true meaning of history is to be located somewhere else than in the church... Put simply, Constantinianism is the attempt to make Christianity necessary, to make the church at home in the world, in a manner that witness is no longer required (Hauerwas, 2002:220-221).

To Hauerwas, it is a mistake for Christians to think that they must translate their language into the dominant language of their surroundings in the interest of justifying their convictions or of being socially responsible. In fact, “The last thing we should do is to try to translate the early church’s understanding of, for example, the notion of preexistence or the participation of the Son in creation into the “pluralistic/relativist” language of our time” (Hauerwas, 2002:222).

Hauerwas reiterates the view that Christians were not called to translate what the forbears said of Christ’s lordship after their encounter with Hellenism but to imitate their exercise. He notes that the world, as it is, is partly the result of the missionary mobility of the church, the Christian love of enemy, the church’s relativizing of political sovereignty, the charismatic vision of the many members of the church, and the Christian disavowal of empire and theocracy (Hauerwas, 2002:223). Hauerwas points out repeatedly that the duty of the church, in general, and the particular task of theology in the service of the church is to be faithful. He is “...ruthless in his criticism of those who will say whatever they need to say in order to preserve the church’s influence, or assure its relevance, or make it fashionable, or fill its pews” (Thiessen & Samuel Wells, 2000:8).

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<sup>157</sup> Hauerwas is a prolific writer and some of his books include *The Peaceable Kingdom* (1983); *Against the Nations* (1985); *Resident Aliens* (1989); *After Christendom* (1991); *Dispatches from the Front* (1994); and *Christianity, Democracy and the Radical Ordinary* (2008). Some of his articles include “Theology and the new American culture: A problematic relationship”. *The Review of Politics* 34, no. 4 (1972): 71–90. “The Distinctiveness of Christian Ethics”. *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5 (2003): 225-233. “Democratic Time.” *Cross Currents* 55/ 4 (2006): 534.

To Hauerwas, the first task of the church is to make the world the world and not to make the world more just. The church does this by naming “the illnesses”, but the church would need to submit itself to the discipline of “learning how to speak a foreign language”. The language of the church is not a natural language, but a language that requires the transformation of self to be part of that language (Hauerwas, 1996:58-59). He explains that:

Learning to speak as a Christian is to acquire habits that will put me at odds with the world... the very linguistic habit of describing the world as “world” is a practice. When Christians say “world” (Greek cosmos) we are saying more than “universe” or “society” or “culture.” We are saying... that place where the principalities and powers are organized against God for the most noble of reasons (Hauerwas, 1996:78).

The church should be a community capable of being obedient to authority - that authority that reminds one of how to live in unity with Christians across time and space (Hauerwas, 1996:62-63). The church should not be “friendly” to the society. That the church has become a voluntary church whose primary characteristic is that the congregation is friendly is a problem. The church’s message should call for transformation on the part of those who would like to be part of this kind of community. No one’s life should remain the same once they become members of the church of Jesus Christ. All desires and loyalties are directed to the worship of God. People should not be accepted the way they are. As Mark Twain said, “About the worst advice you can give anyone is to be themselves” (Hauerwas, 1996:87-88). Going to church on a Sunday morning in a world where people see Sunday morning as a day to go to the lake or mow their grass is a “...nonviolent protest, a way of saying, ‘We want a different world than the one you serve’” (1996:91). Moreover, “Little, habitual, seemingly insignificant practices like going to church, not having sex with people to whom we are not married, not telling a racist joke, and telling the truth take a new significance in the present struggle” (Hauerwas, 1996:92).

Hauerwas (1996:94-101) use the term “aliens” to describe Christians and/or the church. It is a metaphor used by 1 Peter to illustrate a Christian’s relationship to the surrounding social order. The term “aliens” is fundamental to the self-understanding of Christians from the second century onwards. They note that the term was employed by the Anabaptists, Augustine, Zinzendorf and, more recently, by Dietrich Bonhoefer. Apostle Peter’s “...designation of early Christians as aliens and sojourners arose in a situation in which baptism pushed one to the periphery of the

dominant order, not so much on the basis of baptism's demands, but rather because the dominant order is intolerant" (Hauerwas, 1996:97).

Hauerwas (1996:98) explain that any distance between Christians and the surrounding world is not due to the Christians' hate of the world. The world is God's creation and possession. The world they reject is their world. Their distance as Christians is not so much distance from their sinful neighbors in the world but rather the world in them. Any distance is due, not to their hate of the world, but to their love of God. In any case, "Baptism both names our estrangement as alienation from God and encourages us to embrace a new culture and community (Church) that gives us something worth being estranged for and helps us to enjoy being weird" (Hauerwas, 1996:100).

As aliens, Christians are not trying to make the world worse than it is so that the church would recover its honor. The world is bad enough as it is without the Christians encouraging it to be worse. Indeed, much good from the world can come to the church if the church is appropriately alien. All that Christians have to do, is to be what God has made them, for as Christians, they have been made part of a story that the world cannot know unless Christians are embodied in that story. The world cannot know that God has chosen to redeem the world through the Jews unless Christians witness to that (Hauerwas, 1996:100-101).

Elsewhere, Hauerwas (1995:38) urges Christians to acknowledge that their existence can only make sense as they recognize God's presence in the people of Israel, the Jews. Christians should not give in to the temptation to tell their story separately from the story of Israel. Christians are not first called to be aliens. Hauerwas (1996:101), quoting Luke 1:8 and Matthew 28:19, note that Jesus calls Christians to be witnesses. Churches exist, not for themselves, but to save the world by proclaiming "...the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).

The church should seek to be true rather than to be many. The church attracts many when it becomes a truthful community. Evangelism, therefore, means bringing people into the Christian disciplines to save them from the world. When people leave the world to come into the church,

they receive the necessary disciplines to be in the world as Christians. Such is the church's service to the world (Hauerwas, 110-111). In other words, Jesus calls Christians to be a pilgrim people, resident aliens, who are never completely subsumed into the political climate within which they find themselves. The focus is not so much on what the Christian does, but on who s/he is.

Thus, this approach to doing Public Theology places emphasis on the inward formation of the heart, mind, and soul, according to the core religious and moral vision of the Christian community. The assumption is that all the religious traditions will have to shape the inward parts of the Christians including their disposition, outlook, and habits of heart. According to Benne (1995:184):

When proceeding effectively along these lines, the church as a narrative-formed community shapes people at a profound level. Their outlook and character is patterned according to the core vision of the tradition. When the church is really the church, its preaching, teaching, worship, and discipline form and transform persons so that their innermost being is powerfully fashioned.

The Church will have to embody its vision. It has to incarnate its vision in its own institutional life. The implication is that the Church, instead of commending any ambiguous policy to a world in which its own competence is highly doubted, makes every effort to bring its corporate life into harmony with its religious and moral commitments. It is important to note that affecting a community in such a manner is perhaps the most fundamental and, potentially, the most effective way the church affects the public order – politics, economics, and cultural life. The ordinary member of the church in their various roles in the community will express the core religious vision, which has fashioned them, and through them, the religious tradition pervasively affects its environments. The effects will be felt in private life (marriage, family, friendships), as well as in economic and political life. It is also notable that, as Christians relate their religious vision to the thought forms of the day, intellectual life is also influenced.

Historical studies do show the effects which this approach to doing Public Theology has had, for example, on the Western society. In his book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber writes that the Reformed piety was crucial to the development of Western capitalism. Those Calvinists were not intentionally shaping a new economic order nor were their

religious institutions coercing that order, but they formed persons in such a way that Protestants became “the harbingers of a new economic order” (Weber, 1958:56).

One feature of this approach to doing Public Theology is discipleship. Christian discipleship, through untold and unnamed millions of persons wherever they are, has been and continues to be a space where virtue is formed and maintained. Christian discipleship becomes the moral clue, which disciplines the freedom that so easily can degenerate to license. Allen D. Hertzke, in an article, “Lutheran Political Witness” in *The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Public Policy Advocacy* writes that:

... religion and the churches should be considered the “first” of the American political institutions precisely because they avoided direct political intervention. Religion is most powerful... in its indirect, cultural influence, educating people in their obligations to the community and directing their attention away from self-interest, materialism, and hedonism inherent in a society that celebrates individual freedom. Churches, in short, made liberal democracy possible; without the inner mores they taught, the centrifugal forces of individualism would plunge society into moral anarchy, selfishness, and indulgence (Hertzke, 1990:62).

This way of doing Public Theology or this inadvertent method of Church influence remains apparent and widespread in many parts of the world to date. Strong religious traditions continue to form the character of millions. Most local Christian congregations function according to this form. They try to do the basics well, and allow the members to carry their convictions into the public sphere.

Much as this approach and the influence it brings to the wider community is obvious, it appears to be under threat from contemporary social dynamics. With the emergence of the postmodern cultures and globalization, the general Christian culture, which permeated many communities, is rapidly thinning. What once provided positive reinforcement of the Church’s efforts at character formation is being replaced by the claims of popular cultures, which promote anti-Christian attitudes and values. The contemporary popular culture promotes and encourages hyper-



individualism. This is combined with the pressures to privatize religion, which makes for a very fragmented culture and fragmented persons.

Benne (1995:189) makes a startling, yet witty observation as follows:

When churches can no longer persuade their own people, they make greater attempts to get their way politically through more coercive means. When, for example the Catholic church cannot persuade Catholics to refrain from abortion, it attempts to prevent them and others from doing so through legal means... Such coercive measures have predictable effects; members who have been coerced protest vigorously.

The indirect approach to doing Public Theology seems to fit with the long-established set of guidelines of the Church's mission. It focuses on the fundamental calling of the church, the preaching of the gospel, and confines its main activities to the formation of its members in the core religious and moral values of its vision. The approach also does not confer authority on the church to claim more competence and spread more energy on issues peripheral to its central mission.

There are advantages to this approach. Its emphasis on the formation of Christian character is profoundly countercultural. Even though it may lend itself to a less radical posture, it has the promise, if done well, of having a far-reaching, pervasive, and long-term effect on public life. Since the church membership is larger than that of the clergy, the members can affect a complex and secular world, and can have access to a far wider array of public roles than the clergy. Secondly, the approach has the tendency to unify Christian communities around their central convictions, and not divide them over issues on which Christians of intelligence and goodwill often disagree.

Benne (1995:190) notes that there are some serious limitations to this approach. He observes that the 'unintentionality' and the indirectness of the approach lead to the assumption that the members of the church will make the connections between their religious convictions and public life, a task, which is not always done well. Lay people often dichotomize their religious and secular lives. In addition, the church's lack of intentionality reduces its witness in society to spontaneous, often, unconscious, connections. It is too long-term and general. This approach also

trims the mission of the church by prohibiting the church from directly addressing the Word as law to the public world. Sole reliance on this approach is, therefore, incomplete.

A response to the unintentional dynamic of this approach is the intentional, yet, indirect approach. Benne (1995:191) notes that the church aims to supplement the unintentional with intentional strategies, where the laity moves into the world with more self-conscious direction. Meanwhile, the church's connection to the public world remains indirect; it is not a public actor itself. The church, then, cannot coerce its members' actions in the world even though it does awaken them to its vision's relevance to public challenges. In this case, the church becomes a locus of moral deliberations, which may stimulate and help the laity to make connections between their religious and moral conviction and their life in society.<sup>158</sup>

To Hauerwas (1995:124), true Christian worship is about the church becoming a place, which is clearly visible to the world. It is about the church becoming a place in which people are faithful to their promises, love their enemies, tell the truth, honor the poor, suffer for righteousness, and testify to the amazing community, the creating power of God. In his (Hauerwas) writings, some normal congregational practices, which have considerable significance to public life, are discussed namely baptism and Eucharist,<sup>159</sup> prayer,<sup>160</sup> preaching,<sup>161</sup> pastoral care and

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<sup>158</sup> The idea of having the Church as a locus of deliberations will have to be done carefully. Those facilitating such deliberations should be in a position to know the distinctions between the core religious and moral convictions and the more debatable extensions of that core issue and policies filled with ambiguity. There should be allowance to disagree on the applications of fundamental values. There should be balance between commitment and tolerance of diversity.

<sup>159</sup> Baptism and Eucharist have a Public Theological significance. Hauerwas sees the two as not only motives or causes for social work, but they are effective social work. In them, humanity sees most clearly the marks of God's kingdom in the world (Hauerwas, 1983:108). In his other book, *Christian Existence Today*, Hauerwas describes how the celebration of the Eucharist in the United Methodist congregation of South Bend, Indiana, has led to meals shared with the poor members of the neighborhood. The gesture made it clear that the church was not another social agency, which does a little good, but a people called out to witness to God's presence in the world. That presence, which came with the meal shared, sustained that church's ability to be present in that neighborhood as a symbol that all was not lost (Hauerwas, 1995:121).

discipline,<sup>162</sup> as well as the way Christians deal with sexual matters.<sup>163</sup> These practices have impact on public life.

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<sup>160</sup> Prayer has public significance. Hauerwas (1983:108) remarks that through prayer, we learn to open ourselves to God; "...prayer is the way we let God loose in the world. Prayer, therefore, though a common activity is a dangerous one, for God's presence is not easily controlled". In another book, *Christian Existence Today*, he enters the American debate on prayer in public schools to explicate the public nature of prayer. He writes, "For if Christians reclaim prayer as an end in itself rather than a way to confirm the 'Christian nature' of our society, we will perform our most important civic responsibility. As Origen argued, what more important public service can we render than to pray that the emperor recognize his or her status as a creature of God? Such a prayer is no less significant in a society that believes 'the people' have in fact become the emperor" (1995:185).

<sup>161</sup> The practice of preaching has a public significance. In *The Peaceable Kingdom*, Hauerwas (1983:109) asserts that preaching forms Christians into a people of witness. Preaching, which challenges people with the story of Jesus and his kingdom, helps them to hear and see in new ways. The preaching of the church shows hospitality to strangers by inviting them to share the story of Jesus. In this act of hospitality and in this engagement with strangers, we learn more fully to hear the story of God. Moreover, "Without the constant challenge of the stranger – who often, interestingly enough, is but one side of ourselves – we are tempted to lose the power of Jesus' story because we have so conventionalized it".

<sup>162</sup> Hauerwas (1983:109) claims that the practices of pastoral care and discipline enable the church to be a holy community in the world that is capable of leading a life of compassion, hospitality and justice.

<sup>163</sup> Hauerwas further suggests that the manner in which Christians deal with sexual matters does impact on public life. In his book, *Community of Character: Towards a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*, he develops this view by asserting that the fact that singleness is accepted as a valid mode of life for Christians affirms the church's confidence in God's power to affect lives for the growth of the church. Christians bring children into the world because they believe, despite evidence to the contrary, that God has not abandoned this world. Children, then, become a sign of the hope, which Christians have for the world. Marriage and family are central institutions, which affirm that God is bringing his kingdom into this world through the providential ordering of history. The faithfulness and commitment to exclusive relationships implied in marriage witnesses to God's pledge to his people, Israel and the church, that through his exclusive commitment, all people will be brought into his kingdom (1981:190-191). In *The Truth about God: The Ten Commandments in Christian Life*, Hauerwas and Willimon argue that all sexual behaviour is not private, but public. This means that what we do to our bodies impact on the body of Christ, which we are part of, through baptism, and on the society. They state that, "God desires us and enlists our aid in reclaiming a lost creation. Salvation of the world turns on our obedience, on how we have sex and handle property and watch

In whichever manner the church chooses to do and express its theology, its message will have to be convincing. If it is not convincing, people will cease to attend to it, will decide against it, subvert it at every opportunity, turn to other authorities, ideologies, or faiths, and raise every practical and theoretical objection they can think of. Theological ethics must work by persuasion, or it will not work at all (Stackhouse, 2000:18).

What, then, is the status of the poor and the marginalized in the two approaches? What priority does public theology place on the poor and marginalized?

## **5.6 The Place and Priority of the Poor in Public Theological Discourses**

A discussion on the place and priority, or the role, which the poor play in the two approaches to Public Theology, will follow.

The place and priority of the poor in Public Theological discourses are not very explicit, but they are, indeed, a central part of the agenda of Public Theologies. The works of public theologians like Max Stackhouse and Duncan Forrester are examples of Public Theologies that seek entrée to the (existing) public debates. They use those debates to push for the emancipation of poor people from poverty, racial discrimination, and social exclusion through, among other means, mass actions. Public Theologies, largely, deal with debates and engagements in the public square. Duncan Forrester<sup>164</sup> pleads that poverty be addressed through Public Theological engagements.

The two approaches to doing Public Theologies, i.e. those that focus on the direct involvement of churches on public life and those that focus on the public significance of congregational practices, have a bearing on the poor and vulnerable. Those that focus on the public significance

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our words”. Further, “Any God who won’t tell you what to do with your pots and pans and genitals isn’t worth worshipping”. This is to indicate that God is involved in all spheres of life (1998:19-20).

<sup>164</sup> For more information, see Forrester, D. 1997. *Christian Justice and Public Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

of congregational practices pay attention to the needs and grievances of the poor and vulnerable within and outside the church.<sup>165</sup> As those needs come to the attention of the more able communicants and to the leadership, a plan of action is drawn to respond to them within the confines of the church. The church also prepares its communicants as individuals to deal with poverty within the larger society.<sup>166</sup> This approach draws on the practices of the congregation to address poverty in and outside the church. The congregational practices, as earlier mentioned, include:

- Baptism and Eucharist - the celebration of baptism and Eucharist reminds Christians that they are one body in Christ, and have to share what they have with the rest of humanity, especially the poor.
- Prayer – prayer is about opening oneself to God and what God wants to be done including caring for the poor.
- Preaching – biblical narratives, especially the story of Jesus, help the hearers to hear and see in a new way, and possibly help them to respond to needs around them.
- Pastoral care and discipline – these bring about compassion, holiness and justice.
- How Christians deal with sexual matters – this is about faithfulness, and is representative of God’s unrelenting commitment to bring restoration to all humanity. The family is representative of God’s kingdom and children, a sign of hope in the midst of brokenness.

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<sup>165</sup> In the article, “The Teaching Ministry in a Multicultural World”, Richard Osmer develops a comprehensive framework for the teaching ministry in a globalizing world. He conceptualizes catechism, edification, and discernment, in relation to the emerging global context. His framework offers guidelines for committed educators to assess their own programs, helping them determine areas of strength and weaknesses. To him, communities of faith would do well to reflect on the kind of teaching and learning their members will need if they are to make a faithful and effective witness in a rapidly globalizing world (Osmer 2001:37-75).

<sup>166</sup>Writing on the “Responsibility in the World of Mammon: Theology, Justice, and Transnational Corporations”, William Schweiker is of the view that the ethical mission of the church is to be an academy of justice in the crucible of culture creation. In this way, the church’s mission draws together, in Christian self-understanding, the grand task of shaping civilization with a distinctive faith in the justice of God. This vision of the church’s mission is rooted in the confidence that, as creatures of a loving God, human beings can be gripped by truths that raise them, above vice and hatred (2000:138).

These ordinary congregational practices are crucial in the formation of character and habits, which help Christians deal with poverty head-on. The approach that deals with the explicit involvement of churches in public issues also gives attention to not only those who are in the church, but the wider society as well. The focus of this approach is how to influence public discourses and public opinion, analysis, policy-making,<sup>167</sup> advocacy, and intentional public actions.

The church may address the concerns of the poor and vulnerable through its statements, which are aimed at the wider public, and give attention to an issue or issues that affect the poor and vulnerable.<sup>168</sup> In partnership with other institutions of society, churches also lobby policy makers to mobilize support for legislation, which would deal with the concerns of the poor and vulnerable. The church plays the role of advocacy, speaking on behalf of the poor and vulnerable to the perpetrators or the people/systems responsible for such poverty, and to the powers of the day, which may have the authority to bring change. The church directly mobilizes the masses to

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<sup>167</sup> In the article, “The Spirit of God and the Spirit of Medicine”, Allen Verhey notes that policy is always developed within particular conditions. The conditions of a shrinking world include the nation-state’s limited influence over business and research conducted across national boundaries, beyond the scope of national laws. States now share power with international corporations, and with multinational and non-governmental organizations. The church must participate in policy discussions not only with and about the nation-state, but also with and about other organizations. To any discourse about policy, the church brings convictions learned at Pentecost. The church looks for the curse of Babel to be lifted. The church must, in its own discourse and conversations, listen carefully to the stranger and especially to those who are least well off. The church must demonstrate and teach that a congregation and a globe require a diversity of gifts – and a diversity of voices – if discourse is to be discerning. In memory and in hope, Christians sometimes speak prophetically, sometimes sagely, sometimes analytically, sometimes politically, using policy analysis and compromise to accomplish good for those who hurt, or to avert harm toward which pride and greed still tilt the world (Verhey, 2001:137-138).

<sup>168</sup> In an attempt to address the plight of the poor and vulnerable, Public Theology will have to offer “guidelines about how we might, insofar as it is possible, form a more valid ethos and develop those attitudes, institutions, habits, policies, and programs that are in accord with a more ethically viable ethos, rightly legitimated by a valid theological view of ultimate reality” (Stackhouse, 200:16).

action, which would send a clear message to those responsible for poverty, with the hope of a change and a betterment of the conditions of the poor and vulnerable.<sup>169</sup>

In *Christian Perspectives on Politics*, J. Philip Wogaman assesses the different levels at which the church's responsibility can be exercised. He identifies seven levels namely influencing the ethos,<sup>170</sup> educating the church's own membership about particular issues,<sup>171</sup> church lobbying,<sup>172</sup> supporting particular candidates for office, civil disobedience, and participating in a revolution. Besides, the church could even become a political party<sup>173</sup> – if need be (Wogaman, 2000: 263-272).

In a recently published paper, "Churches and Public Policy in South Africa", Koopman<sup>174</sup> writes that:

Various local congregations in South Africa had started to establish discussions where policy issues are being dealt with. Churches, however, need also to participate more directly and institutionally in public policy process. The South African Council of Churches (SACC), the South African Council of Catholic Bishops Conference, The Dutch Reformed Church as well as the Baptist Church and the Society of Friends (Quakers) had established public policy liaison officers at the national parliament

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<sup>169</sup> Such an action of mobilizing the masses to an action will have to be preceded by the creation of an open space of discussion, education, and critical reflection. By doing so, the church will bestow a gift of enormous value on a society which almost lacks such space.

<sup>170</sup> This is about churches engaging in advocacy by influencing the spirit of the times out of which political actions spring (Wogaman, 2000:264).

<sup>171</sup> The church relates its general faith to particular issues, using educational techniques, backed by technical analysis of the issues (Wogaman, 2000:266).

<sup>172</sup> Churches make a direct attempt to influence public decision by, for example, using testimony offered before the legislative assembly (Wogaman, 2000:267).

<sup>173</sup> Wogaman is here aware of the challenge that such an approach may pose to the church and to the wider society. He writes that this may be done if and when circumstances seem to warrant the approach (Wogaman, 2000:269).

<sup>174</sup> In *JTSA* March, 2010.

during the past decade. These churches collaborate on issues of public policy. They make presentation to the portfolio committee of parliament, and they guide, inform, and consult with churches (from ecumenical to congregational level) on specific policy issues.

If the role of Public Theologies in the public policy making discussion forums becomes that of only providing broad principles, then the concerns of the poor and vulnerable may not receive adequate attention. Public Theologies must bring to the fore very specific directives for policy-making.

## **5.7 Preliminary Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the notion of Public Theologies. It is clear that the concept of Public Theology has its roots in the North American debates of the 1960s, but it has been developed and defined over time by various scholars. Public Theologies, though similar, are different from Civil Religion, Public Religion, Political Theology, Public Church, Social Ethics and Public Ethics. A Public Intellectual is also not synonymous with a Public Theologian.

It has been noted that Public Theologies build on four major pillars namely Scripture, tradition, reason and experience. They rely heavily on resources from the four pillars with the aim of addressing the challenges that confront any particular people. However, there is no one approach to doing Public Theology and scholars hold different positions on method.

The one approach, represented by Stackhouse and others, holds that the church should be directly involved with public affairs. The other approach, represented by Hauerwas and others, is of the view that Christian truth claims function within a particular faith community and the church should not attempt to explain or justify Christian faith claims in a way accessible to publics that are external to the Christian community. This is because Christian truth claims are to be understood from within the shared convictions of a community of faith. It is there to preach, teach, and offer the sacraments of the gospel. The church plays the role of nurturing the many callings of its individual laypersons. Hauerwas, therefore, pushes for the utilization of the potential of congregational practices for public life.



The agenda of Public Theologies is to gain an entrée into debates in public places, and it is critical of using a utopian language or mere criticisms. Furthermore, Public Theologies, in general, deal with the poor, mainly, from both the perspective of the impact of congregational practices on poverty, and the formulation and monitoring of policies that sequentially address poverty. The two approaches complement each other.

Nonetheless, two questions arise at this point: Do the agenda of Public Theologies and methods, address the plight of the poor adequately? Does Black Theology's agenda and method adequately respond to the plight of the poor? The next chapter proposes a dialogue between the two, that is, between Black Theology and Public Theologies, with the aim of establishing a theology that faithfully addresses the plight of the poor and vulnerable. What can each approach learn from the other to enable theology become good news to the poor and vulnerable?

# CHAPTER SIX

## SOME LESSONS FOR BLACK AND PUBLIC THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSES

### 6.1 Introduction

The two previous chapters have revealed, among other issues, that both Black Theology and Public Theologies attend to, or seek to respond to the plight of the poor. It is evident that, in general, the poor enjoy a position of prominence and distinction in Black Theology compared to most forms of Public Theological discourses. Further, some streams of Public Theology may run the risk that their discourses have become so concerned with intelligibility, that they neglect the plight of the poor and vulnerable.

In this sixth chapter of the study, a dialogue will be established with the approaches to the poor in Black Theology and Public Theologies to determine the lessons that both Black Theology and Public Theological discourses may learn from each other. In a concluding round, some guidelines for the calling of the church regarding the challenge of poverty will be distilled from such an enriched theological discourse.

The foregoing analyses have indicated that both Black Theology and Public Theologies, with their strong bases in social and biblical reflections, attend to the plight of the poor. Black Theology highlights the divine preferential option for the poor. It teaches that God sides with the poor and the oppressed. Consequently, the people of God have a duty to side with and fight for the poor. It also notes the inherent conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed and sees its role as that of ensuring that the *status quo* does not remain. Black Theology reads Scripture and the social context from the perspective of the poor (as shown in Chapter Four above). Likewise, most forms of Public Theologies attend to the plight of the poor through the analyses of social contexts, participation in public discourses, and public policy formulation and monitoring. Public

Theologies also emphasize the significance of congregational practices for addressing poverty in the church and the broader society (as shown in Chapter Five above).

It appears that Black Theology's priority to the poor can enrich Public Theologies. The epistemological status of the poor in Black Theology can help Public Theologies to adopt methods and epistemologies that are truly transformative. The emphasis of Public Theologies on rational and credible participation in public discourses can help churches to impact on poverty, public policies, and practices more adequately.

Any fight against poverty on a global level, or in Africa, in particular, calls for a concerted effort by all. The most important consideration is to address the root causes of poverty such as ignorance, unemployment and corruption. In addition, it is necessary to create socio-economic structures that will empower the victims of poverty. The poor should be educated on their economic rights within their countries. It is after such civic education that they will cease being passive observers and become active participants in decision making in matters affecting their welfare. Empowerment of the people will also restore some confidence and hope to their lives. Furthermore, this will encourage them to look for their own homegrown solutions to their problems instead of being dependent upon others to bail them out of their misery through temporary relief grants.

Thus, it is in cultivating a spirit of self-determination that the church should identify with the poor. Quite often, the emphasis on the life to come overshadows the life here and now. The poor, at times, are encouraged to accept the *status quo*, since they will be compensated in the life to come. Such a theology endorses the suffering of the poor. Life, here and now, should be seen as the foretaste of the life to come. The challenge of the church in Africa will be to identify with the poor rather than the oppressive elite. It is only then that it can claim to be truly prophetic.

Certainly, the poor and the marginalized deserve to be liberated from their wretchedness through a change in the structures that keep them down. To deny the poor the means necessary to attain their basic needs in life is to limit their freedom and their search for full human development. The situation of a growing prosperity for a few and poverty for the majority represents a very

serious obstacle to any society's economic and social development. For any society to develop, the human person should be the focus.

## **6.2 Black Theology and Public Theologies - an enriched theology working reciprocally and mutually for the poor?**

A motivation for a theology, which is (or which can become) good news to the poor and the vulnerable, will be advanced in this section.

Black Theology, with its emphasis on the preferential option for the poor, may not have discovered a new truth that never existed prior to its inception. Both De Gruchy (1991:2)<sup>175</sup> and Koopman (2010) agree that Reformed Theology, for example, had an intrinsically public and liberating core from its inception. As far back as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Reformed Theology had already focused on both the salvation of the individual and the transformation of the society in the context of social, political, and economic conflict, violence and oppression. After this period, Koopman (2010:54)<sup>176</sup> writes:

Second-generation reformer, Calvin, and his successors developed a public theology that was a potent force within the political struggle and ferment of the Europe of its day. Many of the adherents to the reformed tradition experienced persecution and oppression themselves, amongst others the French Huguenots. Public involvements and identification with the poor and oppressed is therefore central to Reformed Theology since its inception.

It may be correct to point out that Black Theology has discovered a new truth, however, Public Theologies may benefit from the emphasis that is inherent to Black Theology, i.e. the preferential option for the poor. Just as Liberation Theology may have helped "...contemporary Reformed theologians to rediscover the inherent liberating dimensions of central notions in their traditions, e.g. grace, justification, sanctification, ecclesiology, the law, and the covenant" (Koopman, 2010:54), Black Theology can help Public Theologies to discover and rediscover the

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<sup>175</sup>J. De Gruchy, 1991. *Liberating Reformed Theology: A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

<sup>176</sup> In *JTSA* of March, 2010.

emphasis and priority of the poor in the Christian tradition. Therefore, both Black Theology and Public Theologies can be enriched by learning from each other. Koopman's description of a contemporary prophetic engagement with public life shows the way both Black Theology and Public Theologies attempt to address poverty.

In the article, "Public Theology as Prophetic Theology: More than Utopianism and criticism?", Koopman (2009:120-129) develops contours for a contemporary prophetic engagement with public life by modifying James Gustafson's<sup>177</sup> four modes of moral and public discourses. Gustafson's modes of moral and public discourses are the prophetic, narrative, technical/ethical, and policy modes. Koopman amends these four modes to "illuminate the prophetic presence and impact of churches in public life." His amendment of Gustafson's four modes or the role of the church include "...being visionaries, critics, storytellers, technical analysts and policy makers". These modes or roles of the church, as proposed by Gustafson and modified by Koopman, are slightly adjusted, according to Koopman, to "shed light on the public role of churches" in order to respond to the challenges of the poor and vulnerable, globally, and in Africa, in particular.

A brief analysis of these modes of prophetic speaking will demonstrate how Public Theologies and Black Theology can learn from each other in terms of a faithful response to the plight of the poor and vulnerable. The five modes of prophetic speaking (i.e. Gustafson-Koopman's) bring together the strengths of Black Theology and Public Theological discourses.

In the light of the pervasive global poverty, and in the effort to get rid of poverty and care for the vulnerable, the church will have to think creatively; tell stories that speak to the concerns of the poor; "name the devil" which underlies the wrongs; present appropriate and informed arguments; and participate fully in matters of policy making implementation and monitoring. A discussion of

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<sup>177</sup> Gustafson, James. 1988a. "An analysis of church and society social ethical writings". *Ecumenical Review* 40, p. 276-278. In this article, Gustafson discusses the four modes of moral and public discourses. Later in 1988, Gustafson delivered a lecture, (the Stob lectures) at Calvin College and Seminary, titled, *Varieties of Moral Discourse: Prophetic, Narrative, Ethical, and Policy* (Stob Lectures of Calvin College and Seminary, Grand Rapids).

these modes/roles will follow, under the headings of Black Theology, Public Theologies and Imaginative Thinking; Black Theology, Public Theologies and Storytelling; Black Theology, Public Theologies and Naming the Devil; Black Theology, Public Theologies and Technical Analysis; and Black Theology, Public Theologies and Public Policy Matters.

### **6.2.1 Black Theology, Public Theologies and Imaginative Thinking**

Koopman (2009:121) appreciates the works of several South African scholars and theologians who had the courage to engage the South African apartheid regime by envisioning “a new society, a society of compassionate justice, the justice of the kingdom of God, which is proclaimed and embodied by Jesus Christ the prophet...” That envisioning is captured in the Belhar Confession.<sup>178</sup> The Belhar Confession uses a biblical, symbolic, metaphorical, and utopian language which appeals, calls for, and motivates the hearers to act and to work for the realization of the vision of a new society, where there is justice, irrespective of its inadequate, penultimate shape.

As earlier noted, the Bible records several incidences, where the prophets envisioned a future different from what obtained; a future characterized by obedience, and that is free of oppression and the consequences of disobedience. One cannot help, but to assume that the apartheid situation may have created a favourable environment for the breeding of Black Theology in South Africa. One could also assume that quite a number of those who helped to envision a just South Africa and, probably, pushed for the adoption of the Belhar Confession, were Black Theologians and those who empathized with the situation of the black peoples of South Africa.

To move forward, even in the context of pluralism and freedom, Black and Public Theologies will have to ensure that they project an appealing vision of the future. They have to be able to see

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<sup>178</sup> The Belhar Confession is a confession of unity, reconciliation, and justice among Christians. It was adopted by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa in 1986. The Belhar Confession was co-authored in 1986 by Prof. Dirkie Smit who is currently a professor of systematic theology at the Faculty of Theology, University of Stellenbosch. The Confession was named after a suburb of Cape Town, where a general synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church was held in 1982.

a new world free from poverty especially horrible, abject poverty. That “seeing” of the future may not speak well of the wrecked present reality. The “seeing” of the future will have to be communicated in a language that moves people, i.e. using images (metaphors), comparisons (analogies), similes, symbols, and a utopian (ideal and perfect state) language. The moral authenticity of persons who will be communicating the visions (seeing) will always be critical and decisive. This task of imaginative thinking will involve preparing the church to know how to proclaim what is not yet, but will be - a different order of things, a new social order.

### **6.2.2 Black Theology, Public Theologies and storytelling**

Any story, a story, and that story well told may be very potent. Koopman (2009:123) describes three functions of stories in communities especially in the Christian community. He notes that stories form the ethos and identity of a community and its members. Stories also inform and guide the moral choices of people; and stories perform a prophetic function.

The experiences and situations of the African American slaves, and of the South African black peoples during apartheid, were similar to those of the Hebrew people who also faced oppression. When the African American slaves and the segregated black people of South Africa read the Bible, they noticed that they were not alone. They saw the exodus story ending in hope and deliverance. When these poor and vulnerable read the Bible, they brought their agitation to it. They noticed that Jesus met them as their liberator, and Jesus became the good news of possibilities and power for the poor.

The biblical narratives must be told and told well. The biblical accounts told well, may shed light on general, and unclear moral arguments. The biblical accounts may not offer distinct, unambiguous, and argued response to particular ethical cases, but they may afford nuanced and slight clarifications of the challenges that are faced especially by the poor and of possible outcomes. When biblical stories are told well, they may not give evident and decisive conclusions, but they may widen the hearers’ vision of their situation.

Biblical stories are not the only stories to be told. Even real life experiences and stories, especially the stories of the poor and vulnerable in the society, have to be told. Koopman (2009:124-125) sketches the story of a South African woman who confronted the South African Black Theologian, the Rev. Allan Boesak with a question during the apartheid era. Boesak had watched as the apartheid police abused and dispossessed her of her belongings. The lady then came to him to ask what God was saying in her situation. Koopman writes that, what was articulated in the Belhar Confession is the faith of people like that woman, whose faith was tested especially since those who practiced the injustices against her claimed to be doing so in the Name of the same God. Such a community story may not have biblical or even theological material, but it may offer theories of justice and injustice.

Similarly, in his book, *The Prayers of African Religion*, the Kenyan scholar and theologian, John Mbiti records some African prayers, idioms, sayings and poems (songs) to tell in a narrative manner how the African people deal with the many assortments of difficulties, which they face, particularly, the plight of poverty. Clearly, the stories in the Bible and the experiences of the ordinary people, especially the poor and vulnerable, well told by the church, may accelerate the pursuit to address the wrongs brought about by poverty, and injustice in the world.

### **6.2.3 Black Theology, Public Theologies and naming the devil**

In addition to thinking creatively, and telling stories well (storytelling), the church will have to “name the devil”, i.e. point the finger at the reality that is inconsistent with the visualization of a new social order. On the task of the Old Testament (or biblical) prophets, Koopman (2009:122-123) notes that the prophets had a double task. The one was that of annunciation (declaring), while the other was that of denunciation (condemning). The prophets had to denounce the reality, which was in conflict with the vision of a new society, in addition to their other task of announcing the vision of a new society. Thus, it is obvious that the biblical prophets addressed what was recognized as the core of the problem that brought grief to God and pain to His people.

Fortunately, Black Theology and Black Theologians never turned a blind eye on the situations of poverty especially in the USA and in South Africa. They were critical of persons and structures



behind the scourge of poverty. They spoke openly, against oppression and its offshoot, i.e. poverty, despite the consequences of such actions. Likewise, the church has to name all forms of social, religious, and moral waywardness in the society. It will have to “name the devil,” i.e. name and condemn the scamp, which may be the cause of the various forms of incorrectness and poverty in the society. Black and Public Theologians will have to search out, and get to the root of the myriad poverty struggles, which spread through establishments and cultures, or which permeate the deeds and conducts of individual people. Resting on the foundation of statistical indicators and social analysis, Black and Public Theologies will have to expose the causes and roots of national, tribal, communal, and personal poverty. As they “name the devil”, Black and Public Theologies may not have to engage in meticulous policy recommendations, or issues of approach and procedure. According to Koopman (2009:123):

Prophets as critics... use passionate language, metaphors and symbols that are directed to the hearts as well as to the head. Their language, analogies and metaphors make statistical analysis more effective and affective in the reader. They do not make rigorous philosophical arguments. They rather demonstrate, show, tell. And this telling and showing evokes moral indignation. Their information moves and stirs us to deep moral concern and action.

Therefore, Black and Public Theologians will have to ensure that they name and criticize those who abuse available resources, irrespective of their affiliations to a particular creed, race, position, tribe, or gender. By so doing, some in the community, especially those who are corrupt, would become uncomfortable while some others would also feel undermined, destabilized, and upset. Even those who are not directly involved in any impropriety may become unsettled by any form of naming and criticism directed to either individuals or structures responsible for creating, sustaining or failing to eradicate poverty. Such discomfort brought upon the society by Black and Public Theologians is consistent with the kind of unease that the biblical prophets brought to the peoples and communities of their time.

On what he calls “the language of prophetic criticism” within the South African situation, Koopman (2009:123) notes that:

In the years of the struggle against apartheid and in the new era of the building of a democratic society of justice and peace in the context of very complex social processes on local and global levels, this language of prophetic criticism and indictment helps to guard inappropriate compromises, decisions and policies that would betray the most vulnerable.

In the light of the current global trends, the demands of a free market economy, globalization, pluralism, and the need for sustainable development, compromises will have to be made locally, nationally, and globally. As compromises are negotiated, Black and Public Theologies will have to ensure that whatever concessions are arrived at, they have to be favourable to the poor and vulnerable. Black and Public Theologies will have to watch against any inapt compromises including any resolutions and strategies that may let down or even worsen the conditions of the poor and vulnerable.

#### **6.2.4 Black Theology, Public Theologies and technical analysis**

Black and Public Theologians must approach matters that concern technical analysis with the knowledge that such an endeavour will be about ethical discourses, and may involve the provision of concepts, forms of proper argumentation, and significant distinctions, which lead to greater accuracy and stronger backing for what Christians and other religious communities consider the right and good thing to do. Any undertaking to participate in any form of ethical discourse has to bring about clarity and precision in the utilization of such notions as justice, virtue, rights, and duties. It has to offer more careful distinctions between concepts and classes of moral issues. It has to have stronger coherent arguments in support of moral prescriptions or condemnations (Koopman, 2009:125).

Koopman (2009:126) further observes that:

Prophets as technical, ethical or philosophical analysts are challenged to employ ethical theories in a complementary manner in their analyses – as is done in the Bible, e.g. teleological... deontological... utilitarian or consequentialist... theories. In addition to the teleological (human as maker) and deontological (human as citizen) theories, HR Niebuhr calls attention to the *cathecontic* (human as answer) theory.

This quotation from Koopman implies that any ethical discourse has to employ a variety of ethical theories. Such theories bring about the truth that humans are makers, inhabitants, and providers of solutions. In the light of global and local poverty, Black and Public Theologies have to make clear to, and remind the church and the community that much as humans (the wealthy and the poor themselves) may be to blame for poverty, they have some potential to provide solutions to it.

It is correct to state that such a process of analysis, especially with regard to poverty, will involve words. Any word used in any analysis will have to be thoroughly precise and correct. The poor people and poverty itself, for example, will have to be understood and defined in an unambiguous, all-inclusive, and succinct way. In an attempt on the part of Public Theologies to engage the wider society on matters of poverty, there has to be a spirited effort to use eloquent but clear language, accompanied with clear thinking, and the use of convincing ways of interpretation. Black and Public Theologies have to use ethical discourse(s) as a means to make the stories and concerns of the poor become public. They have to translate the concerns of the poor into logically justifiable public considerations. In the process, Black and Public Theologies will have to ensure that poverty issues are vocalized in an open and credible manner. It is then that Black and Public Theologies will impact the formation of favourable public opinions, ethos, and public policies that are sympathetic to the poor.

Koopman (2009:126-127) reminds his readers of the collaboration between South African theologians of the Beyers Naudé Centre of Public Theology at the University of Stellenbosch with the famous German Evangelical academic Boll and Arnoldshain. The collaboration is an interdisciplinary research with its focus on the impact of globalization on what he calls “the so-called southern and northern countries”. He notes that the research gives attention to themes such as justice in the place of work, corporate social responsibility, and gender justice. These themes are addressed in the mode of thorough technical, interdisciplinary analysis. Koopman further writes that The Beyers Naudé Centre of Public Theology has recently steered a project of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa and the Evangelical Reformed Church in Germany that attempted to do technical and theological analyses based on the *processus confessionis* on economic justice of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. This project aimed to move from the language of vision and critique to other modes of discourse especially to technical and policy discourse.

This project is an excellent example of the kind of analyses, in which Black and Public Theologies will have to engage, to deal with the plight of the poor and poverty.

### **6.2.5 Black Theology, Public Theologies and public policy matters**

Public Theologies will have to give an audience to the poor and the vulnerable in its pursuit of matters policy. Black Theology gives enormous attention to the poor and vulnerable in its thinking especially on policies to support and those to oppose. Public Theology, if it has to be good news to the poor and the vulnerable will have to give priority to the poor, the exploited, the oppressed, women, children, and the physically challenged. Koopman (2010:127-128) considers that the notion of giving priority to the most vulnerable will ensure that unavoidable compromises will not impact negatively on them. Further the notion of the option for the most vulnerable serves as a benchmark with regard to policymaking and especially the adoption of compromises.

As Black Theology and Public Theologies push for public policies, which are more favorable to the poor and vulnerable, new policies will be formulated. The challenge will be on the implementation (and monitoring) of those policies. Churches must be educated and equipped to monitor the implementations of those policies so that there is delivery of services to the poor and vulnerable in the society. In the words of Koopman (2010:55):

...churches are to make sure that they are not lapdogs, but watchdogs as well as co-workers. The lapdog role entails that churches are co-opted by the government and that they pay unacceptable loyalty to the government and other institutions of power, like big business. Churches should heed the fact that their loyalty is reserved for the triune God, and for those with whom this God identifies in a special way.

Black and Public Theologies have the task to equip churches to partner with governments and other structures in the public arena, which deal with matters of politics, business, civil society, and even on public opinion formulation, so that there is a thorough and consistent implementation of policies. Whatever policies are formulated and implemented, Black and Public Theologies have to equip churches to partner with the necessary structures in the public arena, possibly, to evaluate, amend, and even improve such policies while monitoring their implementation.

Public Theologies, therefore, could learn from Black Theology about prophetic speaking on poverty in the form of imaginative thinking (envisioning), storytelling (narrative) and naming the

devil (criticism). On the other hand, Public Theologies bring in the dimension of technical analysis and policymaking. Public Theologies go further than Black Theology in addressing poverty. They place more emphasis on the modes of technical and policymaking than Black Theology. Black Theology, therefore, could also learn from Public Theologies, and advance the theological engagement with poverty through an emphasis on technical analysis and public policymaking.

### **6.3 Black Theology and Public Theologies versus the church and the poor in Africa**

From the foregoing discussion, an investigation will be carried out here of the role of both Black and Public Theologies, serving the church as agents of change(s) that will lead to eradication of poverty within the African continent. As earlier indicated, Africa is the poorest continent and it has the highest number of poor people compared to other regions of the world. Moreover, there seems to be a link between poverty and blackness. The discussion will be made under the following themes - Black Theology, Public Theologies and a Legacy of Despair in Africa; Black Theology, Public Theologies and Good Governance in Africa; Black Theology, Public Theologies and Dependency Syndrome in Africa; and Black Theology, Public Theologies and Africa's Indebtedness and Unfair Trade.

#### **6.3.1 Black Theology, Public Theologies and the legacy of despair in Africa**

One of the major tragedies of postcolonial Africa is that the African peoples have trusted their leaders, but only a few of those leaders have honored that trust. What has held Africa back, and continues to do so, creating a more conducive environment for poverty to thrive, has its origins in a lack of principled, ethical leadership. Leadership is an expression of a set of values; its presence or lack of it, determines the direction of a society, and affects not only the actions but the motivations and visions of the individuals and communities which make up that society. Leadership is intimately influenced by culture and history, which determine how leadership perceives itself and allows itself to serve, whether it has self-respect, and how it shapes public and foreign policies. There is no doubt that independent African states would have made far

more progress if they had been guided by leaders motivated by a sense of service to their people, who practiced better governance, and created opportunities for their people to prosper.

Black and Public Theologies have the task to equip the church to care about the fate of the poor in Africa. Black and Public Theologies have to raise questions regarding why some postcolonial African leaders treat their citizens in a cruel manner. It has to ask why, after nearly a half a century of independence, some African countries remain embodiment of failure, poverty, and dysfunction. Even though there may be no simple answers associated with the condition of poverty in Africa, Black and Public Theologies will have to deal with the question of why the continent continues to have a considerable leadership deficit. Black and Public Theologies will have to speak to the culture and history, which influence how any leadership identifies itself, and how it serves.

On gaining independence from the colonizers, each of the new African nation-states was given a name, a flag, and a national anthem, and then handed over to a select group of Western-educated elites, most of whom were sympathetic to the colonial administration, whether they had been groomed for leadership by them, imprisoned or exiled. After independence, the division between the new African elites and the people they governed continued to grow. The peoples of Africa were disadvantaged economically and academically, and their cultures were being destroyed. As a result, they were not in a position to hold their leaders accountable and, unfortunately, the leaders took advantage of that fact. The robbery and destruction that followed may have been achieved through the perpetuation of the culture of disempowerment learned from the colonizers, which kept the great masses of people ignorant, fearful, passive, and obedient.

The gulf between the elite and the masses of the peoples remains wide especially concerning cultural identification. Even today, many African elites in (and out of) government continue to trivialize their indigenous cultures and consider them retrogressive and irrelevant in today's world. At the national level, the continent's varied micro-national heritages are deliberately defined very narrowly to mean, for instance, traditional dances performed for politicians during ceremonial occasions or for tourists to look for the "authentic" or "exotic" Africa. Many Africans very quickly embrace alternative cultures, principally, from the West. Such is a reflection of a society's material, political, and spiritual poverty. Black and Public Theologies

will have to engage with such mentalities with a view to bring lasting relief for many, particularly, the poor.

Churches, therefore, express through their various practices, e.g. Holy Communion and prayer, a hopeful and priestly presence among the poor.

### **6.3.2 Black Theology, Public Theologies and good governance in Africa**

At the time of the independence of most African countries, Western Europe and North American countries gave huge grants and loans to Sub-Saharan nations.<sup>179</sup> Huge potential existed to develop Africa's natural resources such as bauxite, uranium, gas, oil, gold, and diamonds. However, since the 1970s, the continent's economic fortunes began to decline. In an analysis published in 2003, the National Bureau of Economic Research, a US nongovernmental organization (NGO), indicated that while the world's economy grew by an average of almost 2 percent a year between 1960 and 2002, in Africa, the GDP growth was negative from 1974 to the mid-1990s. By 2003, the average Sub-Saharan GDP was 11 percent lower than the previous thirty years. Whereas in the early 1960s, only 10 percent of the world's poor were Africans, by the year 2000, the number had increased to 50 percent.<sup>180</sup>

Given the fact that the population of the continent increased more than three times, from 277 million in 1960 to over 900 million in 2008, not even those economies, which grew were able to meet the basic needs of their people. Botswana, whose economy expanded by an average of 6.4 percent per year from 1960 to 2001, remains an exception to the anemic economic performance of the rest of continental Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> See: Meredith, M. 2005. *The Fate of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence* (page142).

<sup>180</sup> Elsa Artadi and Xavier Sala-i-Martin, "The Economic Tragedy of the XXth Century: Growth in Africa," in *NBER Working Paper #9865*, July 2003.

<sup>181</sup> Table 6:1, "Africa's Growth Tragedy: An Institutional perspective," *Economic Growth in the 1990s: Learning from a Decade of Reform*, World Bank, 2005, p. 275.

African states have had to grapple with external conditions imposed on them to combat poverty and foster growth. Some states were offered or even urged to accept loans to finance large-scale projects, which became fronts for official corruption. However, since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, development in Africa has taken a positive turn. These two events have made African leaders realize that even they could not continue to deny democratic space to their citizens indefinitely. Since that time, there has been the introduction of multiparty politics, resulting in demands for better governance by the civil society and donor nations. The civil society (including religious groups) has intensified its challenge of the policies of dictatorial governments and has engaged in opposition politics. Overall, Africa's current heads of state are an improvement over those of the previous four decades.

A definite hunger for the reintroduction of democracy exists among the African peoples after the many years of being denied. Some of the current so-called democracies are weak or still unfolding. Too often, the term "democracy" has simply become a bromide offered during voting, rather than a means of enhancing the capacities of governmental and nongovernmental institutions, providing basic services to the poor people, and empowering them to be active participants in development.

All political systems, institutions of the state, and cultural values are justifiable only insofar as they encourage basic freedoms including human rights, and individual and collective well-being. There has to be the protection of minority rights, an effective and truly representative parliament, an independent judiciary, an informed and engaged citizenry, the rights to assemble, and an empowered and active civil society that can operate without fear of intimidation.

Black and Public Theologies have to equip the church not only to contribute towards the achievement of these goals, but also to ensure that development does not entail only the acquisition of material things - although everyone should have enough to live with dignity and without fear of starvation or become homeless. Instead, development should be a means of achieving a quality of life which is sustainable and, which allows the expression of the full range of creativity and humanity especially among the poor.



The participation of the masses, especially the poor masses in the development of a country, is crucial. Without citizen participation and an active civil society, prospects of sustainable, equitable development are bleak. Governments have to be held accountable for their decisions and actions. It is public knowledge that some governments in Africa will not respond to the needs of their people, particularly the poor masses, unless they see that if they do not, their time in office will be short. Governments, which do not care for the poor, should be threatened by “votes” that are cast in free and fair elections.

Benefiting from such an enriched theology (i.e. Black and Public Theologies in dialogue), the church has to engage and dialogue with, for example, other African states, the African Union, the international community, and civil society groups, to urge reforms. It has to demand for judicious application of international and local sanctions, which target the perpetrators of poverty and injustice, while not deepening the people’s suffering. It has to suggest ways to apply pressure to the leaders of governments, which ignore the plight of their people, press for arms embargo, and freeze the bank accounts of such leaders.

### **6.3.3 Black Theology, Public Theologies and dependency syndrome in Africa**

It appears that, in recent years, there is an emerging consensus, within and outside Africa, on the importance of democratic space,<sup>182</sup> which has coincided with increased interest from outside

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<sup>182</sup> African leaders approved a new charter on democracy, elections and governance at a 2007 summit. It was welcomed as a reflection of the continent’s rejection of unconstitutional change of government, and to take effect, 15 of the 53 AU member states were expected to ratify it. However, nearly three years down the line, only Ethiopia and Mauritania have done so. Emma Birikokrang of the Kofi Anan International Centre in Accra believes that it is unrealistic to expect African leaders to take a strong stance against unconstitutional takeovers, when many of them also got to power through illegal means such as coups or rigged elections: “It is difficult to condemn them, especially for African states to condemn fellow African states. Most of the heads of state have been in power for 20 to 30 years. And so when they go for AU heads of states meetings it is really difficult for them to condemn say Mugabe or Gadhafi or Conte at the time when he was alive, because they are very senior citizens who are supposed to be wise”

([http://www.news.dailytrust.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=8518&catid=21&Itemid=130](http://www.news.dailytrust.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8518&catid=21&Itemid=130)).

Africa to help the poorest individuals, many of whom are concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is evident that elected leaders, diplomats, economists, and celebrities have helped to place the issue of Africa's dehumanizing poverty, HIV/AIDS, food security, and debt relief on the international community's agenda.

Just as the church should ensure that the poor and their plight are placed at the centre of any development process, governments have to take the lead. In terms of aid, there is a big difference between asking donor agencies, philanthropic foundations, or individuals for help – for instance, to prevent and treat malaria – and being persuaded to do so only when funds are available from the outside. Black and Public Theologies will have to engage Africa's leaders so that they do not continue to wait for the international community to provide finances before doing the right thing. Almost fifty years after independence, it is incumbent upon African governments to work for the good of their people without the need for “carrots” coming from donors to persuade them to do so. Africa will have to move beyond aid and the culture of dependency.<sup>183</sup> While one may speak well of the motives of the international community in providing technical and financial assistance to developing countries including those in Africa, the issue that lingers is how much good foreign aid does as opposed to the much damage it has done, and continues to do, to the African peoples' capacity (especially the poor) to engineer their own solutions to their many problems.

While it is necessary to challenge governments, Black and Public Theologies will have to ensure that the citizens of the African countries are made aware that they also have a role to play in demanding development that discourages dependency. The masses (and governments) have to be

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<sup>183</sup> In his article, “The African dependency syndrome has become permanent”, Kilasa Mtambalike writes that, “the three member states of the East African Community not so many days ago tabled their budget proposals in their respective Parliaments for approval. Despite differences in the budget proposals, one common feature always manages to find its way in the budgets. And that is donor support from development partners... The illness has become permanent. In fact, in its own dysfunctional way somehow reaffirms the relationship between the North and South. It is called the dependency syndrome” (<http://tradeafrica.blogspot.com/2007/06/african-dependency-syndrome-has-become.html>).

encouraged to push for programs such as an effective agricultural extension service that advises farmers on prevention of soil erosion and the capturing of rainwater. While aid can be an effective tool for eradication of poverty, in the past, it might have achieved completely the opposite outcomes, thereby, undermining the stated objectives and leaving the majority of Africans dependent rather than empowered. Many aid programs continue to treat symptoms and manage emergencies rather than supporting investments for the long term, so that crises either do not occur or can be handled and resolved with limited or no international assistance.

Black and Public Theologies will have to establish what policies they will push their government(s) to adopt, and what commitments they can make without the availability of aid, so that the images of the poor and the African children express a new reality. The new images should be not one of malnutrition, but of health; not of child soldiers or street children addicted to drugs, but of hard working students and intact families. This should not be because the hungry have been hidden away, or the street children thrown in jail, but because Africa has more achievements to display than famines to be covered up.

Black and Public Theology will have to present a vision of the Africa they wish to see rather than use images that emasculate the very mission they are trying to accomplish. It should be possible for potential donors to respond to images of a functioning Africa, which deserves support, and not only to give in response to those images that inspire pity and condescension.

#### **6.3.4 Black Theology, Public Theologies and Africa's indebtedness and Unfair Trade in the context of globalization**

The fundamental belief that “*God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged*” assists churches in their response to the challenges cause by globalization. The response of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) to globalization, in a document titled, *A Continuing Journey toward Confessing Movement for Economic Justice and Life on Earth*, attests to this.<sup>184</sup> For the fact that the global market economy excludes Africa from the

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<sup>184</sup> The information about this historical development within the WARC is contained in an unpublished document, *A Continuing Journey toward Confessing Movement for Economic Justice and Life On Earth*, that was drawn up by

world economy, the 1995 Kitwe Consultation on Reformed Faith and Economic Justice organized by the Southern African Alliance of Reformed Churches viewed economic justice as a confessional matter.

In 1997, the Debrecen General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches invited member churches and the ecumenical movement into a *processus confessionis* on economic injustice and the destruction of life on earth. It stresses that the question of economic justice is not merely a question of social ethics, but it also has to do with our faith. It challenges Christians to analyze and understand economic processes, their consequences for people's lives and for creation. In 1997, the Harare General Assembly of The World Council of Churches embraced the *processus confessionis* that would lead to close cooperation between the WARC and WCC and other ecumenical and so-called para-church bodies.<sup>185</sup>

It is significant that the *processus confessionis* has its historical references in the Barmen Declaration (1934) of the Confessing Church in Germany, the Ottawa Declaration on the apartheid system at the 1982 General Assembly of the WARC in Ottawa, and in the 1986 Confession of Belhar especially article three of this confession (2001:1-4).

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members of a consultation on the theological basis of a *processus confessionis*. The consultation took place in Cape Town between 26<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 and was the result of a mandate from the WARC Executive Committee to the Department of Cooperation and Witness of WARC.

<sup>185</sup> The Bangkok Symposium in 1999, which was held in response to the financial crises of Asian countries, bears witness to this cooperation. The participants, which included the Christian Conference of Asia, The Church of Christ in Thailand, the Asian Cultural Forum on Development (ACFOD) and the Buddhist Community of Thailand, sent messages to churches, other faith communities, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund and transnational corporations, urging action against economic injustice and destruction of the earth. Based on the Bangkok conference, the WARC submitted a written intervention on economic, social and cultural rights to the 57<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations Committee on Human Rights. Subsequently, several bodies, which include the Geneva WCC, WARC, the Lutheran World Federation, YWCA and YMCA, formed the Ecumenical Coalition for Alternatives to Globalization (ECAG) (2001:1-2).

No doubt, churches in Africa will serve the cause of justice well if they can join hands in this *processus confessionis* with brothers and sisters from various parts of the world, and if they let their social ethical agenda be determined by the process. Nothing less than such a joint effort is required to address adequately the challenges at hand as clearly formulated in the WARC document. The challenges include the increasing exclusion of developing countries and poor people from the formal economy; the aggravation of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, racial hatred and ethnic cleansing by socio-economic destruction; and the perpetuation of civil wars and armed conflicts for the sake of profit making arms deals. Others are the feminization of poverty, sexual abuse and the flourishing of the international world sex-market; international sanctions; alienation from the land; the appropriation and marginalization of language, music, food and cultural treasures by the market and the mass media; and the increasing non-accessibility of food, shelter and health care. The list also includes increasing unemployment and discarding of non-technological skills by the market; the effects of floods, drought, fire and storms, which are signs of the abuse of the earth; water and air pollution; depletion of resources and destruction of biodiversity, as well as the alienation of human beings from the rest of creation (2001:3-4).

Consequently, the relationship between debt, poverty, and aid will have to be set right. There is no sense in African governments receiving aid, on the one hand, while, on the other hand, they repay debts acquired in the past by discredited regimes for projects, which, largely, did not benefit the poor African people.<sup>186</sup> These illegitimate debts should be cancelled; for as much as one might wish otherwise, they dilute the impact of philanthropists and donors who genuinely

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<sup>186</sup> The First Conference of African Ministers of Economy and Finance (CAMEF) on 7 May 2005, in Dakar, Senegal indicated that Africa's debt is unsustainable compared to those of other developing countries. The Commission stressed that no technical solutions have yielded sustainable and lasting solutions. It, therefore, made recommendations such as Cancellation of the External Debt; Twenty-Five (25) year moratorium; Comparison of the Annual debt Payout Level and the Annual Expenditure on Social Policies of Debtor countries; Debt repayment in local currency or African Exchange; Cancellation of the 1960 – 2000 debt; Debt equity swaps or exit bonds in debtor countries; Non re-payment of debt; and Future loan optimization; non-debt generating funding ([http://www.iss.co.za/dynamic/administration/file\\_manager/file\\_links/CAMEF1REP.PDF?link\\_id=4057&slink\\_id=8451&link\\_type=12&slink\\_type=13&tpl\\_id=3](http://www.iss.co.za/dynamic/administration/file_manager/file_links/CAMEF1REP.PDF?link_id=4057&slink_id=8451&link_type=12&slink_type=13&tpl_id=3)).

care about Africa and its peoples. Although they assist the peoples of Africa in practical ways, some of the philanthropists and the donor governments, as well as international lenders, are draining Africa's resources. This makes it much harder for Africa's institutions to fulfill the basic functions for which the given funds were intended.

Appreciably, in the last few years, civil society's success in persuading international lenders to recognize that Africans should not be held responsible for the sins of governments and lenders, which they had no control over, is yielding fruit. It is being paralleled, not only by aid being given and received more transparently and accountably, but by countries in Africa beginning to open up to democratic governance and civil society participation – conditions that make governments more accountable to their people. Possibilities now exist for the citizens, in Africa and in the industrialized countries, to know how much money the government has received, how much debt relief has been provided, and what conditionalities apply.

Despite the priority placed on Fair Trade<sup>187</sup> with Africa and other developing regions by the international civil society, considerable obstacles remain. The ability of African peoples to engage in economic activities and creative initiatives that generate wealth are inhibited by mass-produced, imported consumer goods, often sold at prices lower than those of local goods and, which marginalize homegrown businesses. The problem is coupled with the requirement that the poor countries should open their markets to goods from the developed world, as a way of bringing in foreign currency and stimulate foreign investment. Aware of this difficult situation, it would not be in Africa's interest to "shut up shop". Africa cannot avoid the fact of globalization. One of the ways in which the church could help, could be to mobilize the friends of Africa to help make education in science and technology, as well as the required technical assistance,

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<sup>187</sup> The challenges faced by farmers in Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP), and other poorer economies pale in comparison to those by the EU and US farmers. The subsidies the EU or American farmer receive per day compare with the living wage of some of these people. For there to be a level playing field in the trade arena, the producers from the poor economies have to be given at least a chance to compete (see: [http://www.africanpath.com/p\\_blogEntry.cfm?blogEntryID=5607](http://www.africanpath.com/p_blogEntry.cfm?blogEntryID=5607)).

available and avoidable to African countries. The African governments will have to be made aware that they also have a responsibility to nurture an environment that encourages creativity and innovation and supports the same. What governments in Africa should realize is that the inequalities, which characterize their societies, which are perpetuated by governments and inherently unjust economic systems, will only fuel violence and conflict.

If the poor will have a voice in Africa, and if their conditions will change, Black and Public Theologies will have to call for genuine leadership that puts people's welfares first, places the environment at the centre of development, and maintains a vision of the future founded on justice and sustainability. In a nutshell, to deal with poverty globally, nationally, and locally, particularly, in Africa where poverty is very pronounced, Black and Public Theologies, may need to harness all available approaches and discourses including the ones discussed above such as prophetic speaking in the forms of creative thinking, storytelling, and naming the devil. In addition, a focused attention on technical analysis, and an engagement in public policy creation, implementation and monitoring will be required.

#### **6.4 General Remarks and Recommendations**

At this point, some general comments and proposals will be offered that could strengthen a formidable discourse that would, in some way, more adequately deal with poverty and the plight of the poor – globally, nationally, and locally.

In the attempt to deal with poverty and the plight of the poor and vulnerable, Black and Public Theologies will have to learn to listen to a wide range of voices from the powerless (the poor and vulnerable) to the powerful (community leaders, decision makers, big business, etc.). This would require theological reflections that are linked with social analysis and that would grasp the common meaning of the people's lives, particularly, of the poor and vulnerable. Both theologies will have to engage continually with the social, political, and spiritual issues of the day, bringing a coherent Christian perspective to bear upon public policy and local cultural discourse.

Black and Public Theologies will have to decide on and/or choose, which social programs to support, informed by Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason. This will aid in the formation

of the so-called middle range principles, which could have impact on particular problems and concerns of the poor and vulnerable.

Black and Public Theologies will have to use a language or languages that would engage the poor, the general public including the public policy making community, without reducing the discourse(s) to the level of vague and indistinguishable civil engagements that obliterate distinctive Christian theological ethical norms. Both theologies will have to learn to “name the devil”, i.e. the illnesses in the world. However, the church, assisted by such enriched theology, will have to submit itself to the discipline of speaking in a language, which requires a transformation of self, and structures that breed poverty. The church will have to learn to “be” the change it calls for in the community. Such “being” may include a life lived in obedience to authority and, at other times, a life lived in rebellion to authority. As far as poverty is concerned, the church’s message will have to be that which calls for the transformation of everyone, but especially on the part of those who would like to be part of the church. No one should be blind to poverty, once s/he becomes a member of the church community. The practices within the church (congregational practices) must inculcate a passion among the congregants to respond decisively to poverty.

Black and Public Theologies will have to develop a vigorous public witness, which should be designed to foster community rebuilding, and should be justice oriented. Such a public witness will involve the adoption of social statements. In situations where the Christian church has to respond to situations of poverty, the church should not rely on arguments from the Bible alone, since other religions have their own scriptures and their own interpretations that, in claim, may be stronger than the Christian doctrine. The church will have to show why the Bible should be taken seriously in any public discourse especially that on poverty. Advocacy, advice, and apologetics are central to Christian engagement in the public square. Therefore, Black and Public Theologies will need to provide resources to churches and church leaders, to engage effectively in the moral and political debate, enabling them to challenge aspects of the thinking that breed poverty, and bring a Christian perspective and prophetic witness to the public square.



Black and Public Theologies will have to make the church a theological centre. Theology is a public matter. The church will have to play a public role, a role that deals with poverty and the plight of the poor. It preaches, teaches, and offers and interprets the sacraments to explore the public, as well as the personal theological content of faith, recognizing that the public is now global in scope and endangered by poverty and injustice. These two theologies, working together, will have to make contemporary Christianity renew its moral vision, and play a redemptive role in any transformation. It should guide modern pluralistic democracies with a commitment to human rights, and a humane form of mixed economy in the path to righteousness. It should develop deep compassion for the poor and the marginalized, and draw people of all sectors of society into faithful, truth-seeking, and justice-doing communities of commitment and cooperation.

Black and Public Theologies will have to ensure that the poor receive the necessary training on how to use the facilities, which are aimed at eradicating poverty. Any introduction of facilities without the appropriate know-how on the side of the poor may be counterproductive. Both theologies will have to ensure also that there is proper qualitative evaluation of the conditions of the poor, and that such an evaluation be done with the express participation of the poor.

In any struggle against any form of injustice, especially poverty, the church will have to call for the practice of habits that are different from those outside the Christian church. Black and Public Theologies will have to push the Christian community to be part of the story, which the larger society cannot know unless the church is embodied in that story. The larger society cannot know that God has chosen the church as a tool to redeem the world, unless Christians witness to such reality. The church must seek to be a truthful community, a pilgrim people, who are never completely subsumed into the *public* (political, economic, civil society, public opinion formation, etc.) climate within which they find themselves. Both Black and Public Theologies can assist congregations in re-discovering the tremendous potential of congregational practices for transforming human beings and the structures in which they live for the sake of a life of dignity and justice for all.

## 6.5 Conclusion of Study

Can Black Theology and Public Theologies be in dialogue in a way that would enable them to bring good news to the poor? The question, which this research has sought to deal with, is *the meaning and potential of both Black and Public Theologies for the calling of the church to address poverty in the world*. It has been demonstrated that, on a theological level, the problem of the poor can be addressed only by a theology that is preoccupied with dealing with poverty namely Black Theology and the so-called Public Theologies.

Whether it is absolute or relative, it was observed that poverty is a pervasive problem, globally, but its brunt and impact are felt more in Africa. Majority of those who are described as poor are black people, living in Africa. Moreover, poverty is about powerlessness and vulnerability. It is a state of not having, inability, and inferiority. Some of the causes and effects of poverty have been discussed, and it has been noted that, in some instances, poverty tends to breed more poverty, creating situations where masses of people are trapped in poverty.

Whereas the study has pointed out the negative as well as the positive impact of globalization on poor peoples and poor countries, several measures undertaken to eradicate poverty were enumerated to show the potential of humanity to rid itself of the quandary of poverty. However, despite all the anti-poverty efforts by different groups, millions continue to languish in poverty. Poverty remains a reality to many.

Any Christian theological venture, such as this research, has to be centered on and shaped by the Christian Scripture. The Bible sees all forms of poverty as outrage, declaring that poverty should not exist. The Bible also recognizes the evil of economic oppression and affirms God as the protector of those deprived of access to the gifts of the earth and the fruits of their labor. Poverty is seen as the creation of those who refuse to live according to the ideals of the Torah and the Gospels. From a cursory exploration of the perspectives of poverty in the Bible, authentic responses to poverty were discovered. Any radical pronouncements and criticism, which are not backed by appropriate action, do not exhibit the kind of conversion that the Gospel calls for with regard to poverty.

The study examined a theology, which is outstanding and prominent, and whose emphasis is on the place and priority of the poor, that is, Black Theology to establish possible lessons, which could enhance the efforts of Public Theologies in dealing, faithfully and with integrity, with the plight of the poor and vulnerable. An attempt is also made to establish lessons, which Black Theology could learn from Public Theologies on the plight of the poor and vulnerable.

Moreover, it has been noted that the emergence of Black Theology was rooted in situations of slavery and racial oppression in the USA and conditions of apartheid in South Africa. Black Theology poses the question – what does it mean to be black and Christian for a people situated in the midst of racism and oppression, yet called by God to be full human beings? The development of Black Theology, which has covered slavery as a historical context of Black theology in the USA, the reading and experiencing of the Bible in situations of oppression, and the Civil Rights and the Black Power Movement of the 1950s to 1970s has been outlined. The development of Black Theology in South Africa was also highlighted, in particular, the activities of the Black Consciousness Movement. The sources of Black Theology, which include the Bible, the African American church, a faith tradition of struggle for liberation, African American women experiences, and a radical politics, were discussed. It came across clearly that there are several approaches to doing Black Theology especially in South Africa. Such approaches to Black Theology namely kerygmatic theology, theology and black experience, theology and struggle, occasional theology, and autonomous theology have been investigated. Some of the strengths and weaknesses of Black Theology including some of its contemporary trends in South Africa, the USA and Britain were also noted.

Central to this research is the place and priority of the poor in Black Theology. Black Theology recognizes the conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed, and strongly presents the view that there is a preferential option for the poor and the oppressed. Black Theology insists that the reality of our conflictory world should become a subject of theological reflection, and that racism is the cause of injustice and leads to a desire to dominate others. Thus, Black Theology cannot remain socially and politically neutral. It takes sides and urges the church to do likewise, being aware that the Gospel is incompatible with injustice and structures of alienation. The liberation of the poor becomes the priority of Black Theology and the poor determine its methodology. As

earlier mentioned, Black Theology reads the Bible and the social context through the lenses of the poor, and creates new liberating knowledge from the perspective of the poor.

A detailed discussion of Public Theologies was offered because it is a relatively new, but a rapidly growing aspect of theology. The origins of Public Theology were found to be rooted in the debates of the late 1960s in the USA. It was observed that Public Theologies generated their own area of discussion, which overlapped with the expanding and fading Civil Religion debates. Other terms and rubrics were brought into the conversation including Public Religion, Political Theology, Public Discourse, Public Church/Ethics, Public Intellectual/Philosophy, and Social Ethics and Public Ethics. With each of these concepts, Public Theologies share some similarities, yet they remain distinct. The sources and the principles of Public Theologies were discussed for a better understanding of Public Theologies.

Furthermore, two major approaches were outlined with the purpose of establishing the role that the poor play in Public Theological discourses. The two approaches are the so-called direct public involvement and the so-called indirect public involvement. Even though these two approaches address Public Theology differently, it is evident that the poor play a role in both approaches. In the indirect approach, the ordinary congregational practices of the church, i.e. prayer, preaching, pastoral care and discipline, and sexual purity, are utilized to impact the wider society including dealing with poverty. In the direct approach, attention is focused on technical analysis, public policy making/formulation, advocacy, and intentional public actions. Either way, poverty is addressed. A major concern emanates from the agenda of Public Theologies, which is to gain an entrée into debates in public spaces, while being critical of using utopian language and mere criticism as the only modes of engaging public life.

In the attempt to respond faithfully to the plight of the poor, Public Theologies need to learn from Black Theology, especially in areas such as prophetic speaking on poverty, imaginative thinking (envisioning), storytelling (narrative), and naming the devil (criticism). These are the strong features of Black Theology, as far as dealing with poverty is concerned. Black Theology criticizes evils and structures that bring poverty and oppression. It speaks imaginatively of a

future free of oppression and poverty, and, creatively, tells the stories of those who have gone through situations of struggle, to highlight the pains of oppression.

Public Theologies do well in technical analysis and public policymaking. However, Public Theologies could be enriched by Black Theology as Public Theologies learn from Black Theology about theological engagements on prophetic speaking, imaginative thinking, storytelling, and naming the devil, and the emphasis it places on the poor. Alternatively, Black Theology could learn from Public Theology in the areas of technical analysis and participation in public policymaking discourse.

To this end, Black Theology can assist Public Theologies, and Public Theologies can assist Black Theology so that they both truly become good news to the poor and vulnerable.

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